

# Relationships Matter

Facilitating conversations at an event:  
An organiser's perspective

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Centre for excellence  
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## ABOUT THE EVENT

The College Development Network (CDN), Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children (CELCIS) and Who Cares? Scotland (WC?S) have been running events in 2015-16 to support college plans for implementing their new legal corporate parenting duties.

The event held on 28 September 2016 focused on the importance of relationships to care experienced young people. It explored ways in which supportive, positive relationships between staff and care experienced students in a college setting could be facilitated, what barriers exist to relationship-based practice, and what can be done to overcome such barriers.

## USING THE TOOL

The event organisers split participants into two groups. Each had a facilitator and a scribe and each person was asked to pick a card from a deck of 20 questions they had chosen from a larger pack. Over 30 minutes, each person was asked to read their question aloud and answer the question from their perspective. People were invited to openly share their views and experiences in relation to the same question. They were encouraged to be honest and be accepting that people were from different organisations, which may enable and disable relational-based practice. No answers would be deemed right or wrong but it would be useful to share and explore.

The scribes analysed the discussions and wrote down examples of practice that enable and disable educational practitioners from developing meaningful relationships with care-experienced young people. This information will be used by CDN, CELCIS, and WC?S to stimulate discussion about areas which could/should be addressed to bring about positive change, meet duties and responsibilities as corporate parents, and enable relationship-based practice in colleges.

## Organiser's perspectives

The tool was a 'brilliant way to start a meaningful conversations' with people in the education sector so they are encouraged to think differently about relationships with care-experienced students.

### 1 What did you hope the outcomes of using this tool would be?

*'I hoped attendees would feel enabled to openly discuss relationships and relational boundaries in a peer/colleague group setting, and learn from one another's experiences. I also hoped that people would explore different views without feeling defensive or judged ... I hoped that the group would have ideas for change to take back to their institutions, or be inspired to continue the discussion with colleagues not in attendance today.'*

### 2 Were these outcomes achieved?

*'To some extent. I don't think 30 minutes was long enough as it took time for members of the group to feel comfortable with sharing thoughts and experiences which might have felt 'risky' to raise immediately. But I think people definitely started to feel more at ease and the discussion opened up towards the end of the 30 minutes. I think the group did come up with some ideas to take back to their institutions and I would be interested to learn whether any of this was followed up on.'*

## Participant's perspectives

Some participants claimed that the approach was a 'useful way to support discussion and share experiences of practice'. Others thought it 'enabled conversation to be open and honest', 'de-personalises issues but supports and stimulates honest and very interesting discussions'.

### 3 What, if anything, did you learn by using this tool?

*'I learned about other people's boundaries when working with young people and how information about relationships are recorded.'*

*'Other people's perspectives were enlightening.'*

*'It was good to hear that other people experience similar issues that we do.'*

*'That we need to re-examine our practice with regard to building sustained relationships without care experienced students.'*

*'That there are ostensible tensions between safeguarding and the necessity of building caring, affective relationships.'*

*'There is a need to carefully consider safeguarding alongside the direction this work is taking.'*

*'We need to think about every student and support worker and lecturer as an individual [individual relationships].'*

*'The level of difference between what staff in colleges do (because of culture and safeguarding concerns) and what staff would like to be doing.'*

*'About other people's ideas like tracking progression of students via Alumni and peer mentoring networks, developing mandatory staff development about the experiences of young people in care and the education system.'*

*'An interesting discussion about safeguarding and boundaries, I recognised the difficulties therein.'*

- 4 What needs to happen to enable what you have learned to become part of your practice?
- Interactive safeguarding resources made available that I can use (x4)
  - We need time to address these issue at work (x2)
  - Our senior management team needs to get behind this way of working (x3)
  - The culture needs to change at work (x2) [a reduction in institutionalised fear of having relationships - or acknowledging that you have relationships) with students]
  - Resources need to be looked at at work to dedicate to this way of working
  - Not sure
  - Job role boundaries, there is not always room for flexibility

### Group perspectives

- 5 What needs to happen so you can be better supported by colleges to practice this way? What actions, if any, have you, your team or your organisation taken to support and enable you to work this way?

The groups highlighted ways that colleges could better support positive relationships between staff and care experienced students:

- Training for staff

*'Building awareness of issues / problems within the academic staff - it is their job to care.'*

- Support for staff
  - » It takes time to build relationships and support young people. Staff need to be able to spend time with young people who need their support.
  - » KPIs could be developed to reflect how staff spend their time with care-experienced young people eg supporting in times of crisis / perceived quality of contact.
- Thinking about time and resources differently
  - » Offer flexible deadlines in situations when circumstances in young people's lives change or are in flux, or when they have no internet access in the evenings.
- Changing some processes
  - » Change data sharing agreements so that staff are aware that young people are leaving care.
  - » Have systems in place to ensure funding doesn't stop without discussion with the young person.
  - » Are policies required that promote continuing relationships?
  - » Always provide a positive 'exit' no matter how the educational journey 'ends'. Highlight their successes, and offer an opportunity to come back when the time is right for them.
- Ideas for new services
  - » Developing an Alumni or Ambassador as a means of keeping in touch.
  - » Offer care-experienced young people the opportunity to peer-mentor other care-experienced young people at the college. Or create a buddy system.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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For more on the Relationships Matter conversation tool, please see: <http://s.iriss.org.uk/2e9flwZ>



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