Breaking Traditions

A Report Exploring Strategies To Help Improve the Futures of Marginalised Young People

Dominy Roe

Florida, Virginia and New York
Charlotte Wellen and me at Murray High School, Charlottesville, Virginia

Humuni performing at Urban Word and NYC Votes Poetry Slam in New York - an event to raise awareness with young people of their right to vote
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments .................................................................................................................. 4

Introduction ............................................................................................................................. 6

Objectives ................................................................................................................................ 10

Florida ...................................................................................................................................... 12

Summary of Florida .................................................................................................................. 18

Virginia .................................................................................................................................... 19

Summary of Virginia ................................................................................................................ 26

New York ................................................................................................................................. 28

Summary of New York ............................................................................................................. 35

Conclusion ............................................................................................................................... 38
Acknowledgements

This research was made possible through the award of a Fellowship from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust [www.WCMT.org.uk](http://www.WCMT.org.uk). I would like to thank them for offering such a fantastic opportunity to such a diverse range of passionate and committed people. A dedicated thank you to Julia Weston from the Trust for her time, patience and continued dedicated support.

During my visits to the United States so many people made time in their hectic schedules to talk with me. I have listed below those who provided me with advice and guidance without which I would not have been able to gain the comprehensive insights I did nor complete this fellowship. I would like to thank everyone for their time, energy and contributions.

In particular I would like to thank staff at Daniel Kids foundation, in particular Doug Standard, Julia Lyon Kalinski, Matthew Kalinski and Briana Adams, staff and young people at Murray High School in particular Nica Basuel, Charlotte Wellen, Paul Wellen and Ashby Kindler, staff and young people at Good Shepherd Services in particular Denise Hinds, Lina Pasquele and Miles Jackson, staff and young people at Urban Word in particular Mikal...
Amin Lee. I would also like to give thanks and appreciation to Shanelle Gabriel, Ishmael Ish Islam, Shareef Aztechnique Islam and Hip Soul Datz Hot Ents.

I would also like to say a special thank you to my mentor Rupert Miller for his patience, never ending commitment and faith in me and my grandmother Yvonne Roe, without whom this report would be riddled with grammatical errors!

I would also like to thank Christopher John - KND Promotions, Angela Bucknor – Waltham Forest College and Stanton La Foucade – Streetlife Radio for their support in executing the Breaking Traditions Online International Skype Seminar on the back of my report. Let alone the wonderfully talented and inspiring Charlotte Wellen, again, for her words of wisdom and vision.
Introduction

‘There are so many pearls in the ocean not knowing their own worth’ – Talib Kweli Greene

A colleague once said to me “You can’t save the world Dominy….”. Experience has certainly taught me that he was probably right, that does not mean I will give up trying though. After all, if you do not at least try to do something worthwhile in your life, what is the point in it at all? It was this attitude that got me to meet some of the most inspirational leaders in the world. Maybe a realistic goal for some but beyond what I could ever have hoped to achieve by the age of 26 years old.

I work as an Outreach and Development Worker for Fairbridge – a Personal Development Programme within The Princes Trust. I help to co-ordinate the Under 16 programme which supports young people who are not accessing mainstream education in relation to their potential; they may have been excluded, are persistent non-attenders or struggling to engage with learning. My role involves 1:1 work with young people on developing their personal and social skills. In order to recruit young people and maximise the impact of their time with us I also liaise closely with schools and a variety of other support services. It is through doing this role for over five years, as well as working on residentials with young people for The Princes Trust and Raleigh International, that I have come to realise the impact of relationships.

I am aware of the various barriers to engaging with education, positive activities and their future success that is experienced by young people. I am of the belief that the current education system does not have the capacity to successfully enhance the lives of a large cohort of young people. In the field of youth work I have become aware of many techniques and approaches that explore the complexities of a young person’s world and are able to impact on it. I am also aware that these ground breaking approaches are almost non-existent in the UK, the few models of working with young people which I see to be successful, are not being explored to the extent which they could be. Particularly within the context of education.

This research project allowed me to explore the impact, ideas and approaches of effectively engaging with young people facing challenges. These can include: lack of family stability, growing up in a low socio-economic environment, diagnosed learning or behavioural difficulties. These factors can often contribute to various negative outcomes for young people.
Before I embarked on this trip it had become my opinion that the education system is built on the expectations of achieving in exams, as opposed to society. It is therefore unsurprising that we are dealing with the highest rate of educational disengagement, let alone the highest rate of social disengagement; unemployment, crime, substance misuse and the increasingly supposed ADHD Epidemic.

In what environment can we be most beneficial – residential, education, youth clubs? Furthermore, to remind the field of education and youth work practice that an essential tool, and one we may take for granted the most, is our relationship with the individual.

Through speaking to many experienced educational professionals, I felt there was a strong trend of assuming that if a young person is unsuccessful in school this is directly transferred into adulthood and therefore they can be deemed a ‘failure’ from as early as the age of twelve right through to sixteen. Knowing that there is a strong likelihood of this being the case I wanted to investigate and see just what other methods could be used to prevent this assumption, and more to the point, this actuality.

I strongly suspected that the majority of schools and professionals working with these young people were not placing enough emphasis on the personal and social development of young people. This suspicion had grown with my own knowledge and experience of working with young people. Primarily, I wanted to prove that a professional’s relationship with a young person is the fundamental catalyst to developing that young person’s success without taking away from the fact that ultimately the choice to change has to come from that person.

‘More recently the ‘social pedagogy’ framework, used to describe a range of work straddling social work and education, has similarly foregrounded the therapeutic potential of a child’s attachment to an adult in residential, educational and other social care settings’ (Boddy et al., 2005). (Journal of Social Work Practice: Psychotherapeutic Approaches in Health, Welfare and the Community Volume 24, Issue 4, 2010 The Power of Relationship: A study of key working as an intervention with traumatised young people)

The cultural similarities, and often imitations of American models in music, lifestyle and educational direction, had intrigued me. Research made me aware that advanced methods of addressing and emphasising the importance of relationships in schools existed in America. Besides this I discovered organisations monopolising the third sector by delivering a wide range of programmes to work through similar barriers to those we face in engagement in the UK: namely gang crime, young people in the care system, parenting relationships and education. Dissapointingly, although there are numerous youth programmes in London working to address these issues, we still seem very rigid in our
approach. Educating young people remains linear overall and the ethos in working with them tends to be systematic. I believe in focussing on individual needs and being responsive to them; we have a system which is the opposite. If someone rejects the norm of a classroom environment they are often penalised and the opportunity to gain their right to an academic education becomes slim.

Pupil Referral Units and other alternative education provisions are often regarded as places for ‘bad kids’ where education is dumbed down. This is not because the provisions themselves are unsuccessful or because they don’t promote academic attainment but more because we still have the notion that education outside of the classroom is not credible. It also seems commonly felt that alternative education provisions are not able to challenge students academically as they spend most of their time challenging students’ behaviour.

Even those young people who achieve academically or emotionally find it difficult to maintain these developments when re-integrated into a mainstream environment. Following great success on the Fairbridge Programme I often find that this is unlikely to be continued when the young person returns to school or another alternative education provision. The intervention has often been brief and the question then remains, is mainstream school suitable for everyone?

As well as the range of more innovative models being used in America, there also exists numerous Quality Schools. A Quality School bases its practice on the principles of Dr William Glasser’s Choice Theory, Reality Therapy and Lead Management. Glasser’s 1998 book, Choice Theory: A New Psychology of Personal Freedom details Ten Axioms of Choice Theory:

1. *The only person whose behavior you can control is your own.*

2. *All we can give to or get from another person is information.* From this we can interpret what other people say, have feelings, opinions about it but inevitably it is simply information.

3. *All long-lasting psychological problems are relationship problems. A partial cause of many other problems, such as pain, fatigue, weakness and some chronic diseases - i.e we haven't built the ability to have positive/productive relationships or communicate through things in an appropriate way etc*

4. *The problem relationship is always part of our present lives*
5. What happened in the past that was painful has a great deal to do with what we are today, but revisiting this painful past can contribute little or nothing to what we need to do now: improve an important, present relationship.

6. We are driven by five genetic needs: survival, love and belonging, power, freedom and fun.

7. We can satisfy our five needs only by satisfying a picture or pictures in our quality worlds. Of all we know, what we choose to put into our quality worlds is the most important. - Glasser believe that each of us start to build a Quality World from a very young age and every behaviour/action/thing we do in life is because of what is in our quality world - future goals, ideals, morals, people we want relationships with, those we don't, even materials - houses/cars/clothes

8. All we can do from birth to death is behave. All behavior is Total Behaviour and is made up of four inseparable components: acting, thinking, feeling and physiology. - Glasser believes that by changing our thoughts we will change our actions which can then lead to a change in our feelings - i.e we are in control of our feelings… or at least we can be when we 'choose' to be. As re-iterated in axiom 10

9. All total behavior is designated by verbs, usually infinitives and gerunds, and named by the component that is most recognizable. For example, I am choosing to depress, or I am depressing, instead of, I am suffering from depression or I am depressed.

10. All total behavior is chosen, but we have direct control over only the acting and thinking components. We can, however, control our feelings and physiology indirectly through how we choose to act and think.

The aim of this research is to allow me to study the practices of William Glasser's theories, how success is measured, how these theories are implemented in a consistent setting and how the undoubted longer term benefits are evidenced. In reality, and inevitably I guess, the actual outcome was far more substantial.
Objectives

Prior to this research report three things in various government policies, lives of some young people and, particularly, the alternative education systems in the East London Boroughs I work in were clear to me:

1. Mainstream education, in the traditional sense of schools with classrooms, curriculum, testing and one teacher at the front of the room talking, is excluding a large cohort of young people
2. A young person from a background of various barriers and challenges is unlikely to succeed academically without a whole host of support services
3. If a young person does not develop fundamental personal and social skills (ability to manage feelings, communicate and a sense of moral values) they are unlikely to achieve within education, employment, let alone positive personal relationships such as parenting, co-habitating and friendships.

The above three points therefore lead me to ask, which is it that is imperative to future success, emotional or academic ability? I know that the typical feeling in East London, UK, although changing, in my opinion is still stuck in placing importance on the latter and I could only hope that what my impression of the variety of services breaking traditions in the US were true.

On first setting out to do the above, I had the intent to simply investigate Choice Theory in the context of various organisations. I had experience of practicing Choice Theory and Reality Therapy on the Fairbridge Programme.

I felt that in order to develop and implement the ideas of William Glasser I needed evidence and firsthand knowledge that they work. In practice, this meant much more than simply investigating. Whilst I did a lot of observation and talking to people, it was necessary to embed myself in the various work models for the span of my time in each state I visited: Florida, Virginia and New York.

The practicalities of undertaking the report meant that actually I was only able to travel to three states that had to be reasonably close to each other in order to be financially feasible and the best use of my time. I therefore identified a fostering and adoption service in Florida renowned in the state for its reputation and self-proclaimed motto of ’Improving the odds for kids’. Being an umbrella of services, including residential and educational provision targeting young people facing challenges, I knew that Daniel Kids Foundation would offer a holistic view.
Staying on the East coast I then headed to Charlottesville in Virginia to visit the first established Glasser Quality High School in the world, Murray High School. After much interaction with the incredibly enthusiastic Charlotte Wellen, Assistant Principal and innovator of William Glasser’s Choice Theories, I knew this would be one of my most beneficial stops.

My final destination was the state of New York. I mostly spent time with two amazing organisations – Urban Word, an organisation delivering projects through the medium of hip hop music and spoken word and Good Shepherd Services, an organisation working to support young people from a range of challenging backgrounds. The two could not be further apart in terms of operational structure; however, both equally powerful in their dynamic approach to working with young people facing barriers. My time in New York City also included an extremely productive week of seminars with the Community Aid Society who focus their energies on improving education.

I decided my key aims for this research would be to:

1. Gain knowledge on organizational systems used to capture, monitor and evaluate success.
2. Gain inspiration, ideas and insight into establishing an innovative project which engages with challenging young people
3. Build skills in my own work with young people in terms of supporting their development, educational attainment and overall aspirations.
4. Talk directly to beneficiaries of programs and simply ask ‘what worked?’.
Florida

‘The state never runs out of money to build prisons but it runs out of money to help kids’ – Linda Laniere

Established in 1884 by a group of sisters seeing a need for support for orphaned children in their community, Daniel Kids Foundation in Jacksonville, Florida was my first stop. Gradually developed by donations in memory of philanthropist Colonel James Jaquelin Daniel, this is the oldest child-serving organisation in its community. Supporting over 1000 families daily with over 10 programs, Daniel’s President, Jim Clark, states ‘we’re not good because we’re old, we’re old because we’re good’. The aim of Daniel Kids Foundation is simple: to make their community a better place and to enrich the lives of children in their area.

This organisation primarily focuses its programmes on working with young people in the care of the state – children in care. A report in 2011 in the UK undertaken for the Prison Reform Trust entitled Care – A Stepping Stone To Custody? By Rachel Blades, Di Hart, Joanna Lea and Natasha Willmott concluded that ‘children in care are more than twice as likely to end up in trouble with the law than other children’. Having experienced working with young people in the care system in the UK and seeing how much more difficult they could be to engage, I was keen to gain further understanding and insight into strategies to work with them.

Given Daniel’s extensive repertoire of working with young people facing one of the biggest challenges a young person can have– not having a stable home with consistent boundaries and love – I knew their work would give me some practical ideas on working with young people in the care system.

Fundamentally a service for adoption and fostering, Daniel Kids not only supports families to support foster children but it also provides counselling, advice and guidance on all child-related matters. The adoption team often have a presence at court hearings related to parental rights. The service also runs a school based therapeutic program working to engage with disaffected pupils.

My first few days at Daniel were spent meeting heads of programmes and gaining insights on some context on the organisation. Following this I spent time asking questions of the staff working on those programmes and really gaining an insight into how they work. The most eye-opening experience was witnessing court hearings where the rights of the birth parents are terminated. This often follows a long history of physical/emotional neglect.
or/and abuse and it was disturbing to hear just how much some children had been exposed to at such early stages in their lives. It made me think about the parents of these children and why they gave birth in the first place. What kind of support had they been offered? What services, if any, had they accessed and who could help them with parenting if their own experiences had been just as harrowing?

The work I do in the UK with Looked-After Children is more often than not the most complicated. Often the young people disengaged from education or mainstream society are those who have a track record of broken homes and broken down foster placements and then seemingly the one service that could offer them some consistency - the state - does not. Each change in circumstance often means that yet another different social worker is allocated to the case.

One parenting campaign that Daniel successfully undertakes is that of supporting foster parents to be the primary agents of change. A similar model is delivered by Looked After Children Services in UK. Foster carers are trained to specifically manage the behaviour of young people that have emotional or/and behavioural difficulties. An example of the work of Daniel came to life when I worked with Julia, Julia Lyons who co-ordinates the Therapeutic Foster Care programme. We visited a family who had to call the police the previous evening due to the young person reacting to boundaries that the family were implementing. Julia said the aim of the programme is to minimize the breakdown of the foster placements. A common occurrence when working with disaffected young people is that the family, who often have other children, is unable to continuously deal with behaviour incidents. Daniel Kids response to this is to implement vigorous training and intensive support that does everything to avoid the breakdown of a placement. Julia said “A young person in foster care has had enough let downs, lack of stability and breakdowns of relationships with those they trust. The last thing we want is for this to happen again”.

The Therapeutic Foster Care programme seems to do everything possible to instill the skills within the foster parents and the support within the service so that the possibility of a young person having to leave the placement is extremely unlikely. As well as regular visits, emergency call outs, regular treatment planning and counselling, the foster carer has access to training plus a financial reward if a young person successfully transitions from their care.

Fundamentally a service for adoption and fostering, Daniel Kids not only supports families to support foster children, provide counselling, advice and guidance to all child-related matters. The adoption team often have a presence at court hearings related to parental rights. The service also runs a school based therapeutic program in which it seems the biggest challenge is engaging with parents.
A conversation with one of Daniel’s funding sources, the City County Government re-iterated the need for parental engagement. Linda Laniere sits on the board of directors who help to decide what their budget of public money will pay for. She explained that one of their four strategies is to Strengthen Families. Linda said, “The challenge is finding a marketing campaign to attract families… Coca Cola seem to have done it!”. Linda referred to Harlow’s Monkeys research which evidences the argument that parenting is learnt behaviour, she said “Too many children are in families where the skills and knowledge aren’t there”.

Linda spoke at length about how Daniel Kids Foundation meet the needs of the county in various ways and have therefore been funded since 1994, most key though it seemed, is their approach to working collaboratively to support the child. Daniel prove time after time that they are a valuable partner as they produce good outcomes and are able to manage their money.

One of Daniel’s fundamental programmes is their therapeutic children’s homes. On visiting a few of these I was shocked at the rigid structure and routine they had incorporated. However, on speaking with the staff, and having experience of working with young people, often they are crying out for boundaries to be set. It’s the cliché that most of us were lucky enough to hear whilst growing up ‘it’s because we care’! In the field of youth work and education it is often commented on how a young person ‘challenges authority, doesn’t adhere to boundaries’ however, we often see huge development when boundaries are implemented. Young people may be more likely to respond with resistance if they have never been used to boundaries. I spoke at length with Eddie Howard, Residential Manager of Daniel’s Stateside Intensive Psychiatric Programme regarding challenging behaviours that young people may present. Eddie said, “Redirection without a relationship causes rebellion”. He went on to say that delivery of redirection is so important – tone of voice, body language, context, are just some of the factors to consider. It was reassuring to hear just how, in managing his staff, he ensures that they work hard to build a relationship with the children who move in to the residential environment.

“A residential environment can be very challenging for some young people”, says Eddie. Like with any process of change, there are four dynamics in the relationship with the young person that are to be expected”. Eddie went on to refer to Bruce Tuckman’s 1965 model of group development which suggests there are four phases of interaction between people working on a task. Tuckman presents the following as the four stages:
Forming
The team is assembled and the task is allocated. Team members tend to behave independently and although goodwill may exist they do not know each other well enough to unconditionally trust one another. Time is spent planning, collecting information and bonding.

Storming
The team starts to address the task suggesting ideas. Different ideas may compete for ascendancy and if badly managed this phase can be very destructive for the team. Relationships between team members will be made or broken in this phase and some may never recover. In extreme cases the team can become stuck in the Storming phase. It is essential that a team has strong facilitative leadership in this phase.

Norming
As the team moves out of the Storming phase they will enter the Norming phase. This tends to be a move towards harmonious working practices with teams agreeing on the rules and values by which they operate. In the ideal situation teams begin to trust themselves during this phase as they accept the vital contribution of each member to the team. Team leaders can take a step back from the team at this stage as individual members take greater responsibility. The risk during the Norming stage is that the team becomes complacent and loses either their creative edge or the drive that brought them to this phase.

Performing
Not all teams make it to the Performing phase, which is essentially an era of high performance. Performing teams are identified by high levels of independence, motivation, knowledge and competence. Decision making is collaborative and dissent is expected and encouraged as there will be a high level of respect in the communication between team members.

Although this model is applicable and could be used as a guideline in a classroom and other youth group setting, Eddie used it as just one example of some of the challenges faced by staff and young people in a residential environment. He explained that the constant turnover of young people in the homes means this model often starts over and over. He also highlighted that the ever changing group dynamics within a children’s home make it difficult for some to settle as well as gain a real sense of self in an ever changing environment.

After spending time with senior and frontline staff in each programme run by Daniel Memorial I was impressed at the consistent high level of staff morale. The majority of senior staff had been with the organisation for over 10 years and have progressed within the organisation. Staff were also genuinely enthusiastic about the mission of Daniel, the environment, colleagues and their roles. I asked HR Director, Doug Standard, what he felt
was the key to their success. Firstly he agreed with many of his colleagues that Daniel is an inspiring place to work because of its mission. He too developed professionally at Daniel starting on a work placement after graduating and 18 years later is still there. Doug also spoke about a philosophy based on the book *Fish! A Remarkable Way to Boost Morale and Achieve Results* by Lundin, Paul, Christenson.

Founded in Seattle Fishmarket, Fish Philosophy is about creating a work culture which follows four simple principles:

- **Make Their Day**
  When you ‘make someone’s day’ through a small act of kindness or unforgettable engagement, you can turn even routine encounters into unforgettable memories.

- **Choose Your Attitude**
  When you look for the worst you will find it everywhere. When you learn you have the power to choose your response to what life brings, you can look for the best and find opportunities never imagined possible. If you find yourself with an attitude that’s not what you want it to be, you can choose a new one.

- **Be There**
  This principle is based on the theory that the glue to our humanity is being fully present for one another. Being there is also a great way to practice whole heartedness and fight burnout, for it is those half hearted tasks you perform while juggling other things that wear you out.

- **Play**
  This principle shows that work made fun gets done, especially when we chose to do serious tasks in a light-hearted spontaneous way. Play is not just an activity; it’s a state of mind that brings new energy to the tasks at hand and sparks creative solutions.

In the field of youth work and education we would like to think it is the aim of most professionals working to make someone’s day. Our attitude is an element of self development that the majority in these fields are likely to be working on given the nature of the job. The ‘Be There’ point is most relevant to me and my ideal of working with our younger generation. We seem to have a society where success is often determined by material wealth or economic status. If instead, success were streamed in the media as being moralistic in our conduct, compassionate towards each other and constantly aspiring to be a better person, we could be living in a very different society.

A colleague recently said, “The scary thing about living in a society with a Conservative Government is that it embeds the notion of self and the individual as opposed to considering others. One’s community can become selfish, competitive and worried or focused on
themselves and their own”. One could predict that with an increase in economic divides there can be an increase in acts which are selfish in a last ditch attempt to survive.

This ‘Be[ing] There’ principle was evident regularly. Throughout the week staff would write praise or give thanks to their colleagues for something that stood out to them. Common practice at the start of staff meetings would be for a glass bowl full of paper fish to be handed around, the paper fish pulled out and read aloud. Not only did this then boost the morale of the individual, it encourages team bonding and it has be shown in this context that this sense of public acknowledgement would motivate others to perform better, improve standards.

In considering the notion of Play it would be easy to apply this to the field of youth work where the premise is often engagement through activities enjoyed by young people. However, what about in the context of education? How many students would describe school, or in particular, their lessons, as fun? In a talk by an American speaker I came across on YouTube he talks jokingly about ADHD “Have you ever fallen asleep at the cinema, been bored by a speaker…. Is it my fault that you’re boring me?”.
Summary of Florida

Time spent at Daniel Kids Foundation re-emphasised the importance of two key factors in improving the lives of young people. Firstly, the extent of the impact parents who lack fundamental skills in parenting has on the potential futures of children. The need for parents to engage with parenthood is undoubtedly essential. However, it became evident whilst at Daniel Memorial that finance and support to do this is essential. One home I visited with the Foster and Adoption unit was so poor that mother was often unable to travel out of the home – whether for court cases or school visits, she did not physically have the means to do so. This ultimately translates to an even greater challenge for support services to engage with parents and guardians. My experience of working closely with schools and families is that parents are involved when a young person is at risk or in trouble. This is not always the case but there is most certainly scope to improve the positive engagement with families in the UK.

The same report mentioned earlier undertaken by the Prison Reform Trust also re-iterates ‘the quality of relationships between our interviewees and the professionals they encountered was felt to be the most important factor affecting the likelihood of future offending’. Given this it was reassuring to hear Eddie talk about the importance of positive relationships. Particularly within a residential home where often the most vulnerable young people in the care of the state are placed. Unfortunately though, the therapeutic homes, despite having such a structured and nurturing environment, are often offered to Looked-After Children when numerous foster placements have broken down. It seemed then that the concept of a children’s home is almost fighting a losing battle. Consequently in recent years we have seen a surge in the UK in marketing campaigns for people to become foster parents as this offers a more secure and settled family environment.

There was also a real sense of high staff morale cascaded throughout the numerous teams at Daniel. Senior management actively implement strategies to ensure happy and productive employees. Despite the challenging and heavy work load that staff face everyone was genuinely proud to work for Daniel and everyone I spoke to shared the same ethos as the President of the organisation, “The kids come first”. Many of the senior management have worked there for nearly twenty years and have developed within the organisation which is again, credit to the sense of passion and dedication that Daniel Kids Foundation instills in their staff.
Virginia

“Violence is happening because some people have very unsatisfactory relationships. Because they have this terrible feeling they resort to violence... People think that clamping down will stop the violence, but it's the clamping down that causes the violence” – Dr William Glasser

Murray High School, Charlottesville, Virginia, was the first Quality School to be opened in the world. Twenty years ago the founding faculty of Murray trained in Choice Theory and Reality Therapy. Their goal was ‘to be the best school on the planet’ and the target group of students was those ‘at risk of dropping out or graduating below their potential. The community of Murray believe their most important aim to be ‘Learning is the constant, time is the variable’. While there I gained the impression from them that their most important message is that there is nothing more pivotal to learning than a relationship. The ethos of Murray embraced William Glasser’s ideas but also created some of their own. The sense of importance they placed on the development and nurture of inter-personal relationships between staff and attendees was unlike anything I had seen at a youth provision before.

A Quality School is one that is based on the principles of Glasser’s Lead Management while strictly incorporating the values of William Glasser’s Choice Theory:

The Criteria for Becoming a Glasser Quality School:

1. Relationships are based upon trust and respect, and all discipline problems, not incidents, have been eliminated.

2. Total Learning Competence is stressed and an evaluation that is below competence or what is now a 'B' has been eliminated. All schooling as defined in this book Every Student Can Succeed has been replaced by useful education.

3. All students do some Quality Work each year that is significantly beyond their competence. All such work receives an 'A' grade or higher.

4. Students and staff are taught to use Choice Theory in their lives and in their work in school. Parents are encouraged to participate in study groups to become familiar with Choice Theory ideas.

5. Students do better on state proficiency tests and college entrance examinations. The importance of these tests is emphasized in the school.
20.

Staff, students, parents, and administrators view the school as a joyful place.


Twenty years ago the small team of teachers at Murray decided the primary goal of 'building a young person’s ability to establish and maintain a relationship' but also those that explored and batted away any and every barrier a young person could face to gaining a successful start in their journey of life (including, although not exclusive of, achieving an education).

Initially being at Murray was an unusual experience. In essence this means that the students take ownership of their education. They choose when they are ready to learn and have a major input in what they learn.

I spent most days of my two weeks, in Charlotte Wellen’s classroom. A place where if any Disconnecting Habits were used, the whole and any class current activities, were interrupted to prioritise the learning of Dr Glasser’s essential life tool – a relationship.

Disconnecting Habits (often referred to as ‘red behaviours’) are those that interfere with the development of a positive relationship between two people. This includes:

- Blaming
- Criticising
- Complaining
- Threatening
- Nagging
- Punishing
- Rewarding to Control

The antithesis of these are Connecting Habits (referred to as ‘yellow behaviours’). Dr Glasser, and indeed the teaching staff of Murray High School, believe that if we were to communicate using connecting habits we will experience much more positive relationships and therefore more positive outcomes:
Encouraging
Caring
Supporting
Listening
Befriending
Trusting
Negotiating

Charlotte would say to her class “If we were using connecting habits what would that look like?” and the class would genuinely respond to her. Not only did this create a magnificent learning environment, it encouraged the constant self-development of the students as well as an awareness of others and themselves.

The use of mediation is one of the principles that a Quality School has to commit to. At Murray High School it is used as a technique to re-build relationships. If any party felt a relationship has been jeopardized, a mediation is called.

‘Students have the option of setting up a mediation with a teacher or other classmate, if there are conflicts that need to be worked out (the student can ask a particular Home Choices Teacher [teacher responsible for working through any issues that arise – this responsibility would vary from teacher to teacher as all teachers are trained in Choice Theory] to be their third party, and must work together with all parties to find a convenient time to accomplish the mediation)’ - ‘How to Create a Large, Comprehensive Public High School as a Glasser Quality High School’ Charlotte Wellen, Murray High School Teacher.

My experience of working with young people, the word mediation has been a no-go area in the field of youth work. It was something associated with the traditional way in which teachers would try and deal with bullying and was perceived not to be effective by many young people. However, there were some simple strategies which seemed to make it extremely effective and I was fortunate enough to observe a mediation between two pupils and one between a pupil and staff member.

I witnessed a mediation between Charlotte Wellen (teacher), a student and another teacher acting as a mediator. These are the main points observed:
• Someone requests a mediation if they feel something is unjust or an incident has the potential to impact on a relationship negatively
• The other person involved is then invited to the mediation and has to accept the invitation before it can go ahead
• The person acting as the mediator first creates a safe environment by explaining that one person talks at a time, both will have a chance to speak but it is important not to interrupt. They explain that the space is one of trust and that their role is to simply assist the mediation ensuring that each person has their say and that the outcome is some kind of resolution.
• The mediator goes on to say that there are two points of view and despite this they would like to explore how can they come up with a plan. They also remind the two participants that when other person is talking we respect what they are saying by using appropriate body language and other indicators.
• The mediator says “If I hear you starting to use red behaviours I may ask you to use yellow” and “If I see you getting frustrated (which is natural) I may ask you take a 5 minute break”.
• The mediator encourages those having a mediation to take responsibility for their own emotions and behavior by discouraging the use of blame. They say “Instead can you say ‘it feels like this’ or ‘I see it like this’” and “In moving forward I’ll ask you to make a request of each other”.
• The mediator informs the participants that they will see them taking notes
• The person who called mediation to start starts conversation

Murray High School, a pioneer in Quality Schooling and therefore also in policies that could be seen by some as radical, is one in which the language itself, before even meeting the staff, students or entering the school building, allows one to breathe a sigh of relief. A document entitled Student Behaviours Which Indicate a System Failure states ‘If we see the following behaviors (list behaviours such as learners unfocused, talking over each other/teacher etc) in our students, we will understand that it is time to reevaluate the SYSTEM in our classroom, because it is not meeting the needs of our students.’

This language and thought pattern could be seen as revolutionary next to some of the punitive behaviour systems we execute in the UK – particularly in light of the ever increasing number of academies.

Below is an excerpt from one of their policies and is taken from Dr William Glasser’s book, The Quality School; The Quality School Teacher; Every Student Can Succeed. Every staff member and student agrees to the following:
We agree to abide by the following commitments, with courage of heart and determination:

- Respect ourselves, each other, and our environment.
- Attend regularly.
- Mediate when necessary.
- Participate actively.
- Share our gifts with the community.

This alone epitomises the school’s ethos of putting the students first. Moreover, putting the relationships with the students first. Given current ideas on implementing discipline in schools and the culture of education in England, the very absence of the word ‘discipline’ would be likely to cause worry. The only consequence that I observed at Murray, besides mediation, was students being asked to go to Choices. In essence this meant they were asked to leave the room and go to the a dedicated room where there would be a designated Choices teacher (a staff rota meant that this role was a shared responsibility in the staff team) to complete a Choices Form:

---

**Choices Form**

Name ______________________________  Date ___________________

Period _____________________________  Choices Teacher _______________________

*Murray people use the Choices program when something isn’t working well in their lives. When you come to Choices, the object closely examine the situation with a supportive person (usually the Choices Teacher), to figure out what you observed, to clarify you felt then and feel now, to make a plan to strengthen relationships and to succeed in class. Choices is not punishment. You are “in trouble” when you come to Choices. Choices is a program designed to help you feel happier at Murray because you have so conflicts, rather than letting them go on bothering you. In Choices you learn the skills of Choice Theory, Reality Therapy, Lead Management, as well as Non-Violent Communication, which will help you make stronger relationships outside of school as 

Please do your best on the form below to help you and the Choices Teacher create together a strong plan for your success happiness.*
1. Short Narrative/Explanation of your observation/experience of what happened.
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. How do you feel about what occurred and why?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

3. What do you need that didn’t occur in this situation?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

4. What boundary of yours do you think was violated and why?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

5. What boundary of (other person) do you think was violated? Do you think he/she would agree with that? Explain. How do you think they are feeling now?
________________________________________________________________________

6. What are you willing to commit in order to restore the relationship with the person in question?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

7. What requests do you have of (other person) to restore the relationship with him/her?
________________________________________________________________________

8. Do you require a mediation? If so with who?
________________________________________________________________________

Instead of cultivating the idea of failure or negativity, being asked to go to ‘Choices’ (or choosing to go) gives the students a sense of ownership over their behaviour. The onus is on reviewing the incident and behaviour and looking at moving forward as opposed to punishing the person for their behaviour.
For someone whose experience of schooling is rigid and traditional, the very concept that students could have freedom in a school environment was uncanny. Students choose when they are ready to learn and have a major input in what they learn. Murray High School uses mastery learning which means there is no testing as such. Just written assignments which students get no lower than a C grade for. If the paper is marked at a C students are given concise feedback as to how to improve the grade. The environment is therefore of constant development and success rather than failure or disappointment.

One of the aims of Murray High School is ‘building a young persons ability to establish and maintain a relationship’. This means using Choice Theory at any given opportunity to support the students in developing their skills to manage people. It seemed as though the consistency of shared values at Murray High School embedded in the young people to the point that it translated at home. Building on my insight into the importance of family engagement that I had gained from Daniel Memorial, Murray’s active methods to build relationships with parents is particularly impressive. Adhering to the Quality School commitment of ‘Share[ing]’ Murray delivers a monthly parenting support evening. As Charlotte Wellen was preparing her class for the session I asked her if she expected many to attend, always the optimist Charlotte replied positively saying the take up has been good so far. I however, was dubious but to my surprise, there were 22 attendees – parents and some guardians. Charlotte said that she talks about the parent workshops to parents regularly and talks about the importance of it from the students induction.

The group actively engaged in conversation, provoked around discussing the Choice Theory axioms and watching a DVD of a role play that Dr William Glasser has done on parenting. The open forum, and at times emotive session, was moving to be part of. The parents in attendance genuinely wanted to understand how they could communicate with their children more effectively and the session gave practical advice and theories on how to do so.
Summary of Virginia

Alternative provision – for those disengaged with education – client group – yet doesn’t ‘dumb down’. Common theme in alternate education provisions – lack of GCSE education that isn’t classroom based

During one of my conversations with Charlotte she said “If I did what people thought was realistic, Murray High School would not be here today”. In bringing many of these ideas back to the UK I already know I face challenges. The level of emotional intelligence, for one, is nowhere near as prevalent as it is at Murray High School. Let alone the idea of giving learners ‘free reign’ on their education! However, having observing the underlying and consistent messages of developing and sustaining relationships I am adamant that it is essential we drive home this message in the UK.

Relationships are not only discussed by teachers and staff but, most importantly, the young people have a growing awareness of their importance. A student’s first meeting at Murray High School discusses their values and the nature of Choices. The first week in September is then an intensive induction in Choices and the theories of William Glasser as well as a week of getting to know each other, working together and basically, building relationships. Young people are taught these models so they can then implement strategies they learn and gain a better understanding of their own triggers and strategies to deal with them.

The word ‘Relationship’ is more than a cliché concept at Murray, relationships with parents, students, staff are crucial to its success. There is also a real sense of student voice and empowerment that cultivates creativity and intelligence. Mastery learning allows young people to learn and develop skills when they do not get it right instead of the culture of failing we seem to produce in many mainstream schools in the UK.

Charlotte Wellen, along with some other teachers in Virginia conducted an experiment in the early ‘80’s, here she told me about it:

“We gave 100% of the students in the city, from 2nd grade (Year 3) through 12th grade (Year 13) (ages 7 - 18), a writing prompt. I was on the team to read and analyze what we found out from the prompts. We were trying to figure out what was working about our way of teaching writing and what wasn't. We knew nothing about each of the writers when we read the writing -- we had no idea how old each student was. We were supposed to divide them up into three piles -- poor writing, proficient writing, and superb writing.
We had something like 18,000 pieces of writing to look at. We each read several hundred. What we found were three important pieces of information: a. We had no idea at all of the ages of the writers from looking at the quality of writing, b. the second graders were by far the most interesting writers as a whole group, c. the seniors were by far the worst writers. Therefore, we were teaching students how to become worse and worse writers throughout the 10 years of education we were working to improve their writing. So, we decided that what we were doing wrong was grading the writing for grammar, etc, making it dangerous for a student to take a risk and maybe write a construction that they weren't sure was spelled right, and forcing everyone who wants an A to dumb down their work to be sure they don't have anything ‘wrong’. Gradually, their work got worse and worse as a result of this grading practice. The sad thing is that most teachers learned nothing from this and still grade down for these things.”
New York

‘Hip Hop: Highly Intelligent People Hovering Over Politics’ – Omar Offendum

New York was my last stop and despite a precarious living environment, the programs, seminars and people here were instrumental in cementing some of the principles I had concluded for my future practice of working with young people. My time observing, training and working with Good Shepherd Services, An ‘on the ground’ organisation that has been working with young people through the medium of hip hop music, poetry and the written and spoken word since 1999, seminars and conferences with the Children’s Aid Society and I met inspirational friends along the way solidified a vast new knowledge of practicing youth work.

Having sourced Urban Word before flying into New York I considered the convention I booked myself on to be nothing more than an enjoyable, relevant and brief experience on my trip. Unbeknown to me, it was to become pivotal to my learning while in the capital of North America. Urban Word facilitate the social, intellectual and educational development of young people through delivering workshops that inspire a sense of empowerment and thirst for intellectual knowledge. The only class I was able to make of the two day convention entitled ‘Pre-emptive education in Hip Hop’ was the catalyst to me learning just how a formal and structured organisation could use music – particularly that of the genre hip hop which carries so much negative press – to educate and enlighten young people.

Urban Word, founded in 1999 after Michael Cirelli, now Director of Urban Word, was inspired by reading The Pedagogy of the Oppressed, is the very definition of youth empowerment. Using the word, whether in hip-hop, poetry and/or spoken word, Urban Word states that it ‘believes that free self-expression – matured in an enhanced critical literacy environment – improves self confidence and strengthens educational achievement for NYC’s inner city youth. [They] promote active literacy, critical thought and positive social dialogue across boundaries of age, race, class, gender, culture, and sexuality… Our many workshops are designed to enhance critical thinking skills, leadership, and to ignite a personal commitment to growth and learning which leads to heightened in school performance, and greater interest in pursuing higher education.’ www.urbanwordnyc.com

Spending time with one of the programme directors, Mikal Lee, it became clear that not only is Urban Word engaging with young people, it is doing it in such an intelligent capacity that young people’s minds are stretched. I was asked to be a judge for one of the poetry slams sponsored by NYC Votes. The project consists of various workshops which support young people to explore politics. It culminated in a series of events to find New York’s new
Youth Poet Laureate. To hear young people talk so articulately not just about politics but their observations of themselves within society was refreshing. Some of the poems addressed cultures, heritage, political opinions, race and most importantly, identity. It was evident to me that Urban Word had been clear in unlocking this talent as well as many young people’s potential. Many of them now have clear aspirations of what they want for their future. They have come to value more than just material worth and now focus on their own spiritual and personal worth.

Shannelle Gabriel, a spoken word artist, vocalist and Def Jam poet, is a tutor for Urban Word and regularly delivers writing workshops for young people. Shannelle said, “Urban Word is a wonderful organisation which focuses on youth literacy and spoken word as a way of spreading social awareness and getting teens active and involved in the community. Some of the best poets I know came out of Urban Word”.

Building on the success I witnessed at Urban Word, I was encouraged to attend a screening of a documentary film entitled To Be Heard. The ever dedicated, Shannelle Gabriel, drove us out to New Jersey to watch a film with the tagline ‘If you don’t learnt to write your own story someone else will do it for you’. This documentary tracks three young people through their journey growing up in The Bronx over three years whilst taking part in a radical spoken word class, ‘their struggle to change their lives begins when they start to write poetry. As writing and reciting become vehicles for their expressions of love, friendship, frustration, and hope, we watch these three youngsters emerge as accomplished self-aware artists, who use their creativity to alter their circumstances.’

The backbone of my research in New York City was facilitated by Good Shepherd Services. An organisation who welcomed me from the point of contact and offered me a range of opportunities within their various programs. Good Shepherd Services was founded based on the need for residential care in New York City. Opening initially to home 16-21 year old girls who were ‘troubled’ GSS now delivers over 70 programs across New York to a wide range of young people facing challenges. From residential homes to community based programs to school models, Good Shepherd Services offer as many services as are necessary to ‘prevent youth from becoming disconnected from family, school and society.

Good Shepherd Services, like Daniel Memorial in Florida, are one of the most reputable umbrella organisations existing in New York. As a professional wanting to look at a variety of different delivery models to challenging young people. I was particularly keen to visit GSS to observe and learn their school model as well as their various residential homes. I spent time with Lina Pasquale, Sanctuary Implementation Coordinator. Sanctuary is an in-depth model that I had never heard of before. The theories and models cascaded so
succinctly through the many programs that GSS deliver even down to the facilities staff. Sanctuary can be described as a trauma-informed treatment and organizational intervention. The philosophy is based on the theories of Dr Sandra Bloom, that a "A traumatic experience impacts the entire person – the way we think, the way we learn, the way we remember things, the way we feel about ourselves, the way we feel about other people, and the way we make sense of the world...".

To explain it simply the model is based on the thinking that the trauma we experience throughout our life has a direct impact on our emotional well-being and therefore our behaviours. The acronym SELF acts as the framework for treatment: Safety, Emotions, Loss and Future and there are seven commitments that must be adhered to by all involved in using the model. These are:

- **Commitment to Nonviolence**: building and modelling safety skills
- **Commitment to Emotional Intelligence**: teaching and modelling affect management skills
- **Commitment to Inquiry & Social Learning**: building and modelling cognitive skills
- **Commitment to Shared Governance**: creating and modelling civic skills of self-control, self-discipline, and administration of healthy authority
- **Commitment to Open Communication**: overcoming barriers to healthy communication, reduce acting-out, enhance self-protective and self-correcting skills, teach healthy boundaries
- **Commitment to Social Responsibility**: rebuilding social connection skills, establish healthy attachment relationships
- **Commitment to Growth and Change**: restoring hope, meaning, purpose


It was apparent that this model is a belief system at GSS as opposed to theories that simply sit on paper. Community meetings with a ‘feelings check in’ happen every morning where possible in the residential environment as well as in the evenings. Participants, including staff are encouraged to not only be aware of their feelings but to share them. This, and the intensive nature of the residential, demystifies the idea of emotions and communication and rather than shying away from any conflict or challenge that this might present, it is invited. The Sanctuary model creates a safe environment for young people to learn from their mistakes. To deal with any past trauma and hopefully gain from the long term impact that working through these issues will lead to.

Following a visit to the Non-Secure Detention Centre for boys in The Bronx I left inspired after being part of a ‘psycho-ed’ group. The centre was a residential home for juveniles serving custodial sentences or waiting to be sentenced. The class was on a Sunday morning and on walking in to the boisterous group of boys I did not imagine they would engage very
well. I knew the dedicated staff would still dare to ‘go there’ and am so grateful they did. There were the expected sniggers and reluctance from a couple of boys when we started by going around the group and using a word to describe how we were feeling. However, in getting into talking about re-occurring patterns of behaviour, the boys easily identified with having learnt habits in how they dealt with situations of conflict. The session went on to discuss the results that their actions had produced and a number of other options they could have used. It looked at the role they may habitually play in scenarios – e.g. victim – and how this could be avoided. In closing the session we all remarked on what we had got out of the situation and everyone had something positive to feedback.

While being a founding service in New York City for residential environments GSS also has an innovative schools model now used in many schools throughout New York as well as three of their own. The model includes an advocate counsellor for every student – each counsellor has a caseload of thirty students – and the management of the school is part Good Shepherd Services and part the Department of Education. In essence this means it is part youth work and pastoral support focused and part academic teaching and curriculum focused. The GSS Programme Director manages the advocate counsellors and the Department of Education Programme Director manages the teaching staff. The two work closely together to ensure smooth and succinct practice across the school.

The transfer school model is as follows:

**Core Principles:**

*High Expectations*  We believe that each student can and will achieve at high levels, regardless of past performance. By enrolling in a GSS transfer school, our students commit to actively participate in the educational program and to achieve the goals they set for themselves. Both GSS and DOE staff members provide support and feedback to help students sustain a high level of achievement.

*An Active and Rigorous Learning Environment*  To ensure that the academic program is both accessible and effective, curricula are designed to be hands-on, in alignment with state standards, and connect to students’ life experiences and practical needs. There is a focus on project-based learning and classroom activities, which build upon students’ strengths while maintaining the academic integrity of individualized programs.

*Building Healthy Relationships*  The GSS model emphasizes the fundamental importance of helping students build healthy relationships with school staff, peers, family members, and with the broader community. Within the school environment, adults are committed to forming caring and trusting relationships with students to support them both academically and personally. These relationships provide an anchor for students when issues arise, inside and outside of school, that may jeopardize their
ability to reach their goals.

Student Voice and Responsibility To keep students actively engaged in school, we believe that it is important for them to not only take responsibility for their own learning, but for them to take an active role in shaping the overall school community. Staff members provide young people with opportunities to voice their thoughts and opinions and make meaningful contributions to their learning environment.

Building Community A strong supportive learning community is key to the success of our students. Building this community is the responsibility of everyone involved with the school – students, staff, parents, neighborhood partners, and other community stakeholders. It is supported through defined structures of cooperative decision-making and shared responsibility at all levels.

Essential Components:

Partnership and Shared Leadership
The equal partnership between GSS and the DOE provides the foundation for the success of our model. While both parties contribute to and are responsible for different aspects of the school, they both make an active commitment to operate the school together at all levels of each organization – from the DOE and CBO leadership, to the DOE Principal and the GSS Program Director, to the Advocate Counselors and the DOE teaching staff.

Integration of Advocate Counseling within School Setting
Recognizing that students often lack a trusting, positive adult relationship, and that personal problems are frequently the major obstacle to achieving graduation, at enrollment, each student in the school is paired with an Advocate Counselor who serves as the student’s chief advocate and primary support person throughout his/her time at the school. Advocate Counselors work with students one-to-one in twice-monthly scheduled sessions, in weekly peer support groups, and on an as-needed basis – coaching them and helping them set personal and academic goals, facilitating the development of an individualized post-graduate plan, and supporting them in overcoming barriers to success.

Youth Development Approach to Instruction
We provide an engaging instructional program that recognizes individual strengths, needs, and learning styles, as well as students’ widely varying levels of credit attainment. Students progress through the school in ungraded cohorts and have a personalized course schedule based on the courses and Regent exams that they need to graduate. In the classroom, teachers use strategies that allow for differentiated instruction and provide engaging, hands-on activities and assignments that have real world relevance – these strategies create a consistent, safe environment in which students can flourish.

Defined Target Population and Admissions Process
Our schools work with students between the ages of 16 and 21 who have either dropped out of high school or been excessively truant. Students must have previously been enrolled in high school, have at least a 6th grade reading level, live within the school catchment area and successfully complete the
admissions process. It is critical that students come from the identified school catchment to enable Advocate Counselors to conduct home visits and allow students and their family members to benefit from Good Shepherd’s programs and resources in the community. These parameters and admissions procedures ensure that our students fit with the model and are prepared to take responsibility for their progress in the school. This results in a powerful alliance between students, staff and family from the onset in the journey toward graduation.

Personalized Small School Environment

Most students in our schools have previously attended very large traditional high schools - our model, in contrast, emphasizes the school as a community which values each member and offers high levels of individual attention for each student. A small school and low student-to-staff ratios help facilitate our youth development approach. GSS Model Schools typically enroll between 150 and 200 students, who engage in classes of a maximum of 25 students, with the typical class having 21 or 22. Advocate Counselors also only work with a maximum of 25 students at any given time. In addition, families are actively encouraged to play a role in their student’s success by participating in a variety of school-related events and activities.

Once again this model encapsulates need for student responsibility and ownership by giving students a voice, excellent leadership, the need for emotional and pastoral support and the Youth Development model incorporates the need for teachers to be approachable, value relationships and ensure teaching is engaging. Despite the commitment to work with young people that find the school environment challenging, academic expectations are not compromised.

During the planning stages of this research I came across the Childrens Aid Society online. Founding the National Center for Community Schools in 1992, The Children’s Aid Society, started in 1853, offers a number of services to the children and families of New York City. The Children's Aid Society National Center for Community Schools was opened as a response to a demand for information and assistance in implementing Community School models. The Center now supports 14 Community Schools in The Bronx, Manhattan and Staten Island. I was able to attend two informative conferences consecutively - the CAS Community Schools Practicum 2011 and Developing Community Schools: The Fundamentals.

In attending this conference I gained fantastic comprehension of the Community School model, the main premise of which one that holistically supports the child, their family and ultimately the local community by utilising the necessary services and skill sets that those services can offer. This included the local health services – it was acknowledged that the higher rate of non-attendance in low income families can often be due to a lack of access to
necessary healthcare. Due to healthcare not being provided by the state, children could have asthma or any number of illness and if the family does not have healthcare they are often unable to receive medical treatment. This also includes community essentials such as a local library being on the school site – doubling up as an added incentive for the community to access the school and feel part of it.
Summary of New York

Visiting various organisations carrying out what I would regard as groundbreaking practice in New York filled me with a sense of inspiration to implement more programmes in the UK. There are many models which embrace the use of emotions and the power of our intellect as humans to communicate. Models such as Sanctuary could be used to increase a sense of self which can only be positive when it encourages reflection, awareness of our actions, and an ownership of our potential to overcome barriers. It does not dwell on the trauma young people have experienced but allows them to use it as a tool to move forward.

Schools such as the Professional Preparatory School, a primary school in Brooklyn, is instilling leadership in children from primary school age. Simply by naming their tutor groups Leadership, Revolution and Freedom. Like Urban Word, they embedded culture and diversity into their everyday environment. ‘Let us remember our history, our heritage, our glory. Let us remember our journey and listen to our story, it has travelled from Mama Africa across the Atlantic to America’. Additionally, the students called each other brother and sister – instilling a wider sense of compassion and community.

The Community School model which involves the community to the point where it provides jobs to parents and local residents in order to act out the age old saying ‘it takes a village to instill change’. In engaging with the community as a whole it is not only the child that is supported but the school, the involved organisations and the families of the children. Being that one of the biggest battles, in the UK as well as North America, seems to be engaging with parents it makes sense to model schools such as the Community Schools as best practice. The model is arranged in a way that will reach out to parents with more than a parenting support class as directed by government or other statutory involvement. It includes and involves all members of the community in the functioning of the schools as well as provides them with support in a much less condescending manner. By including services such as healthcare, top up education classes for parents to gain qualifications and even an on-site community café (staffed by local members of the community), the school becomes more than just a school. It becomes a Community Learning Center, as termed by Cincinnati Education Board.

The Children’s Aid Society Community Schools conferences also offered an opportunity to discuss best practice in bringing parents into the education of the child. The benefits of mothers and fathers being prevalent in a students educational journey included higher attendance rates, better grades and happier students making for more productive and
A study carried out by the Children’s Aid Society found the following benefits of parent and family involvement and engagement:

- *Children achieve more when their parents are involved e.g higher grades and test scores, more time on homework and better attendance* (regardless of parents' ethnic background, education level or socioeconomic status).
- *Children exhibit more positive attitudes and behaviour.*
- *Children have higher graduation rates and greater enrolment rates in postsecondary education.*
- *Youth risk behaviours (such as alcohol use, violence and antisocial behaviours) decrease as parent involvement increases.*

Given this we were also made privy to some strategies and ideas to get parents to associate with the schools and their child’s learning. Taken from J.L Epstein’s 2002 School, Family and Community partnerships, there are, as a starting point ‘six types of involvement’ that could be used:

1. **Parenting:** assist families with parenting skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level.
2. **Communicating:** Communicate with families about programs and student progress. Create two-way communication channels between school and home.
3. **Volunteering:** Improve recruitment, training, activities and schedules to involve families as volunteers and as audiences at the school or in other locations.
4. **Learning at home:** Involve families with their children in academic learning at home, including homework, goal setting and other curriculum related activities. Encourage teachers to design homework that enables students to share and discuss interesting tasks.
5. **Decision Making:** Include families as participants in school decisions, governance and advocacy activities through school councils or improvement teams, committees and parent organisations.
6. **Collaborating with the Community:** Coordinate resources and services for families, students and the school with community groups including businesses, agencies, cultural and civic (governmental) organisations and colleges or universities. Enable all to contribute to service to the community.

The above strategies could unfold into a considerable amount of creative ways to encourage parental participation. One idea that stands out for me as a practitioner is information sharing with parents around adolescent development. Unless you work in the field with children or young people, or you have once studied it, many parents would not necessarily have looked into these theories. Despite which, barriers to learning may come into play for them so it is important to consider the nature of how this information is delivered –whether
it's through interactive role play, games, DVDs and more. The resources are endless for professionals with access to the internet at a click of a button.
Conclusion

‘I am always ready to learn but I do not always like being taught’ – Winston Churchill

Before embarking on this research project, I was aware of the barriers faced by young people, families, communities and professionals in the field of youth work and education. The need is to engage with families of our young people and more importantly, to understand the long term benefits. The need to ‘move with the times’ and look to media such as music that we know appeal to almost all of us, but more so to young people. Instead of vilifying music such as hip hop, we can use it in the classroom and in projects with young people; not just as an engagement tool but as an educational tool to inspire a want to learn basic reading and writing skills. In his film To Be Heard, Roland Legiardi-Laura, Film Director/Producer states “If you don’t understand a word and you let it go, you’re just erecting one of those prison bars”, he also says writing is a ‘weapon’ in their life.

Given my experience of working with young people, schools and various professionals in East London, UK I believe there is a need for positive parental engagement, relationships, altered perceptions of alternative education, which is closely associated to, revolutionary review of our ideas about educating.

Parental engagement

Although one could argue that this process starts as early as a parent’s own education and engagement during their early years, the need to engage parents in all areas of a child’s development has proved to be hugely pivotal in the future success of young people. Whether educationally, socially or emotionally, if parents are not aware of this need how would they know to do so? It has been stated that ‘children achieve more when their parents are involved, (regardless of parents’ ethnic background, education level or socio-economic status)’. This is great news and shows the impact that parenting has on a child. However, surely ‘parents’ education level and socio-economic status’ play a part in engaging parents and guardians with the education of their child? In which case, as professionals whose job is to provide support for these families I suggest that it is our role to think creatively about involving them despite the named barriers. If there are financial reasons as to why can we work with them to address that, if there are language barriers or a lack of their own skills in reading and writing can we be mindful of that and action accordingly?

David Cameron, UK Prime Minister, has just released news of a plan to offer parenting classes to mothers, fathers and carers. The Daily Mail newspaper writes, Currently, the courts can impose such classes on irresponsible parents, but Ministers hope this scheme will make them ‘as
normal and pleasant as going to a cookery or line-dancing class’. Under the scheme, to be launched in three test areas, mothers and fathers of under-fives will each be eligible for £100 vouchers. Lessons will cover discipline, diet, exercise, coping with family rows, good manners, bullying, reading bedtime stories and generally preparing children for school.

Grandparents and others carers will also qualify for the classes, which include access to online video lessons on the do’s and don’ts of bringing up children’ http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2143516/David-Camerons-100-parenting-class-Boots-vouchers-help-tackle-child-yobbery.html#ixzz1umN3a1p8.

Valuable as such a service is, this kind of approach is more likely to lead to further segregation as the parents who value these classes and are keen to access them are unlikely to be those in need. In addition, they still carry the stigma of ‘parenting classes’ as opposed to long term valuable tools such as education, work experience and better investment in the education of a child will provide.

Instead we could consider engaging and involving parents and families from the point that their children enter the education system, as the hope is then that they will value education. An extension of this is community engagement – Cincinnati’s Board of Education published a report in 2011 titled Guiding Principles For Community Learning Centers (Community Schools) that reads:

In order to serve more fully the needs of our students and to support improvement of their academic and intellectual development, all Cincinnati Public Schools will engage their communities in improving student achievement. As centers in the community, the schools and their partners should foster strong collaboration, set high expectations, embrace diversity and share accountability for results.

The above report does not just give direction, it states a commitment to engage with the community in order to ‘share accountability’. As idealistic as this may sound, it seems an excellent step towards bringing a community together to ‘foster’ the importance of the young generation and their educational attainment.

**Relationships**

Dr William Glasser says “Almost all relationships can be resuscitated by giving up the seven disconnecting habits (previously mentioned), even if only one party stops using them. If both are willing to do this, literally, any relationship, even a marriage, has a good chance of being saved.”

Having practiced elements of Choice Theory whilst working for Fairbridge, I am aware of the necessity to build a relationship before attempting any kind of ‘development’ with a young person. With some young people it happens quicker than others and there have been times where after three keyworking sessions I still find the need to focus on building a relationship. Understandably, this is not possible for a teacher to do with a class or thirty.
However, it is crucial that someone in the school is that point of contact for a student. A report entitled, The Power of Relationship: A Study of Key Working as an Intervention with Traumatised Young People by Alessandra Lemma confirmed what my experience has led me to believe:

[The young people questioned] all expressed the view that the emotional support they gained from the key worker was as important, and even more helpful in several instances, than that received from a therapist. Formal psychotherapy was viewed by many of the young people as too rigid and unresponsive to crises. By contrast, the key worker was felt to be more readily available at times of need and, significantly, was felt to offer emotional support as well as challenge in a manner that appeared to make it more palatable to the young person. This may be because for many of these young people ‘opening up’ to the key worker was facilitated by a less formal style of interaction (such as using humour, as we have seen), and less formal arrangements, such as going to a café or walking in the park with their key worker.

Whether professional, personal, romantic or social, the ability to build, develop and maintain relationships is the key to future success. This allows us to deal with conflict, build professional and successful working relationships and be happy in our own relationships – which may be modelled for our own children.

Altered perceptions of alternative provisions

In the introduction I asked the question: ‘Is mainstream school suitable for everyone?’ and I have answered my own question in undertaking this report. One size does not fit all. I have heard the phrase ‘It can’t be one rule for you and one for another’ within a school setting on numerous occasions and, although I completely agree with that, the reality is that we are all individuals. Given the power of a relationship to influence change and educate a child, it does not then make sense to think that every child in class of thirty, with one teacher, will be successful in that environment. We cannot then assume that those for whom it does not work are not academically capable. They may well be, but their need to learn in a more individualised environment means a classroom with too many other students and a ‘one rule for all’ mentality means they will not find success in a mainstream school. Some young people have no interest at all in learning by the time they reach secondary school and to force them through the system just creates a bigger divide. This is when we can utilise vocational learning and practical application through a medium that they choose. The methods employed at Murray High School, Children’s Aid Society Community Schools and Good Shepherd Services’ Transfer Model prove that young people who are beginning to fall behind or not achieve at all, placed in the right environment with the necessary pastoral support, can be successful.
In a speech for the Royal Society of Arts, Sir Ken Robinson, author, speaker and educational advisor in the arts, said ‘The current education system was designed and conceived in the intellectual culture of the enlightenment and economic system of the industrial revolution’. In other words, the structured and conformist way of everyone should behave the same, learn the same things and be taught in the same way, is no longer feasible in a society full of distraction.

**Revolutionary Review of Our Ideas About Educating**

In the same speech for the Royal Society of Arts Sir Ken Robinson spoke about a thought process called Divergent Thinking.

*Psychologists have found that a high IQ alone does not guarantee creativity. Instead, personality traits that promote divergent thinking are more important. Divergent thinking is found among people with personalities which have traits such as nonconformity, curiosity, willingness to take risks, and persistence.*  

Despite this, more and more academies seem to be opening which offer an approach which is almost the complete opposite to Sir Ken Robinson’s ideas. In fact their focus is on conformity, discipline and individual academic success. This may actually work with the majority although the ‘majority’ is not inclusive. It is therefore essential that there are many more options for secondary education and that parents and guardians are made aware of these. Already in East London, UK, I work with numerous educational bodies, organisations and professionals to refer young people categorised as NEET/At Risk into alternative education provisions. These can include B-Tec courses, national diplomas and Entry Level 1 – Level 2 nationally recognised qualifications. However, more often than not these referrals are made because a child has been perceived to have ‘failed’ in mainstream school.

According to Dr. William Glasser, “The whole world thinks the right thing to do to a child who doesn’t get along in class is to punish them. It sounds logical. But if a child is not doing well and doesn’t feel connected in school, punishing him only pushes him further away, destroys relationships. Just like every research study shows that flunking a child makes their achievement less and less, we still do it. We just won’t change theories.”

There is an urgent need for schools or alternative provisions that offer the environment of emotional awareness and intelligence alongside a thought provoking and intelligent course that could be, although should not have to be, academic.
This approach should include organisations which model a ‘bottom up’ approach and reflect the needs of their community. One of the seminars at the Children’s Aid Society conference including a simple but effective example; it posed the question, would you build a tower from the top down? Each community may be different but as long as young people are engaged we could be starting to revolutionise an age old idea that education has to be based on academic ability. (An idea that results in what Sir Ken Robinson describes as a thought pattern that ‘there are two types of people - academic and non-academic. A consequence of which is that many brilliant people, think they are not.’) Instead we should be awakening the minds of others, in Robinson’s words ‘to see the many possibilities’. This will in turn arouse a generation to the possibilities of entrepreneurship and the emotional intelligence that is necessary to make it successful.

Linda Laniere in Florida said “We know what’s right, we don’t need research”. It was my intention to help to prove the need to break traditions in different contexts of working with young people. I know I now have many more strategies to implement in my practice as a youth development officer and to share with others. My hope is that many others will add to their repertoire of strategies to improve the lives and futures of marginalised young people.

‘Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has’ – Margaret Mead
If you would like to discuss any of the ideas in this report or would like any further information please email dominy.roe@hotmail.com