



Hidden heroes

Thomas Keaney
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It is a rare thing for a young person to know with certainty what they want to do in life. "The best laid plans of mice and men" is often used to describe the lives of young people who are trying out multiple jobs until something fits, taking gap years that never lead to college or university, changing their degree in the middle or towards the end, or taking college or university courses that they never finish, or never lead to related jobs. In fact, the whole system is set up for the decisive and indecisive alike.

However, for some pupils with special education needs, future career options are elusive and purposeless as they try to manage a myriad of symptoms, and the often difficult task of simply fitting in.

Often pupils' special education needs and disabilities journeys come with late diagnosis, multiple managed moves or exclusions, which results in losses of both peer friendships and positive relationships with caring adults. For pupils already coming to terms

with special needs and co-morbid diagnosis, these factors can lead to a real lack of success resulting in low self esteem. For these pupils, focus and motivation can often be a fleeting companion.

At TCES Group we see our children and young people in a strengths-based way, and our initial role after their placement to is stabilize them and find the often hidden talents and gifts within them. We subscribe to the adage that 'Our deepest wounds surround our greatest gifts.' - Ken Page.

We pride ourselves on our 'zero exclusions' model and our 'never give up' philosophy, but sometimes our pupils are not yet ready for this approach. Even with all the adaptations that our schools can provide, our pupils can vote with their feet and become disengaged with poor attendance.

We know that every child needs at least one adult who is willing to emotionally invest in them and go the extra mile for them, even if this

is against all the odds.

Last week, that value came to the forefront of what we do. Our Head of Finance Nick and I were asked to meet a year 11 pupil called Yousuf, from our East London Independent school. This young man was brought to our Central Services office by Nigel, the School Business Manager.

Yousuf told us that he had not been engaging over the last term and had been only attending school around once a week. He had little interest in anything. He then started to discuss brands with one of the one to one workers in school and from this he developed an interest in business. He brought this interest to the Deputy Head and Head Teacher, and they agreed to include business in the school's range of curriculum options. He joined the business option, and was the only year 11 pupil who was interested.

As a result, Nigel, the School Business Manager, became involved



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Create Service
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as a link to the curriculum. Nigel currently spends two hours per week with Yousuf encouraging and motivating him on the potential of a new branding business.

Yousuf arrived at Central Services, and for an hour or so we were treated to a presentation by an enthusiastic year 11 pupil who was interested in setting up a business.

He wanted to buy good quality tracksuits and put his own brand on them. He had a number of brand ideas and we all agreed that if the three grey haired men in the room liked any of them then that particular idea should be immediately discarded.

Yousuf wanted 'seed' money for his idea. We agreed that Yousuf should produce a budget, and that

a few actions like copyrighting the words would be a priority. It was clear that Nigel was as committed to the success of the presentation as Yousuf was.

What we also agreed was that a career in business was inspiring Yousuf so much that he was now attending school five days each week again. He has a sparkle in his eye and his family are very supportive of his passion. Nigel has persuaded him that business requires English and Maths functional skills.

We have agreed that we need to invest significantly in our L.I.F.E. Programme, and particularly the enterprise/entrepreneurship element of the programme. We know if we can invest even more in Yousuf's business course at school then the success of the particular

business idea will not be as important as the fact that Yousuf is for the first time talking about what he is going to do in the future.

We don't know the end of this story yet but we know that Yousuf has a better chance of success now; he has found his talent and his interest and something he can start to feel good about.

I started this piece thinking about the multiple people involved in this tale. There was a one to one worker who engaged with a very disengaged Yousuf in a discussion about brands in business. There was a Deputy Head and Head teacher who saw the pupil as more important than the fixed curriculum and changed it for him. And there was a School Business Manager who didn't just do a piece of teaching on business.

What Nigel has really done, which is not in his job description, is emotionally invest in Yousuf and gone the extra mile for him, and that has made all the difference.

These are the often hidden heroes in our story, and across our schools and services.



(Left to right): Nigel, Yousuf, Nick and myself

Thomas Kearney