

United Against Bullying School Case Study: Using a Targeted Youth Mentor with Year 10 boys

How Millbay Academy used a Targeted Youth Mentor with Year 10 boys

Context of our anti-bullying work

Our school is diverse, with a wide range of nationalities, religions and race identities. As pupil mobility remains high in Plymouth, maintaining a secure culture of mutual respect and valuing diversity is an ongoing item for focus.

We have noticed, particularly on return from COVID-19 interruptions, an increase in incidents involving low-level aggression. In addition, an emergent culture of bravado, play fighting and poor, disrespectful language. This has led most recently to some school avoidance/poor attendance among some of our young women in Y10. We have also seen police involvement with our students in the community, including reports from the local policing team (as well as from the student body) of knives and an emergent gang culture.

In particular, we have a group of young men in Year 10 and Y11 who state they they do not want confrontation ('beef') but if it comes to them, they will stand up and fight back against it - because that's what they *have to do* otherwise be seen to be weak.

Draw this context out and we have noticed deteriorating relationship with our departing Y11 boys - caught up in this and also detaching themselves from support at school.

Other traits we have seen are imbalances of power in amorous relationships. Some evidence of enacted violence, influenced by exposure to pornography online.

What we hoped to achieve

While our time with Y11 is fast running out, we know that we have an opportunity with our Y10s to street them back from a full assimilation in to this culture. There are many traits that they hold as a group that are positive and aspirational. This certainly gives us something to work with and there is a collective gravity, which we hope will ensure those who are further outliers will be drawn back away from exploitation, violence and crime in the community.

Beyond the more extreme cases, we also want to educate these young people around the role of a 'man'; what it means to be a 'man' and build models for positive relationships.

What intend for this group of young men to engage with the concept of *tender masculinity* and understand how *non-tender masculinity* affects relationships and culture (Pinkett & Roberts).

We intend to

- reduce the number of incidents of boisterous/fighting behaviour in school
- school to feel safe and calm for all students and stakeholders
- reduce persistent absenteeism due to peer group dysfunction or fall out
- ensure all our students remain safe in their community
- ensure the safety and empowerment of young women in our school, in their relationships
- reduce the number of fixed term exclusions due to fighting/physical and verbal assault
- Profile positive diversity to value different perspectives on common themes.

The action we took

We have engaged the work of [KS], a Targeted Youth Mentor with Plymouth Argyle Community Trust. [KS] is a young black man with a calm, confident and emotionally intelligent presence. In this instance, race and identity has been an active part of selection, as we strive in parallel to become an anti-racist organisation, being deliberate in the role models we present to young people.

We are underway with what is initially a 7-week programme of 90-minute small, targeted group work with our Year 10s. This is a bespoke offer that we have negotiated with [KS] in order to directly meet the needs of our students, as we see them. Week one was designed to elicit from a girls-only group some of the things they see and feel with regard to the behaviour of the young men around them. Exploring their own confidence and their perspectives on relationships as they currently stand.

The voice from this first workshop is then being used to contextualise some of the issues we want to present to the young men in the target group for the remaining 6 weeks (issues as set out above). This started with 'unpacking' their own views of male identity (*The Man Box*). Further sessions then draw on the insight offered by their female peers, before then depersonalising it and looking at the wider principles around positive relationships and tender masculinity.

Impact and outcomes of the work

The engagement from pupils has been unanimously positive. Students have fed back the significance of this subject to them and some of the students are actively highlighting to staff where they are doing things differently.

We have also seen a re-emergence of some aggressive behaviours. While this is the behaviour that we want to address, we are comfortable that this can be attributed to the attached emotions and behaviours being brought to the surface. As the work is still underway, we expect a significant repositioning, as well as important points for reflection along the way; these students are having to confront some deeply set habits and cultures of behaviour

We suspect that this may have to extend beyond the 6 weeks, particularly as we bridge into another academic year. Some follow up work after the summer break is going to be essential in order to embed progress made; we expect this will not be a linear journey.

In addition, we are lining up whole-cohort workshops with an external provider *Stand Against Violence*.

What we have learned

This is providing insight into the importance of earlier intervention, too. We are therefore drafting a plan for a similar programme for our target Year 8 students, where data is showing similar traits are emerging.

We would share the importance of targeted work, alongside holistic, whole-cohort work, clearly communicating (regularly) the behaviours and culture that we *do* want to see. Rooting this work in students identity and perspective of themselves, with authentic voice is fundamental to the success of the programme.

We know that incidents of violence are on the rise in our community. We see the impact of this on school attendance, vulnerability to exploitation, and poor mental health. Investing resource in this area before it is too late is crucial.