



Melksham 0-19 Resilience Project

The Melksham 0-19 Resilience Project is a collaborative venture between schools, Bath Spa University and a number of other services working with young people in the Melksham area. It has two main aims – to test out the potential of emotion coaching techniques to improve behaviour, outcomes and family relationships in an area of significant deprivation, and to examine the feasibility and impact of adopting a common approach to such techniques across all services, on individuals, families, multi agency working and community well being.

The project will be led by Dr Janet Rose, Senior Lecturer in Early Years and Childcare and by Richard Parker, Director of the Centre for Education Policy in Practice. It is envisaged that the initial phase of the project will take place between January and July 2011. Although the longer term quantifiable outcomes of the project in terms of school attendance, behaviour, performance and anti-social behaviour may not be available until 2012, it is anticipated that this initial phase will have generated sufficient qualitative learning to support a further bid to a major funding organisation, as well as providing a model which can be extended to other schools and community organisations.

There has been considerable enthusiasm for the project among schools in the area and four have already committed themselves to the scheme, including Melksham Oak secondary school. The project has been endorsed by the area headteachers group, and by the Wiltshire Early Years /Sure Start Team. Wiltshire Police, Connexions and other services are also involved.

The project aims to build on existing good practice within schools and services in the area, to develop a specific approach to behaviour management based on the work of John Gottman in the USA, known as 'emotion coaching'. This focuses on understanding the reasons for an individual's poor behaviour, working with them to develop alternative responses to difficulties, and to enhance their confidence and self esteem.

There is increasing evidence for the success of such approaches in deprived areas in the USA, but to date there has been very little research in Britain. However approaches based on restorative justice, which has a very similar underlying philosophy and which has been successfully adopted in Melksham Oak School, have shown some very encouraging outcomes. Schools in the city of Hull, for example, which adopted restorative approaches across all agencies, saw reductions of 75% in verbal and 57% in physical abuse, 80% reductions in fixed term exclusions and – in one case - a 63% reduction in staff absence. While it is unlikely that such major reductions would be seen in Melksham, improvements in pupil behaviour and achievement at school, coupled with reductions in exclusions are likely to impact positively on levels of crime, anti social behaviour and inter-generational relationships in the area, all of which are key elements of the Melksham Area Community Strategy.

The adoption of a consistent approach to emotion coaching would also enhance transitions from early years settings to school, from primary to secondary education and 14-19. Some work also took place to improve joint working between schools and other agencies, funded by Wiltshire Council, in

2008, but no further funding was available in subsequent years. This project would therefore provide a way of further developing these links and supporting multi agency working in the area.

To date, this proposal has been allocated £5,000 from the Bath Spa University Sharing Knowledge, Shaping Practice partnership fund. It is intended that this funding, matched with a similar grant from the Melksham Community Area Board, should be used to create a pilot project to test out the approaches outlined above. A further bid is in preparation to a major funding agency to enable the project to be extended to a wider number of schools, and to consolidate the learning from the initial phase.

Working with the Community Area Board gives us an exciting opportunity, not only to develop our partnership with schools and other agencies, but to engage with the community as a whole. The current government's agenda for devolution, citizen focus and locality working – the Big Society - reminds us of the need to plan and develop services on a local basis, to the benefit of children, young people, families and the community as a whole. We very much hope that the Community Area Board will wish to engage with us in this project, and look forward to discussing it with you further.

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