

Somerset College

Identifying and tackling the causes of difficult behaviour



Identifying & tackling the causes of difficult behaviour- positive interventions that challenge difficult behaviour within Somerset College

This report will:

- Identify new approaches that Somerset College takes in relation to behaviour that is seen to be challenging regarding both individual learners and groups of learners. 3
- Illustrate techniques and activities completed to engage learners in recognising their differences and valuing both themselves and others within a group
- Capture the voices of learners who have participated in the projects and practitioners who are working to shift the perspective of learners regarding their own self-esteem or low expectations
- Evaluate the impact of these measures and reflect on how this impact could be further improved
- Demonstrate how this approach can be sustained in future academic years

Introduction

At Somerset College we are proud of our learners and feel that for many young people, an opportunity in further education gives individuals a chance to “start again”. This report acknowledges that for many young people the complexities of their lives, past experiences and attitude to learning means that they may receive appropriate and successful additional support and intervention from support services across and outside of Somerset College. However, what will be demonstrated in the report is a new approach that could be applied in collaboration with other appropriate interventions.

Within Somerset College we had a number of students and tutors requesting anger management activities and it was felt that perhaps it was time to think differently about what would be offered. The examples below : **Somerset College – Enrichment** and [Superact!- SEPE](#), illustrate the impact of thinking differently about “challenging behaviour” and how it is addressed. We think that this approach has the potential to be effective in other organisations and that it is transferable to many activities . It is hoped is that by encouraging learning support staff and personal tutors to refer either groups of learners or individuals to positive, enriching activities a shift in their attitude and behaviour might take place benefitting both learners and the Somerset College environment.

Discussing the use of enrichment to address difficult behaviour

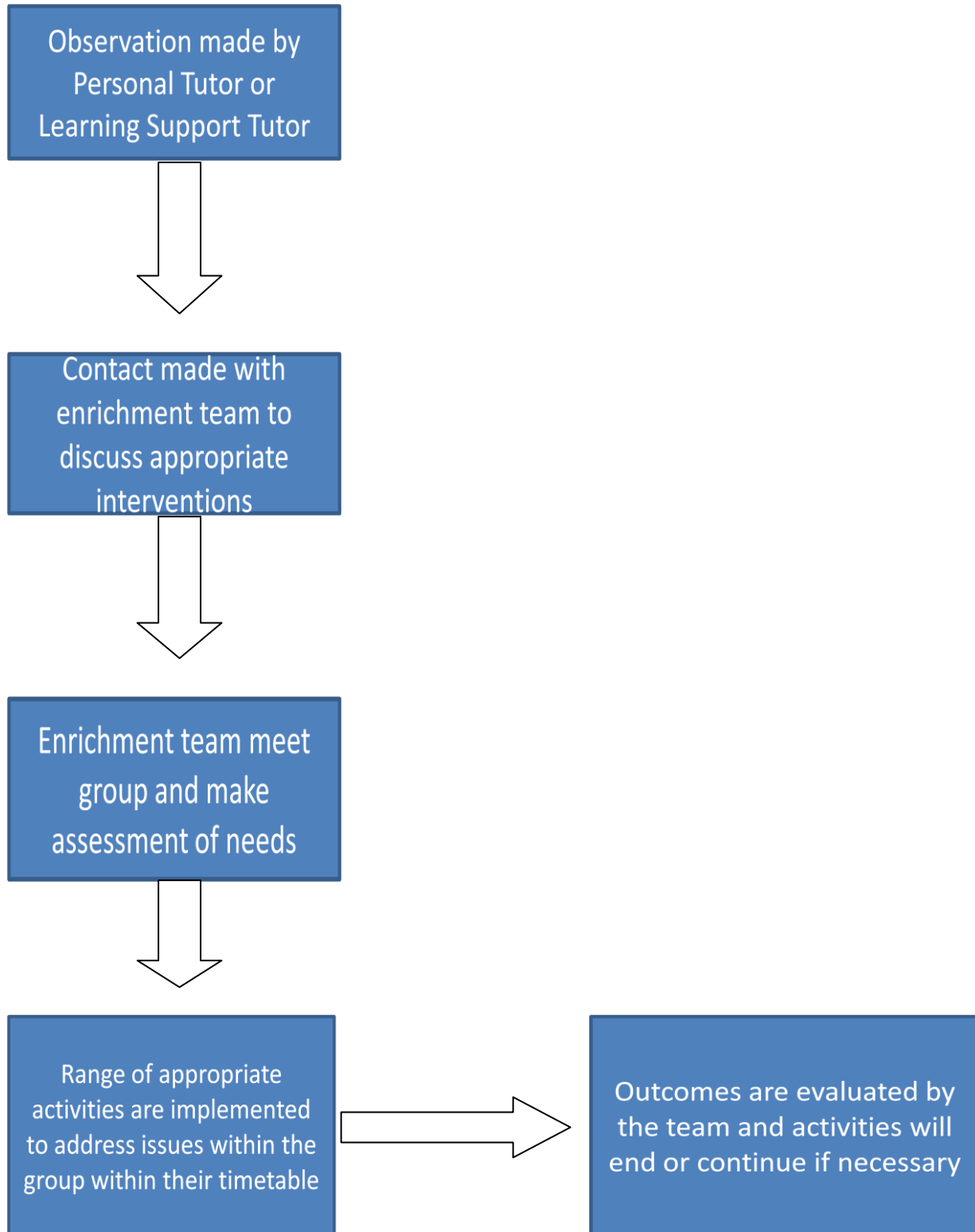
In this [video](#) Kristyn Woodward, Senior Tutor Somerset College and Claire Merchant-Jones- Learning Support and Disability Officer discuss using enrichment to address difficult behaviour.



Enrichment - Somerset College

In the context of this project, Stuart runs workshops for and with groups of learners who have been identified as requiring input due to the behaviour and dynamic of the group. The process illustrated below has been implemented during this academic year.

Flowchart for enrichment intervention



Why this approach?

This concept was realised in the early part of this academic year in a response to some difficult dynamics within a number of learning environments particularly for learners at level 1 and 2. After a number of individuals went into the classrooms in an attempt to address the issues, it became clear that the “direct action” or disciplinary measures were not necessarily having a great deal of impact or effecting change.

It was felt that the learners should be offered activities outside of their classroom environment; the theory being that this would disrupt the current negative culture within the classroom and be a catalyst for change.

Activities

The Enrichment Team describe their ethos as not being a “standard” or “one size fits all” approach and instead will assess the group within the initial session to create an activity or series of activities to further understand and shift their current position.

The initial session must end with a positive outcome and all learners will achieve something in order to encourage further participation.

The activities are all practical but not necessarily only sport related. Some groups take part in forest skills or other outdoor pursuits but there are some key principles that remain the same no matter what the activity.

These common principles are:

- All learners will be successful within these sessions
- All individuals taking part in the sessions will be responsible for the outcomes
- All participants are equal including staff and learners and staff members such as tutors are encouraged to take part

Outcomes

The team describe success as something that all learners **will** experience and crucially the practitioners are responsible for ensuring that this happens. This commitment from the practitioner relies on a great deal of emotional intelligence and capacity to think and implement changes quickly in order to involve all learners. Many disengaged young people do not know what success feels like and so these activities are designed to act as a reminder or revelation that achievement and aspiration is possible.

Leaving the classroom also enables the learners to evaluate their own role in the difficulties that exist within the classroom.

Learner voice

A level 2 group studying within the college are made up of learners who have a range of both learning needs such as dyslexia, mental health issues and Asperger's syndrome and social emotional needs due to difficulties outside of the college environment.

From the beginning of the year it was clear that this group were struggling to get along with each other and to form relationships with the staff that were teaching them.

Sessions on bullying and equality, changes of tutors and disciplinary measures were all attempted but did not appear to work.

A referral was made to our enrichment team who quickly implemented weekly sessions within the learners timetable to address the dynamic of the group.

During a focus group held with these learners most felt that this has been very successful and has helped them to "get along" better and become friends. One of the negative aspects from their perspective was that not all learners choose to take part and that there are obvious downside of this lack of participation from all.

The learners who had chosen not to take part felt that the relationships had broken down to such a point that they were irreparable and they would not be positive contributors to the sessions. All learners who had chosen not to take part felt that they would have done so if these sessions were there from the start rather than to "repair" a problem.

This group of learners appear to have made a positive shift regarding both their attitudes and behaviour and all are applying to progress to higher level courses next year at Somerset College. Whilst it would be naive to believe that this is solely due to the intervention from the enrichment team, it would appear that this has been a major contributing factor that should not be over-looked.

Sustaining this project

Due to the success of these interventions, it is a view of both staff and learners that these activities could form part of the initial timetable for groups of learners where the profile of the group means that they might exhibit behaviour that challenges. This means that the activities may not only be implemented in moments of crisis but could also be viewed as a more preventative approach to ensuring difficult behaviour is tackled and aspiration is encouraged.



Superact! - SEPE

“Superact! is a not-for-profit arts organisation using creativity to improve the health and wellbeing of people from a wide variety of backgrounds and abilities. We use artists and musicians, both amateur & professional, to deliver highly successful projects in the healthcare, education and criminal justice systems.” – Extract from Superact! Website

Within the context of this project, the college refers learners to Superact! where there is either a risk of them leaving college or where the behaviour they are demonstrating in class is causing concern or risk to their success.

Superact! run accredited employability qualifications called SEPE (Supporting Employability and Personal effectiveness) taught through art and music activities, learners referred to this programme have been encouraged to remain on their main programme of study combined with their SEPE programme.

Why this approach

This approach takes a whole person view of an individual and the benefit of basing it within the arts is that it can be both holistic and flexible in responding to the aspirations and needs of each learner. The perspective of the organisers is that the programme of study (normally 10 weeks) should be seen as a fresh start. Learners will come together from a range of referring agencies such as the college and our local Targeted Youth Support team. This is positive as it allows individuals to feel that they are able to somehow “shrug off” the attitudes that are currently impacting on their learning and gain transferable skills to hopefully bring back to their current learning environment.

The learning environment is one where the power is shared between all members of the group and there is not an assumption that the teachers or facilitators hold all of the knowledge. Instead this is distributed throughout the group which seems to create an environment where individuals feel a responsibility to each other and the ultimate outcomes of the programme.

Activities

The SEPE award is designed to help those who may find accessing traditional routes to employability challenging, to build confidence and gain a meaningful qualification.

The award is delivered using a range of creative approaches including music, visual arts, theatre and creative writing and it is difficult not to feel inspired by the Superact! team when they describe learners

as becoming “hooked” on the arts and that SEPE is a way of learners realising their own potential success. . Learners complete a number of tasks which enables them to gain their qualification all through art based activities for 1 afternoon a week for 10 weeks. This often culminates in a performance of sorts

Outcomes

Of the 10 learners who took part in the college based SEPE programme two were not able to complete the programme but eight went on to achieve and more importantly have progressed on to different courses and programmes either here at Somerset College or with different providers.

One of the most positive outcomes of this provision is that learners are asked to address and acknowledge what their challenges are and what they can do to overcome them, encouraging individuals to own these issues means that they are more likely to take ownership of their problems and create solutions rather than further barriers.

Using Superact! to support learning

Learner A joined the college after a difficult period of time in care and a patchy educational history in different parts of the country. He had attended pupil referral units and was only used to studying on a 1-1 basis. He came to study catering within a level 1 foundation learning provision.

The learner struggled with all figures of authority and this became apparent and difficult for teachers who were trying to impose classroom rules.

The learner was referred to the initial SEPE project that Superact! ran at Somerset College. The impact of this for him was that his confidence increased and his aspiration to become a musician was discovered. Whilst he was taking part in SEPE, the team of staff at Somerset College were working hard to establish a learning environment that would continue to encourage his positivity. This was only partially successful as the learner was still finding it extremely difficult when faced with authority figures. The Superact! team decided that they would allow the learner to complete another programme of study. This would take place during some of the time that he was expected in class but was viewed as such a positive influence in his life that the college decided to adjust his timetable.

Feedback from this learner clearly endorses that SEPE and Superact! has helped him to remain engaged in education, he has role models and despite many external influences that are encouraging him to fail he remains on programme at Somerset College and with Superact!

As a result of his success in the SEPE programme, it is being recommended that we offer him an individual learning programme within the college which allows him to access work experience through Superact! and 1-1 teaching from the support team which will address his issues with authority and feelings of injustice and help him through the transition to adulthood.

Sustaining this project

At the end of the ten week programme, learners are sign-posted and encouraged to take up further opportunities through other arts organisations, The Prince's Trust or other education providers. There is a view by Superact! that they would like to run additional courses once a learner has completed the ten week course so that the success can be built upon and further qualifications gained.

Evaluation and Conclusion

The examples above demonstrate the positive impact of these activities. However, it is acknowledged that many learners go on to find the learning environment challenging despite having huge success within the activities. In order for us to develop this provision further, it is clear that learners and practitioners feel that the benefits would be greater if the activities appear in their timetable from the beginning of the year. Also, a by-product of researching for this report has highlighted the potential need to transfer the effective methods utilised in the projects into the classroom environment. The key transferable messages have been:

- Ensure all learners feel responsible for themselves and others at the very beginning
- Learners who have challenging behaviour may find the traditional teacher-learner method difficult to subscribe to. Learning environments that are not based on hierarchy might well be more effective for certain groups of learners
- Build in small successes throughout and ensure that positive reinforcement is frequent and has integrity
- Build curriculum that does not rely on individuals being able to complete an academic year, break it up into ten week courses or projects with exit points that are clearly indicated to the learners

Somerset College will continue to build on this provision with a broader and more consistent approach to particularly vulnerable groups from the beginning of the year. The learning that has taken place through talking to learners and practitioners will influence both the design of future interventions and hopefully delivery within the classroom.