



Personal Outcomes Stories during COVID: Learning from practice

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How have you been able to keep a focus on what matters to people during COVID?



Our school campus serves a diverse population and includes a Learning and Communications Resource for pupils with autism. There have been both positives and negatives for us as a community in the past few months. We take a holistic approach to how we work with our children and their families, and our key concern has been to ensure that all are included as far as possible. Providing opportunities to learn is a priority, along with ensuring the health and well-being of our pupils and families. Highpark Primary was a hub School during school closure to provide support for key workers.

Many of the families have shown brilliant resilience and have a tendency 'just to get on with things' even before these unprecedented times. They do not make demands and sometimes would rather pass on help offered to them to others. This shows the generational strength of the community. Taking that into consideration, a big challenge has been the digital divide, highlighting the wider divide in our city. For some families, they may all be sharing one device, and may not have reliable access to Wi-Fi. Some have asked for paper copies of teacher set work to do at home as they do not have access to Wi-Fi or intermittent access so hence lose out on online teacher support. We have tried to resolve the digital access issues through working with partners such as North United Communities to help bridge this barrier. North United Communities has helped with organising families to have laptops and providing financial support where required.

Access to garden space in living accommodation has come to light with some of my families living in high rise accommodation. The canals and surrounding areas in Maryhill have proved invaluable. Perhaps the school curriculum should build on this rich resource to connect children with their learning in their surrounding environment.

What have you had to do differently and what made this possible?

We have formed firmer relationships with other agencies in the Community, which has been a major benefit of this crisis. I hope that we all get around a table some time soon to grow this extension of community. That includes North United Communities. Achieve More already worked within our school providing physical exercise after the Breakfast Club and within the curriculum P.E. lessons. After our schools closed, they worked with families in the community providing food parcels and connection. Third Sector Partnerships have given me hope after this experience as to what community solidarity can look like. I have a clearer understanding of the school's social-economic geographical map. I can use this knowledge to not only signpost requests but to build capacity in my own community. Achieve More are running a summer school for 30 children and this will provide physical activity, learning opportunities for some and delicious food.

Nurture Connections (Hazel Cunningham) already worked in my school to support families holistically with nurture and reassurance. Hazel continued this family support, including posting essential oils for the family to use to de-stress. The 'shout outs' for family and community connections increase with Covid! Gabi Cullen runs intergenerational sewing programmes, producing family sewing packs which obviously are learning activities but also relationships within the home.

What have you noticed that has been better?

I think some aspects of the community are strengthened and I do not see these partnerships diminishing. As a Head Teacher I have been given a bit of space to reflect how best I can keep improving family involvement and engagement. Our communication with families has been a priority. All of this is necessary to ensure that our children are included, nurtured and healthy in order to be able to achieve their potential.

How did this make you feel?

I am proud of our families for their resilience and commitment to caring for their children. I look forward to continuing to build the community that COVID has reignited.

What have you learned through this?

I see Highpark as being very much part of the community and I think I have learned how to send out messages that reinforce that. We have a role in knowing what is in the community so that we can connect families with the support they need, but don't always ask for. I have learned more about what the needs of the families are and that we need strong partnerships with local agencies if we want life to get better. I also feel that I need to know how best to communicate with Families where English as a Second Language as unfortunately the translators that help us connect are not as easily accessed during Covid.

Anything else you want to tell us?

I worry about the future, about the financial implications of COVID19, and how these will affect our families. Stronger connections might mitigate some of this but it does worry me. I also want to do more to include families where English is a second language and understanding what lockdown meant for them.