

CITIZENS' CURRICULUM CASE STUDY

ST MUNGO'S BROADWAY

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CITIZENS' CURRICULUM CASE STUDY: ST MUNGO'S BROADWAY

Introduction

Taking a Citizens' Curriculum approach ensures all individuals have the core set of skills they need for the 21st Century, including English, maths, ESOL, digital, civic, health and financial capabilities. NIACE is committed to widening access to these skills, particularly amongst under-represented groups in society, as well as improving the range and quality of provision available to all adults. These interrelated skills, which underpin lifelong learning, can be made more accessible by being contextualised and developed as an integrated curriculum offer or framework.

In 2015/16, the development of a Citizens' Curriculum was taken forward by thirteen pilots across a range of organisations including colleges, local authorities and charities. The pilots tapped into what motivates adults to learn, ensuring that more people are learning skills which are relevant to their lives, their needs and their work. Particular areas of focus included provision for homeless / vulnerably housed adults, offenders, ex-offenders, migrants, families and disadvantaged young adults. The pilots provided insight into methods of adopting a Citizens' Curriculum approach, how effective the approach is in engaging disadvantaged learners, the impact on learners and providers, and key success factors for both the learner and the provider. This case study tells the story of one of the pilots.

Background

St. Mungo's Broadway is a charity which works across London and the South of England to help people recover from the issues that create homelessness and rebuild their lives. They support both men and women through a wide variety of projects including: emergency, hostel and supported housing projects; advice services; specialist physical and mental health services; and skills and work services.

St. Mungo's Broadway's Citizens' Curriculum pilot was embedded into the provision offered at their Residential College which is based in Clapham, London. The aim of the college is to equip residents with the skills needed to make a fresh start and move on in their lives. The college can accommodate up to 10 residents who usually stay for between three and six months. While living at the college, residents engage in a full time educational programme that combines academic learning with developing independent living skills.

How it worked

Through their pilot, St. Mungo's Broadway aimed to demonstrate that their Residential College approach supports learners to not only improve their basic skills, but also to develop a range of skills which support independent living. As a result, their pilot was embedded into the full time learning programme offered to residents at the college. This involved participating in a variety of activities and lessons spread

across five days, delivered by two tutors and a number of volunteers, some of whom had been St Mungo's Broadway clients.

To recruit learners onto the programme, college staff liaised with area managers from their hostel network. They held themed activity days and invited key workers to visit the college with potential residents. This gave clients an opportunity to look around the college and find out what was on offer. Afterwards, the college staff visited potential clients at their hostels to have a more in-depth chat with them and work out whether the project would be a viable and appropriate option for them.

The pilot covered the majority of the Citizens' Curriculum capabilities, including literacy, numeracy, health, digital, financial and civic. Some of these were covered explicitly in learners' weekly timetable. For example, literacy, numeracy and IT sessions were delivered once a week and learners also had a 'Wellbeing Day' each Tuesday where they could access a nearby health and wellbeing centre and take part in personal development activities. Due to the variation in learners' confidence with digital technology, the IT sessions were delivered using a less structured approach than the other lessons. Instead, the provision was led by the learners and what they wanted to achieve from the sessions.

However, many activities covered multiple capabilities at once. For example, a chef volunteered to teach the residents to cook; this encouraged them to think about healthy meals and each week a resident was given the responsibility and a budget to go out and buy ingredients needed for breakfast, which they would then cook as group. This embedded the health and financial capabilities into an activity which encouraged learners to engage with the wider community.

Although the programme was full-time, the pilot was delivered flexibly and learners could suggest activities that they might like to be involved in or general goals that they would like to achieve during their stay at the college. St Mungo's Broadway then tried to accommodate these suggestions and help learners to achieve these goals in a holistic way. Similarly, learners had regular tutorials with staff so that they could give direct feedback on what was working well and what could be improved. Staff then had the flexibility to make changes to the provision if necessary. Also integrated into the timetable were weekly group meetings. These enabled learners to discuss living at the college but also suggest activities that they might like to get involved in. The staff would then encourage the learners to take action and organise these activities. In this way, learners were involved in the co-design and co-delivery of the pilot.

Challenges encountered and how they were overcome

One of the key challenges that St. Mungo's Broadway faced in their pilot was issues around consistency and continuity. Due to their clients' backgrounds of homelessness, they found that some learners were not used to routines and at first found it difficult to adjust to the college environment. As a result, cancellations of sessions or changes to the daily routine were found to be quite disruptive and

challenging for learners. To overcome this challenge, the college tried to ensure consistency with timetables and to make sure that plans ran as smoothly as possible.

The college also encountered some problems with the delivery of their maths and English provision. Originally St. Mungo's Broadway had partnered with a local college to deliver this aspect of their curriculum. However, the college's funding requirements restricted its ability to offer the flexible provision needed for their client group (e.g. specific class sizes and set learner abilities). Instead, the pilot lead brought in two tutors from her Basic Skills team to deliver the literacy and numeracy elements of the Residential College curriculum. This has been successful and the college has found that the teaching is now far more consistent as their tutors better understand the needs of their learners.

Impacts and outcomes

For learners

Overall, learners' experiences of the pilot were very positive and their involvement in the programme had resulted in positive outcomes in many areas of their lives. A key outcome for learners, and one that tutors were pleased to highlight, was an improvement in their self confidence. This had led some learners to recognise the value of learning and had increased their motivation to continue in education.

'I find that it's given me the confidence that I need to step forward into higher education if I want to, or taking it into the workplace.' (Learner)

'Just rebuilding your confidence gradually as you go along, with regards to team-building and absorbing all the information that you're getting in.' (Learner)

Tutors also reported that their learners' social skills had developed during the course of the pilot. This was attributed to the communal environment of the residential college, which encouraged learners to interact and develop strong bonds with one another. After the first few weeks, staff began to notice some very positive changes in their demeanour and relationships with others. Similarly, learners commented that they appreciated the support they received from other residents in the college and felt they had developed their teamwork skills.

'Since he's been here he's really come into his own which has been really nice to see. He's made friends, particularly with Charlie, they go out, have coffees together; they go and do stuff together outside, positive things.' (Tutor)

'It's also like the interaction and getting back in, in group activities and working as a team, which I think that we're all very capable and something that we're doing rather well.' (Learner)

Learners felt that they had particularly benefitted from having a structured learning environment with a clear routine each week. Many of the learners were not used to

working to a timetable and routine and they found that this aspect of the course provided a useful life skill.

'There's a lot of people that getting up in the morning, getting into that routine helps as well.' (Learner)

Both the pilot leads and the learners themselves felt that the project had had a significant positive impact on learners' sense of belonging and involvement in their community and society more widely. The activities that they took part in encouraged them to be more independent, use local services and be an active member of the community. These all helped these learners to overcome the social isolation they had felt at the beginning of the programme and suggests that the project successfully addressed one of the main issues stemming from homelessness.

'A very common theme that people say about homelessness is that you feel like you're not part of society. I think that living here and being able to almost create a little small community with the positives and negatives of that, helps them feel like they can participate in the world and that they can be part of something.' (Pilot Lead)

'You're in the routine that most other people are doing every day which actually makes you feel more part of the human race.' (Learner)

This had had knock on impacts on learners' mental health and wellbeing.

'I feel alive when I wake up in the morning to get up, to get up to come here because if I didn't have here, I think that I'd be in a dark place and I need these type of organisations. It helps me with my mental problems and it helps me with my self esteem problems.' (Learner)

Many of the learners expressed more positive attitudes towards volunteering and helping others as a result of the support and assistance that they had received through the pilot. They were so appreciative of this support that some learners wanted to show others in similar situations that they too could turn their lives around.

'If it comes to giving back, I would like to give back in any way I can.' (Learner)

'To show that there is light at the end of the tunnel. It might not appear so at the moment but with a little bit of dedication and hope, you can achieve, because we're living proof.' (Learner)

For staff

The staff involved in the pilot and the Residential College more widely found that they benefitted from the opportunity to implement and trial a new approach to delivering learning to this group. This had resulted in some important changes in their practice, as well as helped them to develop their communication.

'I think we've learnt a lot actually from being here and how I initially saw it being and how taking on a more gentle approach works better.' (Tutor)

The tutors also found that the nature of the Residential College and working with the same group over the period of the project meant that they developed very close relationships with their learners. They found that this was very important for the project to succeed as it helped to establish trust between the learners and the tutors.

'Our relationship with the clients is so important and that trust and if we don't have that I don't think the project really works.' (Tutor)

For St. Mungo's Broadway

Staff felt that adopting such a flexible and learner-centric approach was a particularly effective method to engage learners and ensure that they gained as much as possible from their experience at the college. They were keen to use this approach again in the future and wanted to demonstrate its potential to other members of staff across St Mungo's Broadway. However, this was a challenge due to the size and spread of the organisation.

'I think it's made me think strategically, from a point of view as a manager, how can we get clients as involved as possible in their education and how can we make them participants in their education, rather than just receiving it? That would be a good thing to take forward and spread a bit more. I think it's something my team do a bit but I think it's definitely something we could all learn from as an approach.' (Pilot lead)

Critical success factors

- The Citizens' Curriculum approach of embedding skills such as maths and English within independent living skills helped to adequately prepare learners for moving on and progressing in life.
- The flexible approaches used in the pilot and giving the learners the opportunity to take responsibility for their learning and progression helped to keep learners motivated and engaged.
- The communal environment of the Residential College enabled learners to develop their social and teamwork skills as well as building strong bonds between learners.
- Having a set routine and being given responsibilities helped learners to feel more involved with society and encouraged them to have a positive outlook for the future.

Further information and contact

For further information about St. Mungo's Broadway please visit their website at: <http://www.mungosbroadway.org.uk/>

For more information about the NIACE Citizens' Curriculum, please contact Alex Stevenson at alex.stevenson@niace.org.uk

