

Person Centred '14'+plus Reviews

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Introduction

This paper describes a person centred process that could be used in aged 14 reviews in schools. We have used this process with two young people, Colin and Julie, who both attend Ganton School in Hull. With the permission of the people involved, this paper describes what we did, the results, and what the people who participated thought of the meeting. We end with some ideas about how people could use and develop this process.

The meetings were organised by Sue, Ruth and Annette. They also attended the meetings so that we could reflect together on what worked and did not work. Helen Sanderson facilitated the meetings. This project developed as a result of the 'Making Research Count' course at York University.

Purpose

At Ganton school reviews usually take an hour and a half and are attended by the teacher, family and any professionals involved with the family, whether or not they have met the young person. What usually happens is fairly formal and involves going through the L.E.A. Transition paperwork in a methodical manner. This is a bland process and because parents are unprepared, they are unable to contribute fully and are often distressed by the process. The young person makes no contribution.

We wanted to see how we could change these meeting, without taking more time, requiring additional preparation or involving many more people. If we could achieve that, we thought that this would make it more likely that schools could adopt a different way of conducting reviews. We used the headings and adapted a process from a style of person centred planning called Essential Lifestyle Planning (Smull and Sanderson 2001).

The purpose of this person centred review meeting is to:

1. Review the information that everyone has about what they like and admire about the person; what is important to the person (now and for the future); and what help and support the person needs.
2. Identify what else **we** need to learn to develop this information into a person centred transition plan and agree actions for this
3. Identify what is working and not working from different perspectives (the young persons, the schools, the families, and others)
4. Agree actions that will continue what is working and change what is not working

Process

We put lots of flip chart paper on the walls of the schoolroom. On the flip chart we put the following headings for Colin's meeting:

- What we like and admire about Colin
- What is important to Colin now
- What is important to Colin for the future

- What support and help Colin needs
- Questions to answer/issues we are struggling with
- What is working and not working (we used four sheets for this, what is working and not working from Colin's perspective, from the schools perspective, from the families perspective and from others perspective)
- Actions

Helen Sanderson facilitated the meeting. The meeting was in two parts. The first part was to gather the information, and the second part was to review this information and agree actions.

At the beginning of the meeting Helen asked everyone to introduce themselves by explaining who they were in Colin's life, and by telling everyone something that they like and admire about Colin. As people shared what they like and admire about Colin, Helen wrote this onto one of the flip charts under the 'like and admire' heading.

Helen then explained the process, describing with examples what each of the headings meant. The group then agreed ground rules for the meeting, which included how to support the young person in the meeting. The group then started to write on the flip charts. Colin was supported to contribute and Annette and Ruth recorded his views.

The first part of the meeting took 45 minutes.

The second part of the meeting was to review the information and agree actions. Helen began by reading the 'working and not working' sheets. The group looked at what was working, acknowledged how much was working well in Colin's life and identified actions that ensured that what was working well would continue. The group then focussed on what was not working, and what they could do together to address this, and added these actions to the list.

The group then looked at the questions to answer/issues we are struggling with, and again, talked about what they could do to address these and added them to the action list.

Finally, the group reviewed what they had written under the remaining headings (what people like and admire about Colin, what was important to him, and what help and support he needed). They identified how this information would be recorded and added to. Helen shared some person centred approaches that they could use to gather this information, for example, learning logs and communication sections.

The meeting ended with each person sharing what they had appreciated about their time together thinking with Colin about what was important to him, his support needs and ideas for his future.

At the end of the meeting, Helen asked the group to help us to evaluate this way of having reviews, by recording what they liked or did not like about the process.

Colin's Meeting

Colin's Mum, Lisa, his connexions personal advisor Wendy, the head teacher, and his class teacher, Sue came with Colin to his meeting. Colin chose some music to play at his meeting, and this was on as he arrived. It was a spiritual tape, and the song 'he has got the whole world in his hands' was played, which felt appropriate for a meeting where we were trying to put Colin firmly in the centre. Colin enjoyed hearing what people liked and admired about him. Colin's Mum said he was loving and cuddly, and Colin asked me to draw a heart in red on the sheet. He brought pictures of something that he liked about school, and something that he didn't – painting! He had also done a picture and collage of what he wanted for his future, all about trains. As people wrote their information up, Colin talked to Ruth and Annette about his ideas and suggested pictures for Ruth to draw. It seemed harder for Colin to think about what was working in his life, and he said 'reach for the stars'. We did not really understand what that meant, talked to Colin about it, and decided together that we needed to learn more about what this meant for Colin outside of the meeting.

After the information had been gathered, Colin sat with Helen as we talked through what was working and not working. Something that was not working from Colin's perspective was that his Mum went to work. His Mum, Lisa talked about how they were trying to address that as a family, by helping Colin to understand when his Mum had to go and when she would be back.

Something that was not working for Sue was that Colin had not been able to use the Internet at school. His Mum explained that she was anxious about the safety of this and had refused to sign the consent form for him to use the internet at school. Sue and Lisa were able to talk about that, resolve Lisa's issues and straight after the meeting Lisa went and signed the consent form. Sue later described this as one of the best things about the meeting, that although Lisa had several times refused to sign the form, by being able to bring it up in his meeting and discuss it, it had changed something for Lisa.

What worked about Colin's meeting?

Lisa said that the meeting had "captured lots of information about all of Colin's life very quickly" She liked how Colin had been involved and was very pleased with the actions. The actions included the Connexions personal advisor looking for activities that Colin can do locally after school, Lisa finding somewhere where Colin could start horse riding again, Sue recording in detail how school were supporting him around personal safety issues, so that everyone could provide a consistent approach.

Annette commented that the meeting was "honest and thorough – it allowed discussion of difficult issues".

One of the things that Wendy, the connexions personal advisor had put under that what was not working, was that she did not know Colin very well. She later said that she had learned so much more from that hour and a half than

she could have learned in several sessions with Colin at school. She said “ I like the way that the meeting covered the whole range of things that Colin does and that affect him – rather than just educational ones.”

What would we do differently?

Colin seemed to lose interest a bit after an hour, and something that would work better would be to have had a break in between part one and part two.

Julie’s Meeting

‘Club Tropicana’ by Wham set the scene for Julie’s meeting. She was delighted to see her Mum, Mandy there and immediately sat on her lap. The head teacher, Connexions advisor, teacher, social worker, community nurse and educational psychologist joined Julie for her meeting. Julie had prepared some pictures that she put up, and became fascinated with the spray that we used, and enjoyed spraying the paper. She also used masking tape to make ‘stripes’ of tape on her ‘likes and admires’ poster. After a while she became restless, and Sue bought some of her favourite jigsaws for her to complete. Julie wanted to be with her Mum, and constantly sought her attention, which made it difficult for Mandy to participate.

Reviewing what people liked and admired about Julie – her beautiful brown eyes, helpful nature, caring, and what was working in her life balanced how people had often just focussed on their difficulties with her behaviour. Something that was working from Julies perspective (our best guess) was ‘Heather’s coat’ which was a conversation that Sue and Julie had about a ‘magic coat’ which helped Julie feel comfortable to get on the transport home. Julie shared some conversations about the coat in an excited and animated way. We wondered whether this approach that so clearly worked for Julie, might be helpful in other situations that Julie found difficult and set an action to find out. Some of the actions that emerged from Julies meeting were to record in detail some of the strategies that school had found helpful in supporting Julie in difficult situations so that everyone in Julie’s life could offer a more consistent approach. Communication between school and the respite service was an issue that began to be resolved by inviting the teacher to the respite service’s review.

What worked about Julie’s meeting?

What worked was that “there were lots of contributions in a short space of time enabling us to get to know everyone better” and that is was “meaningful”. The psychologist described how most of the reviews that he sat in were “bland” and it was easy to fall asleep in – but not this one! It was very interactive and people had to sit up and take notice. The social worker said, “I often am unsure about how I can contribute to reviews – but in this one I had lots of opportunities to contribute and share what I know about Julie and her family”

What did not work that we would do differently?

Half way through the meeting Helen asked Mandy for her reflections on what was not working section. Mandy spoke about how as a family they were looking for things they could do together. As the conversations about this

continued Julie became frustrated and demonstrated this by tearing some of the paper down.

It was difficult for Mandy to fully participate because Julie naturally wanted to spend time with her drawing or doing a jigsaw. Next time, we would think about how we could support Julie to be in the meeting, and what it would take for Mandy to be able to fully participate, and work out a solution that addresses what they both needed.

Reflections

Working in this way represents a significant cultural shift for many of us. This process explicitly recognises the contributions of the family, the school, and the other specialist professionals, acknowledging that the young person themselves and their families are the 'experts', and that school staff and others have specific knowledge and contributions to make.

Many reviews and reports begin with the young person's condition or labels. This meeting turns this on its head by instead asking each member of the group what we like and admire about the young person.

In this process everyone has an opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate what is working well for the young person, and their contribution to this. This again, represents a change, for often contact between school and family is focussed on what is difficult and not going well.

What is not going well is also addressed in this process, and results in shared actions, jointly agreed.

In an hour and a half a person centred plan was begun. Over the next few years, this can be developed and reviewed, and then used to enable the young person to embark on adult life. Over the years the focus of the planning would increasingly emphasise what is important to the young person about their future and their dreams.

Conclusion and possibilities for using this process

Person centred review meetings, like this, could be facilitated by school staff, person centred planning facilitators, family mentors or connections. Whoever facilitates it would need training in person centred planning (and to use this approach, specifically Essential Lifestyle Planning) and regular opportunities to reflect and problem solve with others doing this work.

At the beginning we stated that we hoped that if we could find a new process that did not require any more time or preparation, then this may increase the chances of it being used. Our experience (although limited to two people) suggests that this could be the case. However, like many things in life, the more you prepare, the better the result!! By ensuring that people are aware of the headings that will be used, people then have an opportunity to consider what they like and admire etc about the person beforehand which increases the possibility of collecting richer information.

With preparation, other people, who could not attend, but who have information to contribute, like therapists or friends, could share this under the relevant headings.

The next steps for developing this work in Hull are to train facilitators and to take the person centred approach into other special schools locally. A working party has been established, comprised of senior managers from local Health, Education and Social Service departments, to support the Transition Team in this work.

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