

In Search of Utopia



**How to help children and adults
find emotional wellbeing
in a complex world.**

David Bartlett MBE

Contents

- Foreword 4
- About the author 6
- Who should read this book? 7
- Part 1: How to create a therapeutic environment 8
- Introduction 8
- How colours affect us? 12
- How architecture, shapes and spaces affect our feelings. 18
- Access to Nature 30
- Using animals to enhance our environment and assist us in a therapeutic process 39
- Join up and follow up training. 57
- Understanding life and death 74
- Healthy Eating healthy lifestyles. 80
- Activities that have a therapeutic benefit. 81
- Nature Friendly Farming. 94
- Music in a therapeutic context. 96
- Part 2 – How to Create a Valued Based Environment. 98
- Value Based Education. 109
- Promoting the language of values as part of our everyday vocabulary. 120
- The value of experiences. 125
- Looking at the range of activities 131
- Learning values through activities. 163
- ‘Role Model Leadership’, control the space, control the environment, manage the 169
- Achieving happiness and harmony. 171
- Designing a Curriculum - 181
- Perspectives and Spectrums. 181
- Personal Holistic Competence. 188
- Selecting people to be part of your community. 191
- Justice. 194
- Summary and conclusion. 200
- Reading list 202

Front Cover Picture:
A hill farm on the North York Moors, purchased to be a therapeutic retreat.

Foreword

During my career I have never tired of visiting schools, as they always enrich my understanding of how best children should be educated. Few though have impacted on me so much as Pear Tree School. I first visited this remarkable school with my wife Jane on the 5th October 2015. We had been invited to conduct an audit of Pear Tree School, to assess its suitability to be awarded the IVET Foundation's Quality Mark in Values-based Education.

On meeting the Head David Bartlett, I immediately felt I was in the presence of an educational 'giant' who not only espouses values but truly lives them. David's passion for providing the very best care and education for his pupils was profoundly evident in every aspect of the school which we observed. A few years later, on the 24 June 2019, Jane and I revisited, awarding the school the Enhanced Values Quality Mark, as an outstanding values-based therapeutic school.



Jane and I awarding David the Enhanced Values Quality Mark

David's words contained in this unique book is a rich resource of practical ideas and transformative insights. It will help the reader to understand how to create an environment that really does address the needs of children who have suffered extreme trauma and abuse. As David describes in this book, Pear Tree School creates a therapeutic, holistic approach to helping children to recover and gain the life-skills and dispositions to be responsible for themselves and contribute to society. Its ethos is totally built on a values-based philosophy, which has been comprehensively designed to give the children life-enhancing behaviours. The school setting and characteristics, such as the farms, workshops and stables espouse this ethos. Indeed, the school has carefully considered its activities to ensure that they provide opportunities for the children to learn about and live the school's values. Living the values is key to the school's success, as pupils learn to use the values in real situations that will guide their behaviour in life.

Teaching and learning are consistently values-based. The development of respectful relationships is central to the school's success in both helping the pupils recover from their traumas and being educated. Members of staff have received high-quality training so that they are aware of the best ways to follow a step-by-step approach to helping children to self-regulate their internal worlds. They skilfully avoid positively reinforcing negative behaviour, is soon realising that they will not be rewarded for inappropriate behaviour. The school employs members of staff who have the capacity to educate a group of vulnerable children by being excellent values role models.

For instance, I observed a riding lesson in the arena, which showed how working with horses enables pupils to develop courage, integrity, respect, responsibility and kindness to a very high level. Learning to ride and take care of horses helps pupils to develop mindfulness: moment-to-moment, non-judgmental attention, which has a profound effect on the healthy development of the internal world of the child.

As you read David's narrative you will learn how the school is outward facing, embracing a range of good educational practices and experiences, which enhance the school's curriculum. I observed a comprehensive range of opportunities that enhance and deepen their learning and relationships. For instance, learning to drive a tractor or be a part of a group pony trekking, which are the culmination of learning steps which develop pupil agency – their ability to take responsibility for their learning and behaviour. Educational visits, such as to London, helps to develop the personal holistic competence (PHC) of students – their ability to cope with complex personal and social situations.

I'm sure that as you experience Pear Tree School through David's perceptive eyes, you will discover how to create a school that listens to the beating hearts of its pupils. You will be given all the transformational ingredients that will give you a deep understanding about how to create a school that really does address the individual needs of pupils. This book deserves a wide readership, so whatever sector of education you work in this book is for you.

I unreservedly commend David's book to you.

Neil Hawkes.

Dr. Neil Hawkes
Founder of Values-based Education
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About the author

David Bartlett founded Pear Tree Projects in 1990. He was motivated by a fundamental desire to provide an environment in which children in the care system could thrive. He used his rural roots and understanding of the natural world to guide this journey which today has six residential homes and a special school based on the organisations five farms which cover over 500 acres.

David has assessed thousands of children and young people, providing long term care and education to hundreds of children. He has interviewed thousands of staff of which hundreds have been employed, some for many years.

He has developed a system to measure, monitor and promote emotional wellbeing in children.

The system was subject to an independent research project which looked at a group of children over a ten-year period and concluded the children who were involved in the “marginal gains” process are helped to make significant psychological progress. He has fine-tuned the system for over thirty years and at his own expense made it freely available to all children in the UK and an international version which can be used by any child at any age and stage in any setting throughout the world. A development of this marginal gains process is the creation of two ‘apps’ entitled - “Preparation for Employment” and “Emotional Well-being Indicator”. These ‘apps’ are freely available for anyone to use at any time, giving detailed advice on areas identified.

The school has only ever been rated Outstanding by the regulator Ofsted. He was awarded the MBE in 2016 for founding Pear Tree Projects and services to children and young people in North East England.



“Look deep into nature and you will understand everything better”.
Albert Einstein.

Who should read this book?

The definition of ‘therapy’ is to heal; therefore, this should be of interest to anyone responsible for helping those they care for recover and ‘heal’ from an incident or factors that have had a negative impact on their life and potentially their future development.

This could include strategic planners of social care, education facilities or front-line workers such as teachers, care workers and foster carers. Not forgetting parents. Anyone who runs a business.

This book focuses on children as, by definition, they have a longer time available to them for which recovery and positive development is so important. However, much can be taken from this to assist people of any age in many situations.

From the beginning it has been my intention to offer an alternative narrative to the subject of emotional wellbeing, as so much has been written by so many people on this subject.

This book is not mainstream. It offers to take the reader on a journey to explore how as human beings we are still deeply connected to the natural world.

In part one, we explore how can use this knowledge to create a better environment to live and work in and how animals can add great value to this environment.

In part two, we explore how important it is to use our ethical intelligence and re-establish the language of values. How we use this language to interact with each other better and in doing so, help some to heal, others to improve skills and all benefit directly because of improved emotional wellbeing.

This book is not about the theory behind our emotional wellbeing, it is a practical guide to improving our emotional wellbeing.

Part 1: How to create a therapeutic environment

‘Utopia’ written by Sir Thomas Moore in 1516, where he describes a search for an ideal place unlikely to be found.

Introduction

Churchill once said, “Man shapes buildings and then they shape us”! Within these few words he has set the scene for a most important discussion as to whether our environment has an impact on our development as human beings. This can be either positive or negative. If we accept this hypothesis, we must be aware that some environments can go further. Whilst some may inhibit development and have a negative impact, other positive environments can help those in need to be able to heal and others to thrive. Life should be about thriving and not just getting by. This is perhaps best considered against a five-point spectrum.

- Physically and emotionally damaging.
- Negative and dysfunctional.
- Neutral impact.
- Positive and functioning.
- An environment in which its inhabitants thrive.

As a young child growing up on a council estate in County Durham during the seventies, holidays were a very rare thing indeed. The only place I was to visit on more than one occasion was a derelict shed by the river on the Durham Northumberland border.

This was a structure that had been known to the family on my mother’s side from before the Second World War. It is from such structures that holiday lodges have developed. Indeed, the ancient woodland on this farm was used to accommodate several such sheds which could have easily been the direct ancestor of the country park holiday village. This site was not commercial in any way and is now a protected area of special scientific interest which means access is restricted and limited. The shed was just that, a shed complete with wood burning stove and full of spiders.

Within its immediate geographical area there was the farmhouse in which the last ‘witch’ to be burned at the stake in Hexham marketplace, lived. A tunnel, thought to belong to King Arthur, from which legend states if you find a magical horn and blow it, he and his knights would awaken and ride out to rescue us all. It had a bend in the river in which whirlpools would pull you in and a safe deep area with a diving board to jump off. The shed had an outside toilet (a hole in the ground) which was an experience in itself.

This place, despite the spiders and lack of modern facilities, was a magical place and was known to our family as ‘Utopia’. A word used to describe a place which was heavenly and from which any child could use their imagination to transport them to all kinds of adventures.

The concept of finding a simple place lost in time that had the capacity to help you find yourself and recover from the trials of modern life, is nothing new. As a child, films such as Brigadoon and Lost Horizons, where

survivors of an air crash had found ‘Shangri-la’, were a huge influence as they have this factor in common along with a similar storyline.

Both films have at their core the value of the environment that’s found and how it impacted on those that found it. “A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court”, written by none other than Mark Twain, is another such story with this at its heart and as with the other two, this story takes it further to include the value of relationships found and the simplicity of a life lost in time.

Many won’t realise but it is exactly this theme that was the storyline for what became the hit TV series Life on Mars and its follow-on series Ashes to Ashes.

From a young age the concept of finding a place from which you could have a spiritual connection and find strength began to fascinate me and with it recognition that environment was the most significant factor in achieving a sense of well-being. In the sixties and seventies, this was ‘a way-out concept’ in more ways than one and not at all in keeping with the contemporary architecture, which I think reflected the mood of the nation at the time.

So, what are the prevalent factors? In this book, I ask you to consider the following issues and how they may be used to benefit others.

How colours affect us?

- Colours affect taste
- Colours affect feelings and judgements

How architecture, shapes and spaces affect our feelings

- What is cosy?
- Indoor spaces
- Layout
- Colour schemes
- Fixtures and fittings
- Outdoor spaces
- Principals or garden design
- Horatio’s gardens

Access to nature

Using animals to enhance our environment and assist us in a therapeutic process

- So how can other animals help humans therapeutically?

Join up and follow up training

- Managing challenging behaviour
- Evidence
- Spectrum
- Further analysis

Understanding life and death

- Learning about the birds and the bees

- Dealing with death and mortality, learning through animals

Healthy eating healthy lifestyles

Activities that have therapeutic benefit

- Embracing the changing seasons
- Impact of weather and the changing seasons

Nature Friendly Farming

Music in a therapeutic context

Part 2 – How to Create a Values Based Environment

Introduction

- The influence of contracts on social care and education
- Values Based Education
- Binge Drinking
- The Banking Crisis
- Dangers in a digital world
- Obesity
- Low level crime and anti-social behaviour
- A personal story that demonstrates how I learnt values as a child
- Promoting Empathy

Promoting the language of values as part of our everyday vocabulary

- What are values?
- The Golden Mean

The Value of Experiences

- Parenting styles
- Playing
- Measuring Elements
- Looking at a range of activities
- Exaggerated reward
- Negative attributes
- Negative activities
- Learning values through activities
- 'Role Model Leadership' control the space, control the environment, manage the atmosphere
- The importance of language
- Negative and positive language

Achieving happiness and harmony

- How do we achieve happiness?
- Managing biochemistry in education
- What should we be doing?
- A brief account of human history

- Why is this relevant at this point in our discussion

Designing a Curriculum – Perspectives and Spectrums

- What do we want for our children and young people?

Personal Holistic Competence

Selecting people to be part of a therapeutic community

Justice

Summary and conclusion

How colours affect us?

Source - How colours affect us. The great courses. Amazon Prime.

(The details below are taken from the above course and applied to our context)

The first concept to consider, before we look at how colours affect us, is that our brain has the capacity to change and be influenced over time. This is known as neuroplasticity. Seeing and feeling colours is for most perhaps one of the first of our senses to be stimulated.

A child brought up in a negative dysfunctional environment will have a brain that functions and is shaped completely differently to that of a child brought up in a positive functioning environment. To say they are ‘wired’ very differently is not an inaccurate way of describing it. Importantly, the child that is moved from a negative environment to a positive environment will have the ability to create positive muscle memory and the way their brain develops, is changed as a result (Sane New World by Ruby Wax). The level of change is dependent on their receptiveness to their new environment.

Therefore, the hypothesis that outside stimuli affect our cognitive development, is an important one to consider. In my view, this can be illustrated by considering one of the experiments scientists have conducted whilst researching how colours affect us.

The experiment consisted of showing a large number of people from different cultures, four pictures of different landscapes. There were the following:

- A winter mountain pine forest scene.
- A seascape.
- A desert scene.
- A savannah scene.

The question that followed was, “where would you most like to live”?

In every different population, the vast majority of people chose the savannah scene. Scientists concluded that the reason behind this was that the savannah scene resonated with our deepest inherited memories or instinctive feelings. Memories and feelings that have transcended through the generations from the time human beings first climbed down from the trees and stepped out of the forest into the open spaces of the savannah in Africa (savannah hypothesis).

The savannah scene consisted of flat green plains with occasional trees, grazing animals and available water. Scientists think that grazed grassland and water represented the availability of food while occasional trees represented places to climb, to escape pursuit by predators. Many thousands of years on, this savannah scene still resonates with the vast majority of human beings today.

Indeed, this was the concept that the famous landscape architect Capability Brown, tapped into in the eighteenth century, as he created a savannah type landscape which became English parkland. This parkland, which was thought to reflect the English farming landscape, was in fact the savannah type landscape we hunger after from the plains of Africa.

All other landscapes represent a significant risk to life, not from predators but just the landscape itself. Extremes such as cold and heat meaning no food, expanses of water, a risk of drowning. Likewise, consistent dark green represents a dangerous jungle, however, varying shades of green, means - LIFE.

(This also explains man’s obsession with cutting grass. Short grass indicates a safe place to walk as there are no snakes hiding in the long grass. I get hugely frustrated at the sight of workmen on the side of dual carriageways strimming grass, with machines that burn fossil fuels, to keep it short. This practice destroys plant and animal habitat and serves no purpose other than to provide a service to keep in tune with preconceived ideas that grass must be kept short).

If we are to accept this hypothesis, it informs us that human beings today are intrinsically connected to our history which still has an impact on our thoughts, feelings and emotions. It is this realisation that as human beings we are still connected to the natural world and use our senses like other animals. Understanding the animal that is the human being is the most important starting point of helping your human to heal.

The above hypothesis may go some way to explain why the colour green has an impact on us today.

When considering the impact of colours, it is important to recognise that the impact changes depending on the context. For example, if you are a young person wanting to be noticed and looking for a mate, wearing a red dress will be significantly more successful than wearing a green dress (in tests more than twice as successful). If you’re wanting to hide in the bushes, or at the back of the dance hall and avoid being noticed, green is a good colour to camouflage oneself.

However, when considering our immediate environment, the ability to see green reduces your heart rate and anxiety. This is why having green factored into a colour scheme is important if you are wanting to create a warm welcoming environment.

Recently some high street food chains have changed their signage to green as marketing studies concluded it was more likely to be interpreted as a welcoming place. In contrast, red would have the effect of raising heart rate and subsequently impacting on the behaviour of people within, who would be less likely to spend money as they were more likely to be on their guard.

“Green is a positive colour, used to signify ‘GO’. It is welcoming and intrinsically inviting. It opens minds and frees thinking. Contact with nature reduces stress in a measurable way. Green environments significantly improve cognitive functioning. Green is safe, red is danger and represents avoidance.” (Biophilia Hypothesis Edward O Wilson 1984.)

The science of colours is a fascinating subject in itself and many studies have been made. To summarise within the scope of reference required for this study, the following becomes relevant.

As said earlier, different colours have different meanings in different contexts. However, all cultures throughout the world when asked to describe colours do so in the same order - black, white, red, yellow, green, and blue.

Colours affect taste.

This was demonstrated when Heinz brought out multi-coloured ketchup. The first colour to be used as an alternative to red was green. This was successful and because of its success they also tried other colours. To their surprise blue ketchup didn't sell. So why did green do well and blue didn't? The answer, which was obvious with hindsight, was that you can get green tomatoes as well as red ones however, blue tomatoes if they exist, could well be 'off'. Red cupcakes sell faster than white ones because red taps into our memory banks as the colour of sweet-tasting berries. Colours trigger our memories to recall reference points from life experiences, or from those experiences passed down from our ancestors.

Colours affect feelings and judgements.

Studies from art therapy in disaster areas demonstrate the following.

Depressed people see the world in muted colours, in some cases just black and white. Blue is often used to describe sadness i.e., 'the blues'. Children suffering from PTSD couldn't use colours at all.

Researchers claim colours are interpreted differently but consistently across cultures. Black is aggressive, white passive, black represents evil, think of 'The Black Knight'. White represents good, think angels.

Think about uniforms? When the SAS were filmed storming the Iranian Embassy in 1981, they were wearing their black uniforms and gas masks. In contrast, I bet your school lollipop lady wore a white uniform as do many community support officers.

Black

Black uniforms create more aggressive sport. Likewise, if you are in the dock in a court of law you are more likely to be perceived as guilty if you are wearing black as opposed to other colours.

Being exposed to black and white depresses us and develops black and white thinking.

Red

Red is associated with aggression and dominance. A team wearing red is statistically more likely to win. Perhaps there is a placebo effect as the red team feel stronger and more aggressive, likewise the opposition feel intimidated. Red makes you feel stronger and perform better.

As indicated earlier, from a mating perspective red increases attractiveness and is perceived to be more powerful. From a female perspective it presents as being more fertile. It is used to present status in males, fertility in females, hence red lipstick is so important. However, it can also impair cognitive thinking and lower IQ.

Perhaps this explains why so many men forget to use their brains when they encounter a woman in a red dress.

When considering colour in this way a specific context trumps general context. From a marketing perspective when products are presented against a red background, they are less likely to sell than when presented against other colours, as it is thought it makes the customer a harder negotiator, due to increased

levels of adrenalin.

In general, it represents competitiveness, aggression, and dominance. The British army in the 19th century knew what they were doing in their red uniforms when they confronted the French in their blue uniforms. As did Liverpool FC when it adopted a full red strip. In both cases, victory was to follow.

In plants, red colours are often called hot colours and blue is often referred to as a cold colour. This also transfers to interior design.

Yellow.

Generally, a vibrant happy colour although, the type of yellow is important. It is the least popular colour; however, it is the most visible to the eye. Yellow fruit is thought to be ripe and therefore attractive.

From a social context, yellow can negatively impact on attractiveness. It indicates an issue with health, being associated with sickness, weakness, and fear. In wartime 'yellow' was the colour used to describe cowards. If you want to find a mate, put on the red clothing not the yellow.

In contrast, when used in a classroom or office, yellow can aid with problem-solving as it improves cognitive performance and stimulates thinking. In general, it represents happiness or danger. Hi-visibility jackets are usually yellow. As are flashing hazard lights.

Blue

General context indicates openness, creativity, safe and approachable. Walks under a bright blue sky can counteract the 'blues'.

Blue within a social context represents friendliness and peacefulness.

The United Nations have a white UN against a blue background signalling friendliness and openness. It is perhaps an interesting observation that the police in the UK have the same warning lights as other UK emergency services i.e., blue as opposed to red in the USA. We want our police to be loved whereas the US want them to be feared (or respected depending on the context).

Within a therapeutic context it enhances alertness and well-being during the day, it increases cognitive alertness, improves attitude and creativity. However, exposure to blue can have negative health effects at night. This is in the area of cardiovascular and diabetes, plus others. Blue is not a good colour for a bedroom if you want to remain healthy. It does however aid greater focus, concentration, and performance. It affects alertness and mood and can impact on sleep quality. Blue is often associated with feeling cold.

So, what can we conclude from this information? That visual stimulation around us and the stimulation we project to others, influences our emotions in how we feel, react, and perform. It affects our ability to form relationships and may even impact on our ability to find a mate and reproduce. Ultimately, we are emotional beings in a natural world whether we like it or not.



An example of a savannah scene.

In this photo the field has been sown with a seed mix called 'bumble bird' it is designed to promote the ecology for insects and birds. The variety of colours is powerful and changes throughout the year. This photo was chosen for its variety of colours, it doesn't however have grazing animals and water, usually found in a Savannah scene.



In this actual savanna scene from South Africa, you can see how the long grass represents a risk. Something may be hidden that might eat you. Short grass feels much safer.

Summary.

- Understand how our development as human beings from the earliest days of learning to walk upright, still affects the way we see the world around us today.
- Be aware of how colours can impact on our mood, heart rate, thinking and judgements.
- Use this knowledge to control the space before it's occupied.
- Explain to children the thinking behind your advice. A child wanting their bedroom painted black, or dark blue may understand why that's not appropriate, if it is explained to them properly in detail including how it may impact on their mental health.

How architecture, shapes and spaces affect our feelings.

Key elements of a successful therapeutic environment.

- Sense of place.
- Cosiness.
- Good lines.
- Natural materials.
- Outdoor space.
- Access to nature.

Throughout my time establishing residential and education facilities I have always been aware of the need to identify a 'sense of place'. Again, we are talking about feelings and emotions rather than clinical science. However, when viewing large numbers of properties to find a suitable place it is very clear some places have a 'sense of place' whilst others do not.

(On a recent skiing holiday, I visited hotels in one town in preparation for the following year's trip. This gave me the opportunity to visit many hotels close to each other and I experienced approximately ten hotels within half an hour. What became very apparent was that each different entrance lobby created a vastly different feeling on arrival and the way the environment was decorated and fitted had huge impact on these feelings which would ultimately impact on your experience. Interestingly enough there wasn't a correlation with the cost. In our view for a winter holiday cosy was very important and this wasn't always the most expensive.)

Having a property with good lines is also important. The lines represent the space we must live and work in and the route within a home to get to the other spaces. Having a good line means it flows more comfortably. So why is environment important to the workplace? The answer is simple, it makes people happier. This means your children will get better more quickly and your staff will want to stay with you. Having a hard day in a residential home or special school is never easy. But it's a lot easier if the environment is a good environment to start with.

Within our setting we found that older Edwardian and Victorian properties were more likely to hit our targets and tick our boxes. There would be some very good reasons for this. First, they have a history to them, they have been as they are for a long time and this in itself creates a sense of stability. In addition, they often have large windows usually south facing, with good floor layout meaning good flow. But also, original features, this means creativity and usually natural materials.

New build properties can hit the same targets and tick the same boxes providing the key elements are taken into consideration and planned for.

The Biophilia hypothesis explains why even just having natural materials effects a person and makes them feel better. Also having rooms that are neither too small nor too big helps to create cosy spaces.

Modern contemporary architecture, with its leaning towards open plan, often struggles with this. Whilst I am a long way from saying modern architecture is detrimental to one's wellbeing, I am saying that if you want to create a therapeutic environment you must have the elements listed above and a cosy space is the most important of them all.



Use of natural materials is evident.



Photo of a modern office space. Use of natural materials limited.

What is cosy?

Listening to a radio talk show discussing this issue, I came across a hypothesis in the discussion which I would like to explore further. Phone-in participants talked about such experiences as being in a caravan or conservatory when it's raining and listening to the sound of the rain on the roof. Others spoke of being in a tent in a storm and keeping warm inside when outside it was cold and wet. Many of us appreciate the feeling of being by a wood-burning stove when it's snowing outside. The common factors are of being in an enclosed space protected from the dangers and adverse elements outside. This perhaps, connects with our primeval need to escape predation, of being hidden from sight but being able to see what's going on outside.

Being able to see and hear what's going on but protected from it is a good definition of a therapeutic environment in itself and we've only just 'closed the door'.

Creating a cosy home is an obvious thing you would want to do in a residential setting. It is also important to remember to apply this in other settings such as schools. If you have ever visited schools, to choose one for your child, the feelings created as you walk around are often the most important factors. Alternatively, some would say the only thing that matters is results. I am of the view that results are secondary to a warm, welcoming environment both in its layout and fixtures, as well as the people within. I would go further to say that in most cases the two are intrinsically linked. The school with the well thought through environment will have happier children, happier staff and it is highly likely, better results. Creating cosy spaces within classrooms and within leisure time places is crucial to the overall feel and effectiveness of the building.

Indoor spaces.

When creating a therapeutic environment within a building you need to consider the following.

- Layout - This needs to be conducive to the activities within.
- Colour scheme. Using what we now know about how colours affect us.
- Fixtures and fittings.

Layout.

When considering the layout of a place, it's important to remember that the person visiting or attending is gathering information about the experience they hope to have. This starts as they approach the building, not just once through the door. So outside space is by its very nature the first space to be encountered. We will talk about outside space later but it's important to remember you only get one chance at a first impression.

This first impression is continued as you walk through the door, it is therefore important to think through the overt and covert messages being given by the fixtures, fittings, and signage. If this is a residential facility it is important to remember this is someone's home. Therefore, it may be important that there is limited signage. Likewise in our children's residential homes, we made sure there was no imposing presence of an office as you walk through the door. Our office space was kept out of immediate sight or preferably in an upstairs room like a bedroom study. I find it very disappointing that many residential homes have overt signage and the first thing you see is the office. If you want someone to feel institutionalised and possibly even oppressed, then that works. If you want to create a warm welcoming feeling, the fixtures and fittings and layout speak first before any efforts of a well-meaning receptionist try to make things better.

The layout is often restricted to the shape and design of the building however, obvious factors within a residential setting are for example, the importance of the bedroom arrangements.

Those vulnerable, need to be in close proximity to the main carer sleeping over with them. Bedrooms some distance away and not within the immediate proximity of the main carer can be considered much later, as perhaps part of a planned preparation for discharge or independence but not at the start of the journey.

Access to toilet facilities is crucial and we have learned that even in small spaces it is important to try to arrange ensuite facilities. Going to bed at night is often the most difficult time for children who have suffered adverse childhood experiences. Having someone nearby who is trusted, or even just knowing they are there to protect, is so important.

Generally speaking, lines of sight to aid supervision, in all aspects of function are important. Therefore, as said earlier good flow and good lines become especially significant.

Colour schemes.

Within the main communal areas of whatever building it is, the colour green should be prevalent somewhere in the plan. It doesn't have to be all green or even dominant, but it should be there somewhere. This is for the reasons discussed earlier, it means LIFE and has a calming effect on those within. It reduces stress and anxiety, which is a key feature if you're trying to create a therapeutic environment.

Avoid colour clashes and ensure rooms have their own identity, purpose and function but also follow a theme consistent throughout. Neutral colours have a big role to play, it is important to remember it's not about your favourite colour, it's about the feelings created. As a result, avoid short term fashionable ideas, stick to traditional themes of classic design. They tend not to go out of fashion and if they need updating at some point, there is generally just tweaking to do and not major transformations. Creating a stable environment is important and not one that is subject to regular change. This reminds me of a saying from elite sport – "form" is temporary, "class" is permanent.

Health warning- be careful of patterned wallpaper. Again, these tend to go in and out of fashion, but the real risk is, if you are looking after people who may be on the autistic spectrum the amount of visual stimulation could be a cause of stress. They won't be able to verbalise that the wallpaper is having a detrimental effect, but you will see it in their behaviour.

It is worth pointing out at this stage that children's homes regulations state that children should be allowed to decorate their bedrooms. This has been pretty much universally interpreted as being allowed to paint their bedrooms. The term decorate means - "To improve the appearance of an interior of a house, room, office and so forth". Therefore, restricting decorating to displaying pictures and posters is more than meeting this requirement, especially as many depressed people or people with mental health problems would often paint their rooms black. As we now know this can adversely affect their mental wellbeing and compound their difficulties further. To allow this as a choice is to undermine the definition of the word decorate, which is to improve and denies the child the benefits of science to create an environment in which they may thrive.



A lounge in one of our residential homes.



A hallway in one of our residential homes. Here the use of natural materials combined with use of colour create a relaxing harmonious first impression.

Fixtures and fittings.

What I hope to have already demonstrated above is that there is psychology behind most things in life, perhaps everything. Psychology is about the way we think, we are all thinking all the time even if you don't realise it or you're not that good at it. The thinking and responses lead to emotional reactions which lead to behaviour. So, there is either effective well thought out thinking, uneducated shallow thinking, or shades in

between. Which one do you want to do?

If we are creating a therapeutic environment it needs to be well thought out using the knowledge we've gained. This, I find, can often be seen in the way fixtures and fittings are applied and very evident in the choice of paintings or pictures.

I find most social care facilities and many education facilities, have adopted a formula of getting someone in an office, who will not be using the facility, to order pictures to fill a space on a wall. So, what level of thinking do you believe they apply? Generally, not a lot and often budget led, perhaps their favourite preference or more likely what they think the children will like.

We mentioned earlier about making a 'classy' or 'educated' environment, and yes everyone has the right to experience an 'educated' environment! These environments, when it comes to artwork, also follow a formula. Which is usually -

- Pictures or paintings that reflect the local geography.
- Pictures or paintings which reflect the local culture and activities.
- Animals
- Landscapes.

This hypothesis also extends to restaurants and in my view, there is a direct correlation between the decor and the quality of food. A Chinese restaurant as an example, is generally of better quality if its fixtures and fittings represent the culture and geography of the food it's promoting i.e., China. If it didn't have the educated recognition to do this, it is likely this would also be reflected in the food.



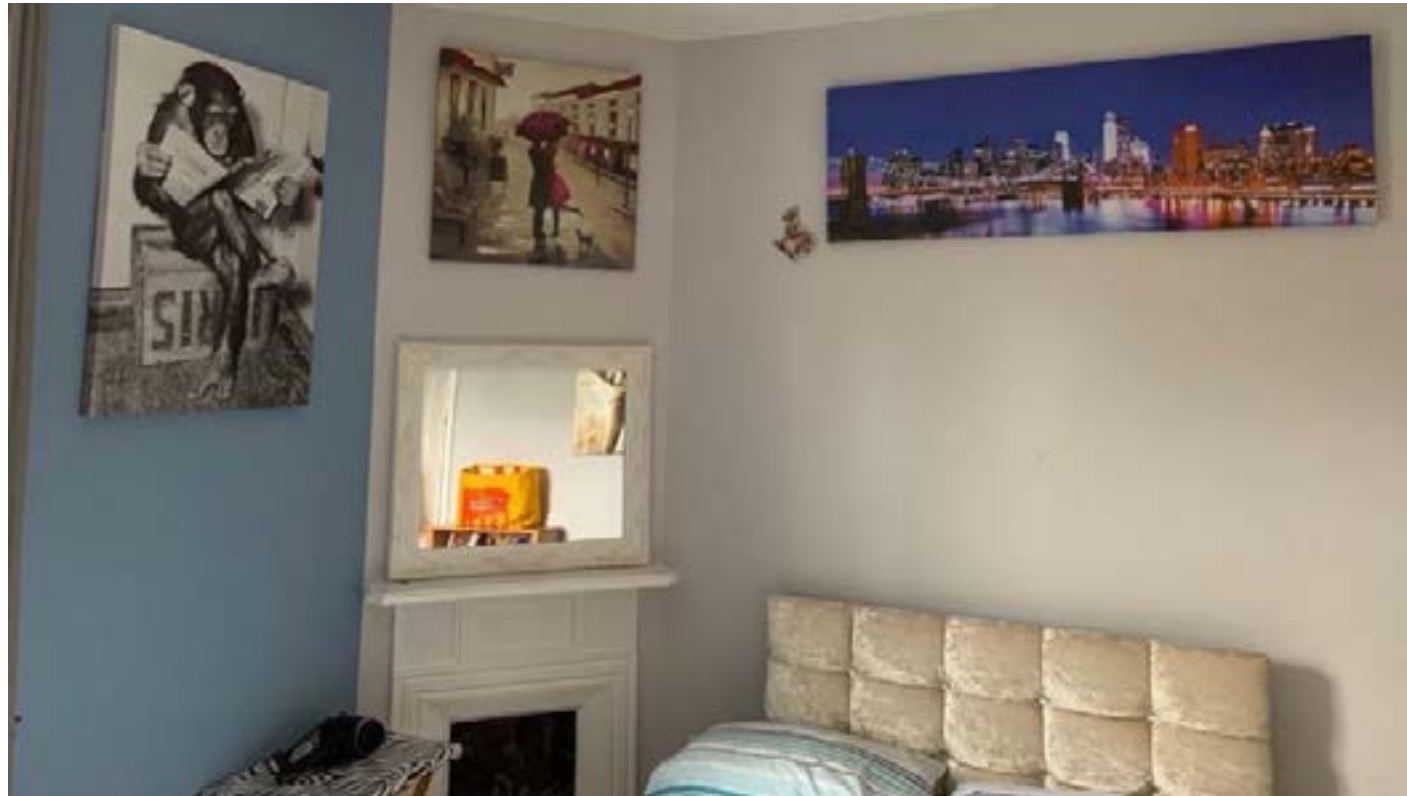
This country pub has good use of natural materials. It is located next to a river and has used fisherman's flies to decorate the walls. This reflects both geography and culture.

Pictures or paintings chosen without following this kind of thinking often results in colourful mindlessness like jars of multi-coloured sweets, totally anonymous or irrelevant objects and the most common in social care settings 'The Manhattan Skyline'.

'The Manhattan Skyline' is probably the most common picture I have encountered in numerous children's residential homes. This would be fine if you lived in New York, but for people who have never been there its dominance in this environment fascinates me.

These homes have no cultural connection to New York however, there is a parallel with social problems being encountered. I have been surprised lately at the number of referrals our organisation has received for British children speaking with an American accent. This is thought to be a result of social isolation and a dominance of gaming and American films in their lives.

The Manhattan skyline pictures are a good example of the ‘no thought’ or ‘what do you think the kids will like’ decision making process, which firmly rejects the science. The one thing children are looking for is a positive functioning family home, led by the parents of the household. To create a therapeutic environment all the environment has to be controlled by someone who understands what a therapeutic environment is. Decisions made without thought or based on what the children would like, tip the balance of leadership in the home towards the children and will not provide the therapeutic environment the children crave.



Oh dear, this bedroom has issues. The colour blue, Manhattan skyline and other subliminal messages.

Scientists have determined that even pictures of the natural world can reduce anxiety. Again, most landscapes have the key feature of green within. The Manhattan skyline doesn't. It represents a mass of colourless concrete full of dangers. So, to get it right, include pictures of a natural idyllic landscape, one you would benefit from experiencing if you were there yourself. A calming landscape. Not all pictures have to be like this but there should be at least one in a key place.

In “The Connected Species” neuroscientist Mark A Williams explains that our visual systems are tuned into low frequency information found in rural environments. (If we think smooth rounded no sharp edges, this is an example of low spatial frequency.)

However, urban environments provide high spatial frequency. (If we think straight lines and sharp edges this is an example of high spatial frequency.) If we want to relax, we visit natural landscapes if we want to be stimulated, we visit urban landscapes. This follows through to pictures paintings and images we view also.

If we also factor in the natural process of facial recognition our brain conducts of every face we see to determine if they are a threat or not, it is easy to see that urban environments are more stressful than we realise. Even pictures of.



The Hay Wain by John Constable

The Hay Wain by John Constable is one of the most famous English landscape paintings. Whilst this is not to everyone's taste, it is a good example of an idyllic savannah scene, calm water and farmers harvesting hay. In the distant background open land with the occasional tree to evade danger and grazed landscape with livestock to eat.

The opposite of an idyllic picture is perhaps ‘The Scream’ by Edvard Munch 1893. This depicts a depressed suicidal man. Believe it or not I've seen this in a children's home! What were they thinking! Were they thinking or does this demonstrate my hypothesis above? This brings the whole concept of subliminal messaging into play. Was someone having a laugh, but at what cost as the message is simple “you could go mad here”! In a therapeutic environment the subliminal message should be “things will get better”. This is a battle between positive and negative and the subliminal messages given out by those responsible.



Images and the messages they give, whether subliminal or overt, are important. In my organisation, we are familiar with covert non-verbal messaging to children who are meant to have their visits with parents supervised to protect them from such messages. Therefore, being aware of messages of all kinds, leads to

recognising that simple things can be significant. I took this as far as not allowing clothing, t-shirts, depicting skulls or skulls and crossbones or anything from the macabre. If we can accept the colour green can reduce heart rate and anxiety, it is not too far from the other way to accept that images representing death and destruction may not only increase anxiety but may also play a part in covert negative messaging.

The use of photographs of those being helped is another way of making people feel at home and part of the culture of the place. There is a positive and negative tipping point here also. The pictures must be showing the subject in the best possible light. The photographer should help the subject achieve this by taking time to ensure the photograph is composed correctly. Alternatively, take natural shots when they are not expecting it. The tipping point is if you allow use of photographs that are less positive e.g., pulling faces, thumbs up, eating with mouth open or looking like someone who needs help, this is not only a wasted opportunity, but it also becomes demeaning.

The hanging of pictures is also important as pictures that are not straight or poorly hung (in that they are the wrong picture in the wrong place) can create uncomfortable feelings for those seeing them. Pictures need to be hung in the spaces that suit them in both size and colour.

Spending a bit of time and effort on the thinking behind the interior design can have a huge impact on how people feel when they live and work in that environment. As many of these places are designed to influence the emotional behaviour and development of their subjects. There is lots of energy and intensity around ‘talking therapy’ and very little, if any effort, on creating the right environment to encourage people to be relaxed and therefore more receptive to the work to be undertaken.

Fixtures that use natural materials wherever possible are important. It is a factor worth noting that places using natural materials feel much more relaxing than those that don’t. Pot plants would be great as they are even more effective than a green painted wall or pictures, at reducing anxiety. Plants being nurtured and which can be seen growing are even better. This leads us nicely on to -

Outdoor spaces.

The first point to make is that having outside space is so important. If you have it use it to its full potential. Being outside not only gives us fresh air, a quality greatly unrecognised in terms of improving physical and mental health, it also gives space to move around and wherever possible grow plants. Even hard standing patios can give space to grow plants in containers. This not only gives a worthwhile activity and learning opportunity but also a major subliminal message “Here we nurture and care for”! I found this from my early days when growing herbs in containers. It also gave us the opportunity to introduce the concept that plants have purpose i.e., aesthetics, provide fragrance and you can eat them.

How you use outside space can vary depending on the size and space but herbs in containers is a good starting point. Fruit trees in containers is the next step. This gives us the opportunity to introduce trees into small spaces and they produce fruits. Nature’s free sweets.

Outdoor furniture is a personal choice however, it needs to be suitable for the population. I quickly found that if we provided tables and chairs, they would never be put back tidily. People behave in environments they are familiar with and struggle to adapt. The result can often be that users of the space treat it like a beer garden under the assumption that magical garden staff will appear and put everything neatly away. The result is that they leave everything out for the next people, who find the place in disorder. Order is a hugely important factor! If a place looks disordered, those there will feel disordered. As a result, we used picnic

tables which were less likely to be moved and don’t look disordered.

The battle of order versus disorder is most clearly seen in children’s bedrooms. Children who are used to disorder recreate the environment they have come from in their bedrooms. This reflects their emotional state and reinforces their past environments because it is what they are familiar with. In order to help with this we ensure their bedrooms are tidy for their return from school or at the end of the day. Eventually, as a result of living in order this becomes the new normal. It is often evident within bedrooms which children have lived the longest in an orderly environment. They eventually invest in their bedrooms both in terms of an absence of damage and keeping it tidy. They also make it a pleasant place to be with photos of themselves and other decorative items to make it feel homely and cosy.

Garden design is a subject in itself. Good design, however, is in tune with the issues of creating aesthetically pleasing spaces that result in positive feelings and therefore in tune with a therapeutic environment. In my view informal or naturalistic planting is more in tune with this ethos and it perhaps taps into the benefits of the natural landscape more succinctly. You can immerse yourself in natural environments whilst formal gardens you look at and visit. More like an art gallery than an environment in which you can relax.

Talking these issues over with our horticultural team, I conducted an analysis of one of our gardens in comparison to a formal garden. I commented that in the formal garden, the focus was on structure, conformity, regimentally, clean lines, discipline with everything in its place. By contrast, our natural garden had a relaxed approach. Plants had space to be themselves, to spread organically, self-seeding plants allowed to flourish and be nurtured. Very much reflecting what we are trying to do for the children we are helping.

One way to incorporate both is to have areas staged that go from formal, to informal, naturalistic and if possible, completely wild. Paths intertwining taking the visitor on a journey. If you are lucky enough to use the garden it can be a steppingstone on the journey to the natural world (countryside or even better woodland areas).



Principals of garden design.

Most good garden designers would recognise the principles below.

- The design should be in context of the location, respect the sense of place and present as if obvious and has always been there.
- Closer to the house the more colourful and exotic, the further away the less you can impose yourself.
- Small steps towards nature. The design should take you on a journey that allows you to arrive in a natural environment.

The ideal formula.

Principal building - Formal - Informal - Naturalistic - Woodland or wooded area.



Whilst in this example the principal is the water fountain it demonstrates the formulae.

Horatio’s gardens

On the 5th of August 2011, Horatio Chapple was killed by a polar bear in Norway whilst part of a polar expedition. He was 17 years old.

His father was a consultant on the spinal ward of Salisbury hospital. Some weeks earlier he presented to his father a design for the creation of a garden in the hospital grounds. Horatio was able to see that the patients who often spend months on their backs looking at the clinical ceiling had no contact with nature. Despite his young age he was aware of the healing qualities of time in the garden and as such the importance of contact with nature. Following his death his parents took it upon themselves to ensure that his ideas were made a reality.

Horatio’s gardens are now seen in many hospitals throughout the country and have been designed by the country’s top garden designers. A fitting tribute, on one garden the words are carved in stone. “Inspired by Horatio Chapple, 17 years of kindness and courage”.

Whilst these hospital trusts have realised the importance of creating a special place and its relevance to rehabilitation, there are many schools that could do much better with their outside space. Rather than see it purely as a functional area but also as an educational and therapeutic area and write the importance of their garden space into their mental health action plan. This plan may have much more efficacy than simply the availability of talking therapy.

Whilst the hospitals that have engaged top garden designers have recognised the importance of creating a therapeutic environment through the use of good design and the importance of nurturing plants to create

an aesthetically pleasing place to sit and recuperate. Other hospitals quite simply provide an outside space to be able to breathe fresh air. These places often void of any creativity or sense of growing life which are the prerequisites for a garden. As such they could transform their effectiveness with simple inexpensive measures incorporating some creativity and using the advice of others in creating something that passes the test for being ‘A Garden.’



Summary.

- Understand the elements that create a sense of place.
- Understand why we like to feel cosy and where this feeling originates from.
- Be aware of the elements that create the environment that allows you to feel cosy.
- The importance of considering the layout of your spaces.
- Why it’s good to use natural materials whenever you can.
- The importance of understanding subliminal messages in fixtures and fittings.
- The opportunities that outdoor space brings to create mood, enhanced feelings, and learning opportunities.

Access to Nature

“No man ever steps into the same river twice, for it’s not the same river and he’s not the same man.”
‘Heraclitus’.

Much has been said about how important it is to have access to nature and green spaces. During the pandemic of 2020 as many people found themselves locked down, people began to value time in their gardens and access to green spaces much more than before. Whilst we instinctively feel better after a walk in the countryside and put this down to looking after our mental health, what else could be going on? The answer is much more profound than I expected, having looked at the science.

In “The Biophilia Effect” written by Clemens G Avray, Victoria Goodrich, Graham and Marc Bekoff, the details are quite surprising. The authors of this remarkable book articulate the importance of access to nature and raise it to another level.

They explain some remarkable concepts, which need to be considered within the context of this book and back up their hypothesis with some simple evidence yet complex science.

The first concept to consider is that our immune system is a complex system which can receive information directly from our environment and transfer this information to actions it needs to take on our behalf.

“We are confronted with the surprising fact that our immune system is a sensory system, which is capable of discerning, communicating and acting.”
Joel E Dimsdale.

The ability to receive information and use this information to take actions, accordingly, depends on its analysis of the information.

They also explain that plants have the same ability, along with the ability to transmit information for other plants to analyse and action within the context of their lives. This is getting close to talking plants! However, it is worth considering their explanation that communication doesn’t necessarily mean talking.

“They communicate by emitting fragrance that holds incredibly complex information”, explains Wilhelm Boland Professor of organic chemistry.

Talking is lingual, the use of the tongue because of a consciousness that evaluates what it wants to say prior to verbalising. Communication isn’t confined to the exclusive use of the tongue or a consciousness. Communication is simply the transfer of information to a receptor of information that can then evaluate this information and take action as a result. Plants therefore have the ability to communicate large amounts of extremely complex information. One of the ways they communicate (and yes there is more than one), is by emitting terpenes, an aromatic compound also found in essential oils, which may go some way to explain the effectiveness of aromatherapy.

The next important piece of the jigsaw to understand is that plants emit information that can be received and evaluated by our immune system. A walk in the woods results in trees and plants communicating with our immune system.

Japanese culture has been taking advantage of this knowledge for some time and refer to it as shinrin-yoku - taking in the forest atmosphere.

Here there is a difference identified between going for a walk in the countryside and going for a walk in the woods. The walk in the woods takes on more significance as it is referred to as ‘forest bathing’. The reason this is more significant, is that a walk in the woods results in you being ‘immersed’ in the benefits of the air created by the trees with its positive chemical additions surrounding you. The benefits of ‘immersion’ are that the positive air is all around you, to your side, below and above you.

You are immersed in forest air just as if you had jumped into a swimming pool and immersed yourself in water. Here you are immersed in the air expelled by the trees themselves, full of terpenes. So, what’s the result? As you may have guessed, it isn’t good enough to say a walk in the woods makes you feel better, is there anything more specific than how you feel?

The answer is yes there is a measurable effect. In experiments analysing blood samples taken from patients before and after time in the forest, the following was concluded.

- The number of natural killer cells in your immune system is considerably higher. (Killer cells are specific white blood cells which attack any illness.)
- Not only are the number of killer cells increased but they are more active, meaning the system is much more efficient. This goes on for days after being in the woods.
- The level of anti-cancer proteins which help to prevent cancer or help to attack a tumour, if it is present, are elevated.

The authors of the ‘Biophilia effect’ claim quite clearly that to help increase the effectiveness of your immune system and fight off viruses - use forest air! A day in the woods can raise the number of killer cells by 40%, two days takes it above 50%.

The benefit of a day in the woods can last for the seven days following. If you spend 3 days in the woods this triggers an increased performance of these killer cells, and the effect can last for another 30 days. This means that your immune system is actively detecting and fighting off viruses and attacking potential cancer cells far more effectively. You don’t need to exercise whilst in the woods, just be there and breathe the air. As they say, “biological communication with the trees happens without our contribution or consciousness”. It has been recognised that cancer rates are higher in urban areas, void of trees, than those urban areas where the inhabitants had access to nature.

This is why in Japan they were the first to set up an independent medical research department in their universities called ‘forest medicine’. In contrast, hospitals in the UK are usually based in urban environments and the culture in most hospitals is to keep windows closed to reduce pollution experienced in urban living. The need to open windows and allow healthy fresh air to circulate has been missed by most.

Therefore, having trees and access to woods in our therapeutic environment is a highly desirable aspiration. The garden design we discussed earlier is dramatically increased in its effectiveness if it can be connected to areas of woodland.



A garden leading to a nature trail at our farm on the North York Moors.

Researchers found that forest smells and time in woodland areas has also been proven to reduce the stress hormone cortisol, lower blood pressure and balance out brain processes in the prefrontal cortex. As a result, stress is reduced. The study showed that smells from average cities were not able to achieve the same effect.

It has also been recognised that being in nature can reduce the effects of conditions such as ADHD and can help all children increase their concentration. It is said that as direct attention is tiring and being in nature results in automatic attention. This automatic attention can help us build and increase our direct attention. Researchers concluded that we should:

- Motivate children to play in rooms that have a view of nature.
- Motivate children to play outside in green surroundings.
- Be an advocate for natural schoolyards. It is especially important for the recovery of the child's ability to concentrate.
- Plant and care for trees and other vegetation at home or ask the landlord to do it.
- Take care of the trees and shrubs in your area. You're doing yourself, your kids, and other people a favour.

The amount of trees in an urban area contributes significantly to the environment. It is somewhat of a surprise to learn that there are more trees per square kilometre in London than there are in the Yorkshire Dales National Park. (Source: BBC Country File)

In conclusion, it is clear we need to value the presence of plants and in particular trees, as part of the tools needed to raise not just our mental health but our physical health also. We are natural beings in a natural world and we are intrinsically linked to the natural world much more than we ever thought or realised. This link has been eroded since the industrial revolution which in evolutionary terms is no time at all. We rely on access to the natural world to meet our needs. Whilst it is difficult to prove that a negative is directly connected to the absence of a positive, urban living and an absence of access to the natural world has a negative impact on social, emotional and health issues.

Whilst having a healthy immune system is important to fight off illness, how does this impact on helping someone recover from say adverse childhood experiences? The answer is of course that it is all connected. We want our subjects to thrive, not just survive and to do what they need to be as fit and as healthy as possible. Healthy body, fitter person, and healthier mind.

The authors of The Biophilia Effect recommend that to get the most out of contact with nature, you should lookout for landscapes with the following features.

- Standing or sparkling water such as ponds, lakes, or lagoons.
- Calm flowing water such as streams or rivers. Fast flowing white water can be invigorating but not suitable for reducing stress and relaxing.
- The sea.
- Flowers blooming, trees and shrubs, green meadows in bloom.
- Gardens with fruit and vegetables.
- Berry bushes.
- Peaceful places where you can smell growing mushrooms.
- Plants and communities of plants where you can hear bird song.
- Trees with sweeping crowns under which you can find cover.
- Trees you could climb to look out over the landscape.
- Clearings with trees and meadows - a savannah landscape.

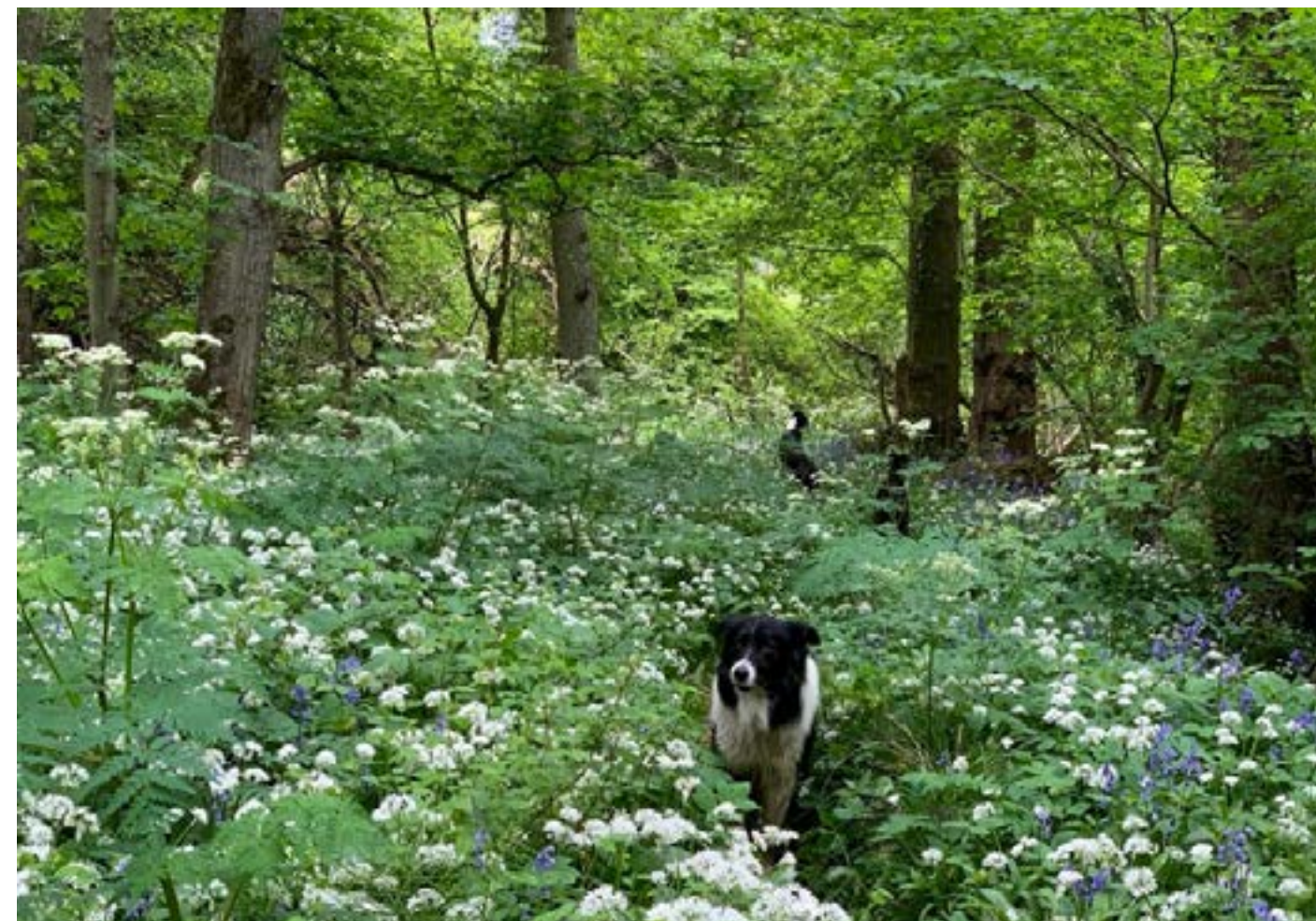
I would add to this the ability to have a fire in a safe contained way. This also connects us to our primeval ancestors and has a relaxing and hypnotic effect. Even better, cook food on it!



The wood on our farm on the North York Moors



The River Tees downstream.



Ancient woodland on our farm in Lower Teesdale



The River Tees upstream



Tanner looking at the lake at The Manor (reflecting)

I consider myself very fortunate to have been in the position of searching for a place to use as a therapeutic environment and with a good budget. This wasn't a commercial venture, my family and I had simply made the decision that the most important thing in our lives was the success of the organisation we had created and we would do anything we could to enhance the lives of the people within, both staff and children. Our search was wide and covered the North of England and Scotland. We designed a criteria checklist which was as followed.

- Within 1 hours drive to manage the facility ourselves with current structures.
- Properties further away were to be considered but would have to be of sufficient size to sustain a staff team on site.
- More than one property on-site.
- Remote but not isolated.
- In a secluded valley.
- With a small river, stream, or brook.

Our search took us to The North York Moors National Park where we were to find an idyllic small farm (shown on the front cover) next to the moors in a beautiful valley. It clearly had that 'sense of place' and ticked all the above boxes.

On arrival, my children immediately jumped in the duck pond. After a tour of the properties, we walked down to the small stream where they paddled in the river and then back up through the woods. Whilst in the woods I turned to my wife and said, "we've found what we're looking for, we need to close the deal or stop looking".



Over the years, we were to add to the charm of this place with carefully planned tree planting, nurturing the wildflower meadows and the introduction of poultry. This farm has since been used to provide holiday accommodation for the children in our care and a cottage was kept especially for the staff and their families to take time out and recharge their own batteries.

In 2020 it became invaluable as a quarantine facility which allowed us to continue to take new children during the first national lockdown.

Whilst staying there I was to take my own children to visit Rievaulx Abbey. Here I wandered around the ruins

of this historic building and listened to the guide describe how the Cistercian monks travelled from France to find a sacred place to establish their community. They had a checklist, a criteria, guess what, it was the same. Remote but not isolated (not far from the village of Helmsley), in a secluded valley and with a river running through it for fresh fish.

Sometime after this, I was to be shown around a very special school built in the countryside, perhaps one of the earliest forest schools. The founder was a major local landowner who had been working on this project for many years. I stated that I could see he had the same checklist in his mind when locating the school and told him of the Cistercian monks at Rievaulx. He smiled and then explained he was a direct descendant of the head monk who founded the Abbey. It could be argued that there is something very spiritual about these locations, or as the science says, it taps into our deepest emotional and physical needs from the time our lives depended on where we were located. Perhaps it's both!

I am pleased to see that the authors of Biophilia Effect highlighted the importance of being able to hear bird song. I find contact with wildlife hugely important and valuable personally but also from an educational and therapeutic perspective. Most of the children I have helped over the years have come from impoverished backgrounds in every sense of the word, economically and emotionally. They have also, with only a couple of exceptions, been from urban backgrounds. Their knowledge of the world around them was minimal to say the least and their knowledge of wildlife was nearly non-existent. However, I find when introduced to the world around them, including showing them wildlife, they soak it up in spades.

At this farm we introduced a variety of poultry to create an idyllic ambience but also to provide interest and stimulation. These included peacocks, peahens, chickens, guinea fowl, ducks and geese. These were very effective in creating the idyllic rural ambience with minimal care required and these animals provided great interest and stimulation to bridging the world of wildlife and domestic farm animals. They were, for all intent and purposes, semi wild walking ornaments which we kept on location by ensuring they never ran out of food. I referred to it as the peacock tax! Whilst they lived there, they had minimal interaction with humans other than being present at feeding times. The introduction of animals is an important subject, discussed in the next chapter.





Summary.

- The importance of access to nature.
- How a walk in the woods can have a measurable effect on our physical health.
- Natural elements to look out for that can improve your mental health.

Using animals to enhance our environment and assist us in a therapeutic process

In my view, to call working with animals' therapy must have the following simple criteria. The therapist must be an expert with both animals and their subjects, independently and together. Being an expert with one or the other is not good enough. The conclusion is there are very few people who qualify for this status. (Definition of an expert is they have over 10,000 hours or 15 years' experience).

One of the pivotal moments which inspired this book was when I attended a webinar, presented by a group of therapists, on how a dog could be used in therapy. It was very easy to determine they may well have been experts in their specialism but had no relevant knowledge about dogs. The result was, myself and some of my accompanying staff, who also meet the above criteria, soon lost interest and moved on.

I have processed referrals that stated the child had access to a therapy dog. Is it a therapy dog, does the dog know this? Or is it just that the care provider had a dog and the child enjoyed taking it for a walk. It becomes therapy when deep knowledge of both the dog and the child is used to help the child benefit from the relationship with the dog, in a structured thought-out way.

To call something therapy just because it helps you feel better, risks the word losing its significance. Lots of things make you feel better. Do you have a therapy tree you sit under or in my case do I go and sit in my therapy tractor. It is the help and support that accompanies the activity that makes the difference between doing something and therapy.

I have been involved in farming and the professional horse world all my adult life, as well as being a head of service and a head teacher. I am also a breeder of all kinds of livestock, including horses and dogs. I have always been surrounded by working dogs and rarely had less than 10 dogs at any one time. It is from this experience I became aware that animals are emotional beings, they react to the world around them with emotional responses which are interconnected to their environment. (Didn't we just say that for plants as well?). In doing so they are very much like children!

So how can other animals help humans therapeutically?

To start with, let us consider this subject at different levels. Having poultry as described above is a way of providing stimulation but little interaction. The higher the level of interaction the higher the therapeutic value. So, to what level can animals interact? Isn't interaction a form of communication?

Earlier we discussed how plants communicate without a consciousness. Therefore, it is plausible to consider that animals may communicate without a consciousness. Is it possible to consider that animals have a consciousness? Absolutely!

The level of consciousness and awareness can vary between species but the animals we may use for therapeutic help have a high level of consciousness. Usually, warm blooded furry mammals not very different from ourselves.

“But animals can’t assess, strategise, communicate and react to communication, can they”? Of course! Let us first deal with communication. As with plants if we are only looking for communication in the form of language (the use of the tongue) we will be disappointed. But as with plants we must consider communication within the context of ‘their world’.

Horses for example are vulnerable herbivores that need to keep quiet to avoid attracting the attention of predators. They use subtle body gestures to indicate the presence of a threat or to engineer a reaction from other horses.

Dogs, as another example, are predators who also need to communicate quietly to avoid alerting their potential prey. Again, body gestures which may be so subtle that they are missed by most but are most definitely there. These gestures may be exaggerated through breeding for example the pointer gun dog, bred to ‘point’ towards game birds. Facial expressions clearly indicate mood, feelings, desires, and intentions. You just must understand what they are and when they are present. They can be so subtle that you can be looking straight at them and not be able to translate, particularly if you don’t live and importantly work with them.

The working element is important. As with under stimulated children who often have poor vocabulary as they have so very little to talk about, the same can apply to dogs. In contrast, if you work with dogs, you have a lot more information to communicate so the dog has an increased vocabulary for you to understand. Likewise, when children are placed in a stimulating environment like a farm or stable yard, we have often been amazed at the immediately increasing vocabulary. Let us consider some events and analyse what’s happening.

Whilst out walking with my dogs, sheepdogs and lurchers, an old female sheepdog, who was hard of hearing and with poor eyesight, wandered away from the pack. I called her but she could not hear. I waved but she could not see. A lurcher stood next to me, looked at me, looked at her and then without prompting set off running around her and then walked in front of her brushing past her nose, and then walked back to me with her following as she could see and feel him and knew to follow.

This lurcher had assessed that the old sheepdog had gone too far away, that my efforts to call her were not working and she needed help. He set off with a clear strategy to help guide her to me. All of this without any request or indication from myself. Clear strategising and execution of a plan, based on an evaluation of the situation and a desire to help the old dog and his pack leader, myself. (Lassie eat your heart out!).



Jet, the dog who demonstrated by his behaviour the ability to assess, empathise, strategise and deliver on his plan.

On another occasion, the same lurcher was walking parallel to a hedge some yards off. A rabbit jumped up and ran towards the hedge. He set off after the rabbit but ran away from it and then looped around to intercept the rabbit at speed from the side at 90 degrees to avoid hitting the hedge. He just missed.

The dog knew that he could outrun the rabbit but if he was to follow it, he would run into the hedge. He strategised that if he was to use some of his available time, he could take it from the side. This was a cunning plan and should have worked. He was only seconds away from success as the rabbit slipped through the gaps in the hedge.

The following day, at the same time of day, in the same place, the same rabbit jumped up, ran towards the hedge. This time the lurcher had assessed his previous plan didn’t work. He had overthought it and this time decided to just run after it. The rabbit got to the hedge and ran through it, the dog just missed it and as he feared the first time, bounced off the hedge. Some lucky rabbit that one!

At one point we had a sheep, a pig, and a goose who all, being void of company from their own species, bonded as a group and often went for walks together, grazing in a straight line as they chatted away. At this point you may well think I’m a tree hugging idiot, the next story may well rebalance your view.

Many years ago, I saw a fox being hunted by hounds. To avoid capture he changed direction, ran across a muck heap and promptly got away.

To do this the fox clearly understood the following.

- He was a mortal living creature and could die.
- He was being hunted and must escape to survive.
- He smelled.
- The hounds were following his smell.
- The muck heap smelled stronger than he did.
- If he ran across the muck heap, it would mask his smell and aid his escape.

You may think that this was purely a coincidence and a one off observation, however that simply isn't the case. It was a well-known fact that if a fox is being pursued by hounds, he will seek out male sheep (a tup) and run through them as the fox knows they smell stronger than he does and this will aid his escape.

Having worked in special education all my life, I can say I have met many people that couldn't grasp some of those concepts. It is very unwise to underestimate the cognitive ability of animals and in doing so apply 'our world' criteria. If scientists want answers, they need to ask the right people, rural people who work with animals every day and see things scientist will never recreate in a lab or see for themselves, even if they had years to do it in.

I was able to capture with a camera what I believe is a good example of this kind of thinking.

Reports from local game keepers were of a sheep that had got a branch stuck on its head in an area called Eldermoor. This was unusual and on closer inspection with my binoculars I was able to see, it was indeed no sheep. This was a rare white stag, known as a Hart.



That was a rare sight. What was remarkable was the fact that this stag was evading attention by hiding in the middle of a flock of sheep. He was different to other deer but like the sheep, being only a little bit bigger. By using his and their herding instincts as a survival strategy, he had found a good place to hide.

In my view this shows remarkable self-awareness and opportunistic behaviour as well as strategic thinking



He stayed a few days before returning to the castle deer park some miles away.

Prolog: Some months later, I was to learn that this animal became high value game by young urban poaches who pursued it in a car and ran him over. They valued the brief thrill and impact on their biochemistry more than the life of the animal. A shocking end to a wonderful creature who always knew his difference attracted dangerous attention. All this captured and displayed on social media to enhance their street credibility.



Recently I received a psychologist report for one of our children. Within the report the psychologist had compared the child's cognitive ability to that of a crow, demonstrating how the crow had more ability. This was not to be cruel but to give those looking after the child a clear understanding of the kind of support he should receive.

This reminds me of a scientific experiment shown on BBC presented by the wildlife reporter Chris Packham. In this experiment a crow was presented with a vessel of water and some pebbles. The water was not accessible to the crow as it was below its reach. The crow very quickly strategised and simply placed the pebbles in the vessel to raise the water level and was subsequently able to have a drink. This crow wasn't going to get thirsty and was independent enough to be able to ensure he had water to drink. An example that would be beyond the ability of many people who would probably just sit and wait until someone else did something. This perhaps reinforces the fact that intelligence is contextual. In a world that only values one kind of assessment, many examples of intelligence are overlooked.

In the book "The psychology of stupidity" by Jean-Francois Marmion, he describes how Professor Keith Stanovich at the University of Toronto identified another level of intelligence which he calls "rationality ". This is the capacity to make decisions that help us to achieve our objectives and to adopt beliefs that take reality into account.

This may go some way to explain how sometimes children with low academic ability and poor life skills can amaze us by doing often very complex tasks that are relevant to their negative world. Like computer hacking. It may also explain why clever adults often seek the help of children with technology.

Professor Yuval Noah Harari is an author I have studied and admire. His books Sapiens and Homo Deus both give an insight into how our brains work and our relationship with other species. He makes the point that intelligence is fluid and can be increased or decreased depending on both need and use.

Another good example I have from my experience of working with children and animals was when I found two young dogs digging holes in some soft ground. They had used their powers of smell to ascertain the whereabouts of some young rabbits in the ground. They were hoping for a free snack. Some children came along and observed them digging and decided to join in. After a while one of them turned to me and said why are we digging? I explained what was happening to their shock and surprise. I then stopped them all to ensure the dogs didn't get a free snack.

It was very clear in this example the dogs were tuned into their environment and knew what they were doing and why they were doing it. The children were simply copying.

Why is this important? It demonstrates that animals are very similar to us because we are just complex animals. If we can relate to animals and exchange thoughts and feelings with a creature that won't question us, answer us back and judge us, then maybe we can use this experience to develop skills to help us deal with the most complex, difficult, and dangerous animal of all - human beings.

It is possible to have a therapeutic relationship with a crow, because feeding it and looking after it, as with other birds, helps you feel better. I know because as a young child I had a pet crow, it was not however as said before, a 'therapy bird'. There is a level of interaction which is certainly worth getting to know. Birds are not the kind of creatures that lend themselves to providing therapy within a structured therapeutic approach, as their interactions have limited value. It is animals that are close to us emotionally and have a high level of social interaction, in a way we can understand and relate to, that are best suited to this process.

The question is often raised do we humanise animals? Anyone who has brought up children watching Disney films will know about this as an issue. As Professor Harari explains it's not about humanising, it's about 'mammalising'. As mammals we share the same hormonal responses in terms of feelings and emotions. Particularly in the areas of anxiety, fear, and loss. This is not opinion lead; it's recognising the science.

To think about this let's look at what different animals can offer, those animals most found, in an animal hierarchy.

1. Insects - visual and audio stimulation only.
2. Reptiles- visual and audio stimulation only, no two-way interaction.
3. Birds / Poultry- visual and audio stimulation, limited interaction.
4. Small mammals including hamsters, guinea pigs and ferrets - visual and audio stimulation, slightly more interaction.

What the above animals have in common and is relevant to all animals, is the ability to teach children or adults nurturing skills, responsibility and how to look after them. In doing so promoting empathy.

5. Cattle and sheep - Visual, audio, aromatic stimulation, and reactionary interaction in that these animals are constantly on guard, in fear of predation and therefore they react to what you may do in small movements or verbal noise.
6. Goats, alpacas, and llamas - As above but much more interaction some of it very subtle. Alpacas can give very clear communication when they spit at you, goats are very friendly seeking attention and affection

from humans. They appear to generate a calming sensation in humans. 'Llama Calma!'

7. Pigs - Visual, audio, and double aromatic stimulation. They are friendly social creatures with high levels of intelligence but the fact they are very mucky animals and our love of bacon sandwiches, often inhibits our relationship with them. This is an area of discussion I will return to later.
8. Cats - You give commitment and show responsibility, take good care of them and they might interact with you if they can bring themselves to come down to your level. They all think they are lions at the top of the food chain and it's your job to look after them.
9. Dogs - All the above plus unconditional affection, even if you abuse them. Sophisticated interaction that can be more easily interpreted and two ways in that it is given and received by both human and dog. This factor is by no means exclusive to dogs, but it is much more overt while with other animals it can be so subtle it's beyond the recognition of most.
10. Horses- All the above except their love is entirely conditional on your good behaviour and positive interaction. They can feel positive or negative energy at a distance and can give subtle communication and complex interaction. This can be used to aid behaviour modification techniques and change negative behaviour to positive behaviour in humans. Also, by the very nature of the activity, horse riding brings you into contact with nature. I have had the honour of riding out with the household cavalry. One officer said to me "We like our soldiers to learn to ride because if you can control a horse, you can control yourself".



Alpacas



Goats and girls





There are of course, other animals we could consider for discussion but these are the ones I find people either own or we have arranged to have access to.

In 2003 I took a group of children to the Bahamas to swim with dolphins.

Dolphins are incredibly intelligent mammals and the more I learned about marine biology the more apparent it became that for every creature above the surface we have its counterpart below the surface.

Orcas or Killer whales, I would say, are most like humans in their ability to strategize and another indicator of their correlation to humans is their desire to hunt for fun. Manatees are very similar to the on-land herbivore the cow. Likewise, I often thought that the stingray was the pet dog of the ocean who like to interact with humans, especially if there is free food on offer.

Our trip to swim with dolphins came about because of wanting to explore further my own research into the effects of working or interacting with animals. There were many articles at the time describing the powerful impact swimming with dolphins could create. Our organisation was three years into developing our first farm as a therapeutic activity base then, for no apparent reason, the referrals stopped. The conversation went dead. I, therefore, concluded a trip like this would be enhancing for many reasons. It may well get the conversation about us going again, I may find the answers to my questions and if nothing else these children would have an amazing time.

They did indeed have an amazing time. The interactions with dolphins were inspiring and did much to create positive memories and experiences that could overlay the damage of the past. However, when I consider that cohort against others twenty years later, my conclusion is that it was a positive experience but no more so than other positive experiences created with the animals listed above that were, of course, much closer to home. It did, however, stimulate a lot of discussion and as a result, we are here today to reflect on that time.

The list of animals in numerical order, displays the level of potential benefit available from the animals due to the different kinds of interactions between animals and humans. It also reflects the level of work and commitment required to look after them, with the exception of cats who require very minimal care and attention as they are much more independent.

Working with animals generally provides huge therapeutic benefit in the form of teaching responsibility, nurturing skills, and the promotion of empathy. Empathy is perhaps the most important factor to consider in most scenarios where people need help or assistance. So, what is empathy?

Empathy is the ability to see and importantly feel things from another person's perspective. For example, if you see someone bang their head, if you have empathy, you feel their pain and will most probably flinch. If you're having a meeting with someone you may begin to reflect their body gestures.

So how does this work? This is the result of mirror neurones firing away in your brain as you see the other person and 'feel' for them. This is not something that is at a universal level for everyone. In fact, for some people those mirror neurones don't work very well at all.

Children need to have this part of the brain stimulated and encouraged to grow. An absence of empathy can have a significant detrimental effect on a person's life and often those around them. Putting someone in an environment where those mirror neurones are stimulated can very effectively increase their ability to feel empathy and working with animals is a great way of achieving this.

The most obvious way that I see children connect with animals, by way of an illustrative example, is when they come into contact with puppies. “Come and see some puppies” was how I met my wife, but that’s another story!



The thing about puppies is that they are small, vulnerable, vocal, need looking after and at a time in their lives when they are wanting to bond with their pack. Their human offers an alternative pack to bond with, taking on the role of the pack’s alpha male or pack leader.

From our perspective, they are usually very close to human baby size and as a result, all kinds of hormonal stimulus are created.

I once heard of a hypothesis that we are all, like everything else in the world, nothing more than vessels of chemical reactions. I can certainly see where they are coming from. Children and puppies’ results in lots of chemical reactions. The size of puppies, their interactions with each other, their facial expressions, the way they yelp if they get hurt, the way they are quick to follow you, all create (or should create) an emotional and subsequently a hormonal response from humans.

Children who have access to animals are much more likely to overcome attachment difficulties, have better mental health and stronger immune systems. They are also more likely to have more empathic skills and as a result more likely to find it easier to care for others.

When considering the potential positive impact on children with adverse childhood experiences, contact with dogs can be hugely beneficial. To start with we have the expected learning about responsibility, thinking about the dog’s life from its perspective. For instance, the importance of being fed on time, what it must be like if it wasn’t fed on time and as a result didn’t know whether it was going to get fed at all. Basic animal care such as worming, vaccinations and of course exercise.

However, the real benefit comes from having someone explain the emotional reactions and expressions from the dog. Relaying how it’s feeling, its desires and fears, its wishes, and expectations. Subsequently, suddenly you are in an environment that by its very nature is constantly asking you to consider the welfare of something else. This is possibly the first time a child has been asked to consider and look after something other than itself. The promotion of empathy, learning about understanding and most significantly ‘trust and love’.

Let’s be clear, in our environment the children who are sent to us for help with adverse childhood experiences have not experienced love from their birth parents. We can dress it up as best we can but the reality is they haven’t. Or even worse, they’ve been exposed to a perverse version of love that takes them down a different level of understanding about love all together. They suffer from emotional poverty and often financial poverty too. Whilst financial poverty brings hardship, it is the emotional poverty that does the psychological damage.

Therefore, when a child begins to experience the unconditional affection of an animal, this could be the first time they have experienced this at all. For that reason, having a skilled counsellor to mediate and explain what’s happening and if necessary, translate the body gestures of the animal is both significant and impactful in its outcome. Suddenly, the child is experiencing the surge of chemicals and hormones that those of us with normal developmental pathways have come to take for granted.

Oxytocin, dopamine, and serotonin are referred to as our ‘happy hormones’. For example, when you are attracted to another person your brain releases dopamine, your serotonin levels increase, and oxytocin is produced. This causes you to feel a surge of positive emotions. This is the mechanism in which bonding occurs. Human and animal studies on the effects of oxytocin on the mother and child bond have found that mothers with higher levels of oxytocin are more likely to engage in affectionate parenting behaviours

including.

- Frequent checking on baby
- Affectionate touch
- Singing or speaking to baby in a certain way
- Grooming and bathing behaviours. (Some researchers suggest that babies who receive this type of parenting experience a boost of oxytocin that makes them seek more contact with their mother, further strengthening their bond. These effects aren't limited to biological mothers. Researchers in one 2014 study, found that oxytocin has a similar effect in foster mothers and adoptive parents.)
- The stimulation of oxytocin can help a person relax, build trust and overall psychological stability". (Source: Google 'what is the love hormone called?').

It is my hypothesis that these feelings created by a surge in hormonal activity, have the capacity to be cross-gender and cross-species. There is little question that powerful bonds between animals and humans exist. It is likely this is the same chemical process going on. Within a therapeutic environment we make the most of this by creating the opportunity for these processes to happen, in this example by arranging regular contact with a litter of puppies.

Circumstances can affect the level of bonding. Within the context of running a large stable yard with many horses, often over thirty at a time, when a young horse experiences an injury and requires both veterinary and ongoing treatment, these horses regularly develop a bond with the human who treats and helps them recover from injury.

This can also be a mutual arrangement. One incident that springs to my mind was when we had a newborn foal that had developed a form of septicaemia and was quite poorly. Before we knew how bad this was, we looked for her in the field. Her mother was at the gate looking for us, but the foal was nowhere to be seen. It was dusk and time was getting critical as I scanned the paddock looking for a sign. I called her name and a squeak and a whinney came from the dark corner of the field shelter as she stepped forward into the light. That moment of great vulnerability and seeking our rescue resulted in a surge of emotions that created a bond between us that is far more powerful than with any other horse of her generation, before or since. She recovered with the use of large amounts of antibiotics injected on a regular basis. They usually die!

I feel it is the same for children in our care, the greater the level of vulnerability coupled with the greater level of responsiveness to adult support equals the greater the quality of the relationship and subsequently the more likelihood of a better outcome.

In respect of adults suffering post-traumatic stress disorder, their life experiences have perhaps in many cases brought them to the point where trust and love have been questioned. Working with animals can if you like, reset, or refresh the programme, stimulating feelings and emotions going back to happier times.

The value of a therapeutic environment is the opportunity to create a rebalancing of the subject's body chemistry significantly reducing adrenalin and stimulating positive impacting hormones.

Over the years one of the most misunderstood and underappreciated factors in children's behaviour is the over production of adrenaline because of living in high-risk environments. This has often been misdiagnosed as ADHD but what was needed was for the child to be removed from the source of the high-risk environment. I can say this with experience as I think we are one of the only organisations to have a child who was previously diagnosed with ADHD, to have this diagnosis reassessed and removed. The significance of this was not missed by our inspector who was 'professionally amazed'.

A reduction in adrenaline is also a relevant factor when helping adults suffering from PTSD. In this situation it can be a case of replacing it with appropriate levels of controlled stress. Dr Bruce Perry stated that unpredictable and out of control stress = increased vulnerability whereas practicable controlled stress = increased resilience. Therefore, the use of stressful activities in a controlled way, for instance sport, have a huge part to play in a recovery programme and increasing resilience.

This reduction of adrenaline is balanced by the stimulation of, as they are called, 'happy hormones' and the stimulus of mirror neurones as discussed above. We are vessels of chemical reactions however, these need to be activated at the right time and in the right way during childhood development, if we want well balanced human beings.

When it all goes wrong the opportunity to rebalance is not only extremely valuable but to be grasped.

One of the ways we help to reduce the impact of adrenaline and calm everything down is with the use of horses.

The impact of using horses in a therapeutic way has been hugely significant over the years and is beneficial at every level.

- Simply having access to horses to pet and stroke.
- Grooming and general horse care.
- Fully involved in all yard duties and observing veterinary care and treatment.
- Learning to ride.
- Riding as a work activity to maintain the horses exercise programme.
- Learning about horse psychology, join up and training techniques.
- Teaching and instructing others.



At the gateway to our stable yard is a sign “Please remain calm and quiet at all times.” Whilst I’m not a fan of overt signage unless it is necessary, we found this to be a constant and subtle reminder of the expectations when around horses.

As said above, for some children just having access to and being around horses for petting and stroking, can have a hugely calming effect. Horses are very quick to feel anxiety or fear, usually through measuring the heart rate of those around them, a survival skill to avoid predation. In this case those around them aren’t other horses on the Great Plains but our children.

Remaining calm and by doing so keeping your heart rate down, is a skill we teach students from the start. If the horse feels anxiety, it can change their behaviour and they become spooked. Something everyone wants to avoid. The desire to have horse contact time results in a strong motivation to “keep calm and carry on”. The effect is a strong culture of remaining calm.

This technique is also used to help children calm down when in a crisis and their heart rate is accelerating, as children will also try to match their heart rate with yours. Simply by being next to someone who can remain calm and regulate their heart rate, results in the child’s heart rate trying to synchronise with that person. The result is they calm down.

In Tom Shadyac’s documentary film ‘I AM’, he puts forward the hypothesis (which the film demonstrates can be backed up scientifically) that human beings have a field of electrical energy surrounding them, similar to that of the magnetic field surrounding the earth. That this energy can be detected by other organic beings.

As a horse trainer it has been my long held belief that horses can detect your thoughts and feelings as you approach them. I used to think this was because of detecting the rate of your heartbeat. However, my thoughts had gone further than this in that I used to tell people that horses could identify if you were thinking positive or negative thoughts. This belief has done much to help children attempt to control their emotions and remain calm and positive, not just in their being but in their thinking also.

The relatively new information demonstrated in ‘I AM’ explains how this is possible. More so, if it is possible for horses to detect how and what you are thinking, it is not a huge jump to understand children in distress with increased senses and heightened alert can also.

As with our earlier example of access to dogs there is also a hormonal effect.

The effect gradually intensifies when involved in grooming and general horse care. When you pet an animal, it is usually quite clear it is to fulfil your needs not that of the animal. Being involved in grooming and general horse care involves the process of thinking about the welfare of the horse and subsequently promoting the stimulation of mirror neurones and promoting empathy.

The next level is to be fully involved in stable yard duties, which will include the observing and even assisting in veterinary treatment as situations will occur that require the services of a qualified vet. This promotes understanding, knowledge and increases skill sets as well as communication skills.

Learning to ride also increases skill sets which improve balance, suppleness, dexterity, and physical fitness. In addition, it increases the relationship with the horse as, by definition, there are now shared experiences with the horse.



In our setting, when students are at an advanced level of competence, the focus of their riding skills shifts from increasing their skills to also helping horses in work with their exercise programme. This again increases students’ skill sets to another level, preparing them for a possible working environment with horses and continues to promote empathy and the stimulation of mirror neurones.

Another life lesson learned through horses is that of group dynamics and the management of groups. Group dynamics isn’t something unique to the human world, it is also an important factor in running a large stable yard when considering the horses. However, it does also reflect human behaviour and is a way we can demonstrate relatable issues.

There are very clear types of horses with varying behaviours and personalities. To demonstrate let us look at three types:

- Hunters
- Point to pointers
- Racehorses.

Hunters are strong well-built animals bred for their stamina and ability to go cross country for hours at a time. They are the ‘Landrover Defenders’ of the horse world.

Point to pointers are built for speed but to be eligible to enter races they must have been hunting to qualify to enter races. They need the ability to go across country but are more finely built than hunters for their speed. They are the ‘Range Rover Sports’ of the horse world.

Racehorses are finely bred animals, built for speed and short bursts of energy. These are your ‘formula one cars’ of the horse world.

If you have a field with two hunters the dominant factor is the prevalence of the ability to go cross country 2:0.

Add two point to pointers and this factor doesn't change, even though they have the potential to race 4:0.

Add two racehorses and the dominant factor in the group remains the ability to go cross country 4:2.

Take out one Hunter and it becomes a field of racehorses. By changing one element of the dynamic the focus of the whole group moves to racing 4-1 because the racing element becomes dominant, overtaking the previous dominant factor of hunting.

This example demonstrates how members of a group within a dynamic only need to shift their position slightly as a result of a minor change to have a big impact on the group as a whole.

Understanding how groups develop their own personalities and the shifting power base within, is a valuable life lesson.

This is of course how man has bred and wishes to use these animals however these factors are evident in their personalities also.

One of the most important factors when running a large equine facility is the need to turn horses out into the paddocks and fields, to graze the grass and to stretch their legs and have a run around.

Understanding the horses' personalities is a potential life and death situation. Horses can be bullies; they can overtly dominate and even kill weaker horses. I know this from personal experience, if you get the group dynamic wrong it only takes one well-placed kick to injure a horse in a life threatening or even fatal way. This is particularly important if one is new to the group. Putting them close to become familiar with each other is very important prior to letting them run together. This process requires some thought and consideration. It is important to think about the issues from the horse's perspective. The ability to have these kinds of discussions with children and young people is very valuable in terms of getting those mirror neurones stimulated. This in turn builds empathic skills.

Learning about horse psychology and join up techniques really underpins our work from the beginning in a subtle way. It begins with how to approach a horse and continues throughout everything we do. The term 'intelligent horsemanship' really describes the most effective process of horsemanship, thinking things through as opposed to just doing it without considering it from the horse's perspective.

For those students who embrace equine life, learning the theory behind these techniques has a dramatic effect. Being involved in completing join up with a horse has the most profound effect as it is so clear the horse puts its trust in you completely, in an entirely voluntary way. This demonstration of trust really helps students to feel completely trustworthy and competent in a very mature grown-up way.

If students can then go on to help other students at the start of this process, the concept of being trustworthy with horses transfers to being trustworthy with humans. It is this transfer that we are trying to engineer from the start and can happen at different levels in different ways but the whole point is to help students improve their relationship building skills with people.

Join up and follow up training.

It's 2pm and the school day has been going well. I find myself faced with an angry adolescent with his adrenalin pumping and looking for confrontation. He is being confronted with things he doesn't understand and angry at having to deal with them. How I handle this situation will have a bearing on not only on the reaction of the pupils watching but also more significantly on the rest of his life. I use my body gestures to demonstrate that 'there is no fear here mate, whatever you want to throw at me I can deal with, you're better off going about your business and do what I've asked you to do'. I maintain that position for some time watching us go around in circles seeing whose patience will break first. Over a brief amount of time that felt like forever I slowly saw him come to terms with his immediate environment where he could see the boundaries were not negotiable, they were solid and he began to slowly move towards me anxiously, could he renegotiate this situation? I find without thinking, just doing, my body gestures react and I soften my tone of voice, I reduce the harder non- negotiable posture I've been adopting and enter negotiation with him. It's my way or no way, I'm the leader here, you follow me, that's how it works, if not go someplace else, you'll come back when you're ready. This adolescent continues to test me out a couple of times but prefers the feeling of being accepted and wants to follow me, now with the knowledge I understand him.

The standoff is over and I have a working arrangement that suits everyone and he will benefit from this for the rest of his life. The group of students that have been watching this situation give a round of applause as I stroke his mane and put a head collar on this young horse. Yes, didn't I say he's a horse and I'm in the round pen at Toy Top Farm (our outstanding school) and I've just completed a join-up session with a young horse that has hardly been handled and is at the start of his learning career. This is not a book about horses, it's about children but the above is a good example of how we can learn from the environment around us and looking at other animals like horses we can begin to understand what we have in common. Children are exactly that, they are children. They are small (if not in stature) vulnerable, inexperienced; they are unsure (sometimes frightened of the world around them) and reactive to their immediate environment. As is the horse above. Those with traumatised backgrounds have learnt all kinds of avoidance and survival strategies and with this in mind have adrenaline pumping through their veins at a level that negatively affects them even when they are in a relaxed state.

With their limited understanding they are looking for grownups, care givers, parents, teachers to guide them, nurture them, mould them and prepare them for the world around them and the life they are to lead. This may seem idealistic, particularly if you work with children in the care of the local authority where your daily challenges have eroded that understanding. Where the management of your work has become so far removed from the task in hand that you've been led to believe your job is to tolerate whatever comes your way and complete the correct procedures until it's time to go home. It's not, you are looking after children that need all of the above and every piece of legislation that has been drafted is designed to do that as best as possible, the question is about how it has been interpreted and how has that interpretation affected your practice.

So, what is join up and follow up training and why is it relevant to working with children or adults?

In the late 1990s I was growing a fledgling organisation. We were looking after and managing some very difficult children, one was displaying what we call 'inappropriate attention-seeking behaviour'.

This behaviour would often become so difficult it could result in the child having to be held for his safety or

that of those around him. The number of staff that were confident to do this was small. If the child was to remain with us, I had to find a way we could manage him without the need for physical intervention.

Many ideas of good practise were to ignore negative behaviours however, this could at best be perceived as overlooking the behaviour or failing to manage it. At worst it could inflame or exasperate the behaviour. In my quest for finding a solution I came across something that would change my life and that of many around me. It was the work of the famous horseman Monty Roberts.

I first became aware of Monty Roberts (Horse Sense for People) in a BBC QED documentary first shown around this time. He was brought to the UK by Her Majesty the Queen in 1989 to demonstrate his horsemanship techniques to the Household Cavalry and the Royal Household. Watching this documentary on how he pushed the horses away and then brought them back to him on his terms resonated with me and I felt this process articulated the difference between overlooking and ignoring negative behaviour in a positive way which allowed the subject back if the behaviour turned to positive.

It was this concept that inspired a method of practise that we were to call 'positive ignoring' and had an immediate positive effect on the child mentioned above. Many years later I was to learn that as well as working with horses Monty was a very successful foster parent and used the techniques I had developed independently, with great success on people. His book, 'Horse sense for people' is probably the most inspiring and informative book I have read in my long career.

His story is remarkable and can be read in many of his books. For the purpose of this book, I will summarise.

Monty's parents ran a riding school in California. His mother was of First Nation descent. His father a hard conventional horseman who was also involved in the local Rodeo. This would also include a wild horse race where 'wild' horses were released into an arena. The competition was a race for the first team of men who could restrain the wild horse and put a rider on its back. At the end of the rodeo all the wild horses that had been rounded up for the rodeo were sent off to slaughter.

Monty was distressed at this whole process and wanted to find a way to stop the slaughter. He realised at a very young age that if he could break these horses in and make them riding horses, he would raise their value beyond meat prices and they could be sold for riding. 'Breaking horses', in a conventional way takes approximately six weeks. He needed to find a way of doing it in 20 minutes, if he had any chance to get through the number of horses involved, in the time before slaughter. These are highly commendable aims for anyone never mind a young boy 14 years of age.

As part of his research, he went into the mountains, lived, and observed the herd of wild mustang horses. He noticed that the herd leader was not the stallion as you would most likely think. It was a matriarchal mare with her youngsters at different ages and stages.

He also observed that when an adolescent youngster became challenging the mare pushed him away, using her body gestures, to the outer edge of the herd. The adolescent was by nature of his position in the herd, on the outer edges and therefore more vulnerable to predation. Being on your own, on the edge of the herd or group is a very scary place to be. He would trot around the edge of the herd looking for a way back into the safe ground of the centre, closer to the matriarchal mare. After time on the edge, he would be allowed back in, providing he would continue to be submissive. If he showed signs of challenging behaviour, he would be returned to the outer edge again and the process started over until the next time he would indicate he was ready to conform and subsequently be allowed back in.

During this process, on each and every occasion, the body gestures of the horses were the same. The mare would square up to him, straight on, showing no sign of weakness. The adolescent horse would circle the herd and during this process, four things would happen that would indicate submissive behaviour.

- The adolescent horse would have its inner ear focused on the mare in the centre and the other scanning for danger.
- His head would begin to bob up and down and eventually sniff the ground as he trotted around.
- He would begin to lick and chew.
- The diameter of the circles he was trotting around eventually became smaller and smaller.

At this point the mare would always respond in the same way.

- She would remain facing him square on until the signs of submissive behaviour were thought to be genuine.
- At that point she would begin to turn side on and allow him to join her. 'Join up'.
- She would then move away dropping her shoulder indicating it was alright for him to follow. 'Follow up'.
- If the adolescent didn't follow on submissively, she would send him away again and the process resumed until he was allowed back and this time continued to follow her in a submissive way without any challenge.

Within the account above there are elements which are relatable to human behaviour also. Let's think about the following examples of human behaviour and how they are similar in our social interactions.

- How many times in a young couple's relationship has the first given the other an ultimatum to comply with the first's terms or break the relationship? The other tests this, the first moves away indicating they are going to break the relationship and the other then runs after agreeing to comply with the first's terms.
- A purchaser of a car in a sale room tries to negotiate a price, the seller says they can't meet the request, the purchaser gets up to leave and the seller then says ok!
- Perhaps this one is the most relatable and relevant. How many times has a young mother dealing with a toddler tantrum told the child to go away and not come back until they behave better? How many times has the toddler then realised, life without Mam is not good at all and changes their behaviour to comply with the request?

The above example is perhaps more relevant as many of the children referred to our service appeared stuck in this toddler stage, where the parent never enforced the boundaries but always followed by giving in to the child and pacifying them.

Here we have the join up process inverted as the child becomes the leader. They subsequently learned that toddler tantrums get you your own way. Keep having tantrums, you keep getting what you want! Breaking this misconception is usually a hard lesson but one of the most important to learn. It is vital to learn this lesson if you want to have a mutual relationship with anyone in life e.g., partner, colleagues, employers.

The above focuses on the role of the leader but there are relatable behaviours in the submissive gestures also. Think about these examples.

- The nodding of the head is the same as bowing the head in Far Eastern cultures, indicating no threat or submissive behaviour.
- How many times have you had another driver give way at a junction and your response was to bow your head and importantly tighten your lips as a thank you. Licking and chewing.

In fact, I found the whole process to be similar in that, as a carer or teacher we often feel we are going around in circles giving a firm stance, clear body gestures, not allowing the subject to see any weakness in our resolve. When enforcing and maintaining the boundaries we discovered that rather than just ignoring unacceptable behaviour, 'giving the cold shoulder of disapproval' with a clear road back to approval and a promise of a positive interaction was the most important point, as long as the subject agreed to your terms

completely and utterly. It is when nuances are negotiated the process is lost and it is only a matter of time before you will be back at the start. To summarise, when dealing with a difficult situation consider using the following.

- Use body gestures to indicate firm resolve and disapproval at the situation.
- Indicate you will only reengage when the situation improves.
- When possible, turn and walk away.
- Look out for possible signs of wanting to renegotiate and reengage.
- If signs are evident, indicate possible ways to reengage positively.
- Reengage positively. (Join up.)
- If complete compliance is not completely forthcoming go back to stage one.
- If complete compliance is forthcoming engage and provide ways to demonstrate ongoing compliance. (Follow up.)
- This would be join up and follow up in a human context.

I had the greatest pleasure of spending a day with Monty discussing his techniques. He told me he had been asked to demonstrate these to the police in a South American country. At the time Police were shooting 3,000 people a year. The year following his intervention this dropped to zero. Monty is one of the very few people in the world whom you know on meeting is a very special human being.

A good simple example to consider was when we had a child disengaging. He was wandering around the farmyard being abusive. The carer was following him around trying to engage him. What the carer hadn't realised is the child had successfully used the join up technique on him and he was undertaking follow up beautifully but for all the wrong reasons. This was a negative interaction with the child who was having his negative behaviour reinforced.

I approached them both and the carer explained that the child had stated he was bored and was going to run away and that he was trying to encourage him not to do so. I turned to the child and said "your behaviour is your responsibility, if you run away, you won't be allowed back here for a significant period of time. The horses are in the barn and need our attention if you want to help you can, but no one is going to chase after you!"

I then turned and walked away and asked the carer to join me. He reluctantly did so as he felt he was neglecting his duty of care to ensure the child's safety. Within ten minutes the child had brought himself into the barn and was grooming a pony. He had returned himself, the power behind that is so much more significant than if he had been brought back.

In my experience it is indeed this inverted join up and follow up I see happening so many times as carers feel they are duty bound to follow children. The outcome is we can very quickly train children to be dysfunctional as their negative behaviour is constantly reinforced.

Monty Robert's was able to articulate the issue very clearly indeed. "All children need a PICNIC! "

- Positive Immediate Consequences
- Negative Immediate Consequences

When training any animal and children are just complicated animals, you must ensure they receive Positive Immediate Consequences for positive behaviour and Negative Immediate Consequences for negative behaviour. In the world of care and education we often forget this and it is very easy for the circumstances to result in this being inverted and a child receiving positive consequences for negative behaviour.

I was once asked to visit a special school to advise them on how to improve their environment. As part of their management plan, they had created small rooms like booths, where disruptive children were taken if they needed to be held or restrained. It was very easy for me to identify that those children who were disruptive received one to one attention in a cosy little room away from the chaos they had created. This was not a negative consequence; it was a positive consequence for negative behaviour. The children whose behaviour was positive were often overlooked as the teacher was so occupied dealing with the negative behaviour of the others. The result was children quickly learned that if they want positive attention from teachers the only way to achieve this was to be disruptive. The unintended consequence was they were systematically training their children to be disruptive by giving positive consequences for negative behaviour.

The negative consequences can be as subtle as turning away and walking away. Positive ignoring.

The positive consequences are as subtle as your time, attention, and a hand on the shoulder. Positive attention.

Where it often goes wrong is when adults think what a negative consequence to them may be is the same for the child but this is not always the case. Understanding the psychology and the way our people think and interpret the world around them is hugely important. What's the motivation, what's driving the behaviour? How to manage this?

These issues are important from the context of creating a therapeutic environment as you can't achieve this without order. The disorder of others impacts on everyone. Get this aspect wrong and the therapeutic environment is eroded. Get the culture right and the therapeutic environment is promoted.

As far as working with horses is concerned, Monty developed his join up and follow up process and was able to train large numbers of horses to be riding horses and avoid the slaughterhouse. He recreated this process in a round pen and was able to start a horse's training and put a rider on its back in 20 minutes.

These techniques are now used across the world with huge impact. Whilst there are still many horse people who don't like to change their ways, Monty's methods are becoming increasingly popular and successful.

They are the foundation to everything we have done with our horses and I think it gets the most from your horse as it wants to do its best for you. We have been lucky enough to breed many winning racehorses from many different mares, a result which is remarkable considering how relatively small our racing interests are.

We have also helped many behavioural problem horses rebuild their careers and go on to be successful riding horses. The most obvious impact is on the homebred horses who have only known careful intelligent horsemanship, training, and handling. They are much gentler and have significantly better relationships with the humans around them.

The process of undertaking join up and follow up techniques with horses in a round pen is effective for the horses and is a method of demonstrating relatable issues to humans.



Managing challenging behaviour

“In nature there are neither rewards or punishments, there are consequences”.

Robert G Ingersoll, political leader and orator.

The amazing thing about getting older is the ability to reflect over such a long time, in my case from the 1970's onwards. I have some powerful memories of the 1960's but my sense of awareness and the world around me began in the 1970's. I became a teenager in the 1970's, an adult in the 1980's and a parent in 1990's.

Throughout this time, I have always been aware of the shifting sands of public opinion, having a huge interest in human behaviour and an awareness of societal changes.

The world I grew up in is hardly recognisable today. For most people there have been huge improvements in most aspects of our lives, including tolerance, diversity, technology, and general living standards. There are, however, areas we would be wise to consider where changes have not had as positive an impact on society as we would have hoped for.

Progressive educational ideals and a general distancing from natural emotional responses to pre-programmed technical responses, have led us to a point where many skills have been forgotten. In a world where these need to be carefully considered, there is a lack of use or respect, for what had previously been regarded as straightforward common sense. Everyone is so nice to each other we have forgotten how to challenge negative or even harmful behaviour when it comes our way.

It has been my long held view, that how we bring up our children has some serious shortfalls. Most children

growing up, can overcome these shortfalls and for many they may be irrelevant. My concern is for the section of society for whom they are incredibly important and in fact, set the direction of their development for the rest of their lives.

The children in our care come from lives and places where people are not always nice to each other. These are places full of conflicts and tensions that often manifest themselves in challenging, violent, and sometimes abusive behaviour.

As they have grown up, the children have not had suitable role models to follow. Often the opposite is evident, in that negative behaviour has imprinted on their psychology resulting in a negative way of living and being.

The other aspect is that early year's development, which is the difficult process of helping children through what is often affectionately known as 'the terrible two's', is not always successful.

This is the time the child is becoming aware of the world around them, their relationships with others and the concept that their behaviours have an impact on their caregivers. This is the time caregivers become familiar with toddler tantrums, which can be distressing and difficult to overcome. But overcome they must if the child is to develop appropriately formed relationships and understand those relationships going forward.

Having run Pear Tree from its conception to date and subsequently assessing and monitoring all of the children over the years, it is very clear to see, when it comes to challenging behaviour, they have not gone through this 'terrible two's' "part of their development. The correct processes are not embedded into their minds, as it would be in most if not all, positive functioning developmental pathways. In many ways they are still in that stage where the toddler tantrums have in fact become the normal embedded and established, model of behaviour.

In my contact with many different parents, schools, and agencies, I see the knowledge gap widen and the following simple formula which helps all children, is in my view all but lost.

- Positive consequences for positive behaviour.
- Negative consequences for negative behaviour.

The sooner consequences to positive or negative behaviour are imposed the better. The ideal is that they are immediate, and part of the automatic reactions and responses given by those responsible at the time.

It is hugely worrying that this simple formula is not adhered to. In many examples that can be demonstrated, positive consequences are given for negative behaviour and negative consequences are given for positive behaviour. Regretfully, in many cases we are systematically training often the most vulnerable young people, to be dysfunctional with devastating effects.

In this chapter I hope to be able to demonstrate this point and articulate how in my view this should be addressed.

Evidence

Example 1/Residential Home environment.

Through my own observations going back many years, it is clear children in a residential setting try their hardest to bring you into their world and recreate the environment they were familiar with prior to coming into our care. This must always be challenged.

Quite often the challenging or violent abuse will result in the child having to be held to keep themselves and the carers safe. The use of restraint techniques is full of dangers. The obvious ones, in terms of the physical protocols, are covered at length in training. The ones I am concerned about are around the process of learned behaviour. If the immediate consequence of negative behaviour is in any way perceived to be positive, this will only result in the behaviour being reinforced and subsequently promoted.

Being restrained, to any well-adjusted adult, may not be what is normally considered a positive experience. If, however, you are a confused child and this experience is the only thing that brings you into close physical contact with someone who cares for you, where it ultimately ends in a calming sense of security, the result is a positive consequence to negative behaviour.

Carers familiar with this concept who ensure the techniques are followed to avoid these pitfalls, may ultimately give the child who is compliant a reassuring cuddle. This is also a positive consequence for negative behaviour. The child will simply learn how to manage the stages in the middle.

Any positive reinforcement must only be after the child has done something positive. There must be a sufficient gap of time between the negative behaviour, i.e., the restraint and the positive behaviour from the child. Only then will the child clearly connect the positive reinforcement to the positive behaviour and not the negative behaviour.

Ultimately one of the most common processes is when the above doesn't happen. The child has a tantrum, gets held for support, stops the tantrum, cries through released stress, and gets a very nice supportive cuddle. Result negative behaviour promoted.

Example 2/ School environment.

On one occasion I was asked to visit a special school in a very deprived area. The invitation was to see if I could help improve their environment. I visited the school to find it hidden away behind industrial units surrounded by secure fencing.

The school was divided into two parts, primary and secondary. I was asked to spend time with the primary children on the morning and the secondary children in the afternoon.

The primary school was chaotic. Children in classes but many were not focused or engaged in lessons. At various points down the main corridor were little booths with carpeted walls, dark interiors, and no natural light. These were the 'time out' booths. Children who were presenting challenging behaviour were taken there to be held, or one to one time with the teacher to manage their negative behaviour.

During my observation it was clear that the children who were not wanting to engage in lessons or were attention needing, were acting out. The result was they needed to be held. At this point they were taken to these 'time out' booths to be restrained. This brought about immediate consequences for the child. They didn't have to engage in lessons, they got the teachers full one to one attention and physical contact from the teachers in a quiet calm soft environment. Whilst I couldn't observe, I would be confident this process

ended with a cuddle. Consequence - the negative behaviour was systematically reinforced.

The children who were wanting to engage in lessons had their time disrupted. They saw the disruptive child get the teachers full attention and be taken to the nicest, calmest place in the school. Whilst I was only there a morning, it was clear that it wouldn't be long before the positive engaging child would learn that the only way to get the teachers attention would be to be disruptive. Consequence- negative behaviour became reinforced and the culture of the school directed by the most disruptive pupils. They had succeeded in taking the teachers into their world.

Being disruptive had become the norm. Children in the primary school were prepared for their time in the secondary school, as this pattern was evident there also.

At the end of the day, I was asked what my thoughts were. The hard working resilient teachers who have learned to put up with so much disruption had lost sight of what was normal. I explained that if they were wanting their students to be prepared for a life of learning and working, they were not being prepared at all. If they were wanting to prepare them for a life of institutional living, often found in prison then their system was doing well.

Several years later following the presentation of this information in a staff training exercise, a relatively new member of staff came up to me to explain her contribution to my story. She had been invited to this school for an interview. On arrival, a group of children were exiting the building on their way to McDonald's for lunch, as a reward. It was explained to her they were the disruptive group who had made progress during the week. She asked about those that were consistently positive and was told they don't get to go at all!

This reinforced my initial view and her experience highlighted that doing the right thing has impact on recruitment also. As a result of her experience, she declined a job offer at that school and made her way to us instead.

Example 3/ Outside Agency involvement.

A girl in one of our residential homes became so challenging that on one occasion she set fire to her bedroom curtains. This was the latest act in a run of dangerous behaviours that resulted in this incident being reported to the police, mainly due to the potential life threatening consequences not just to her, but to everyone else in the home.

The result of the judicial process was she was referred to the local Youth Offending Service (YOT).

It was here she was to undertake a process of structured work. This was on the run up to Christmas. One day she returned with a bag full of Christmas presents donated from a local charity. The girl handed them over to her carers and stated, "there is something wrong here! I've nearly burnt the house down and I've now got more presents than any other child here, from the people who were part of my punishment".

The fact she handed them over in the way she did, clearly demonstrated she had genuinely made progress and was aware of the positive consequences to her behaviour.

Example 4/ Outside Agency Involvement.

A different time and different town, a young man finishing a course of work with YOT. As a result of completing the work he was taken for a day out quad bike riding.

The consequences as seen by the other kids on the street is very simple. If you come from a deprived area where nothing of any good happens, the best way to overcome that is to offend, it will lead to a day out quad bike riding.

The judicial system is structured in a way of light touch gentle interactions, encouraging further interactions, which then increase in intensity as the level of involvement increases. A process adults would understand, but not children. If they want to avoid systematically encouraging juvenile delinquent behaviour, this should be reviewed. A behavioural approach would be to ensure there is no ambiguity between roles. The role of the police and subsequent judicial officers is to uphold and enforce the law. Those roles should command respect from the beginning and not overlap with the role of a social work agency looking to be friends.

I've been involved in promoting my business all my life but surely in this context the YOT don't want to promote their business in the way they appear too. If so, it is highly inappropriate.

The challenge here from our perspective is how we can minimise the negative impact of outside influences undermining our methodology. Quite simply it must be managed and in my experience most outside agencies respect our position, when it is made clear to them.

Children need security from the knowledge that the adults are in charge. As 'Britain's strictest headteacher Katherine Birbalsingh' says, "If the adults aren't in charge the bully's will be!"

This is very true, and I remember well from my childhood experiences. The question is how can we get the balance right? In my view the question is all about balance from different perspectives.

- Positive institutional systems.
- Individual professional protocols and standards.

From an organisational perspective, the positive institutional systems are in our regulatory expectations. All professional staff have a contract of employment setting out what is expected and what the consequences will be if a member of staff falls short of those expectations. These being in the form of disciplinary action at a level determined by the actions being scrutinised.

Whilst we don't usually have written contracts in place with children, we should have clear expectations and clear messages as to what the consequences will be if those expectations are not met.

Negative behaviours of any kind should be matched with immediate negative consequences. These can be:-

- Positive ignoring. Turning your back and walking away from the negative behaviour indicating your disappointment.
- Challenging the behaviour with a verbal dressing down.
- Issuing formal sanctions/natural consequences. These should be specific to the individual and something that is known to have an impact. This will be different for each child and should be known to all carers through the child's care plan. This can ultimately lead to the child being reported to the police and subsequent judicial action at varying levels.
- Having to take physical action to stop the behaviour.
- Any physical intervention once the child is calm, must be followed up with a structured detailed debrief of the incident in a firm and objective manner.

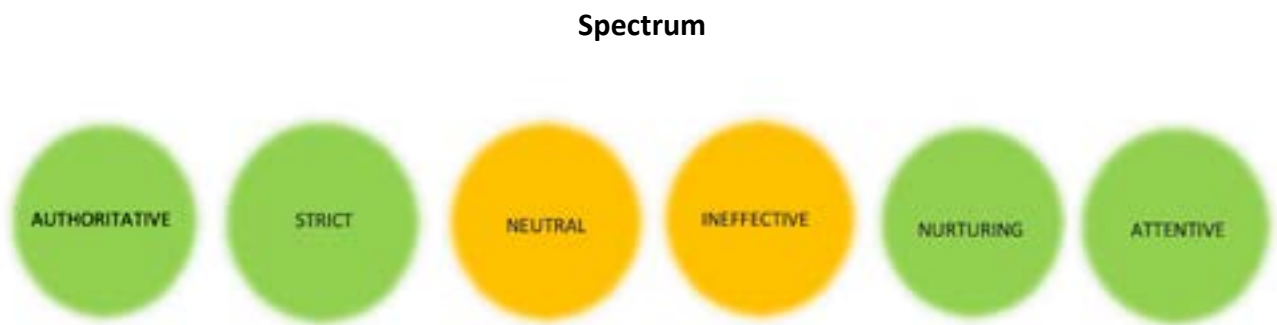
Positive behaviours of any kind should be matched with positive consequences. These can be:-

- Immediate verbal praise.
- Physical praise in the form of a reassuring hand on a shoulder.
- Highlighting to others the positive actions of an individual.
- Reward for positive behaviour. It is recommended this is not to be material or monetary but 1-2-1 time with a key individual.
- Recognition at an award ceremony.

The way individual professionals work is often personal to them, using their individual personality to best effect. It is my observation that when it comes to being effective against challenging behaviour there is a spectrum that can be considered.

Again, quoting Britain's strictest headteacher Katherine Birbalsingh, "Strict works if its wrapped in love".

Whilst I would like to address the issue of love in more detail, it is represented on this spectrum in the form of nurturing and attentiveness



Being strict makes children feel safe and secure but it only works if it is equally balanced with nurturing, attentiveness, and a feeling of being cared for or loved.

Likewise, if a child feels loved but knows they can walk all over you this is counterproductive as the child connects the affection with an abusive relationship. In this situation they are the abusive dynamic. It is never helpful if this is reinforced.

Those that are only able to be strict may be perceived as a bully, with all the negative connotations that go with that.

There is a saying which I support which is, "it takes a village to bring a child up". Meaning to raise a happy, healthy, positive child it takes interaction from all kinds of people with all types of skills in different contexts. In our context it takes a community.

Those that are unable to be strict, unable to uphold standards and don't like to get involved in challenging behaviour may have an ok relationship but don't offer too much of themselves. Their contribution is limited to 'taking care of and the passing of time'. Simple care work.

Whilst we need all kinds of personalities to contribute to our organisation, simple care work isn't going to help children with challenging behaviour, get better. If you are the kind of person described above, whilst your contribution may be limited it is important to recognise what others are doing and ensure you are able to support them in this process. It is very clear that to help children with challenging behaviour you need to

be strict, uphold standards and be very nurturing and attentive all at the same time.

I have often drawn an analogy with the training of puppies. Puppy dog training is often how I will refer to it. As one eminently respected K9 trainer once said to me.

“Dogs are like kids they need discipline and love, more love than discipline but don’t forget discipline.”

Love:

In 2022, The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care was published. This was written by Josh MacAlister. Within the report Josh makes it clear, in his view children in care must be loved. This is quite a bold statement let alone a challenge to live up to.

Love is a deep, emotional hormonal reaction brought about by certain unique factors falling into place at a certain time. A baby’s first cry as an example. Love is not something that can be ordered or put into someone’s job description.

Within residential care we are often tasked with taking children from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. The child that you are suddenly told to look after may have committed sexual offences against younger children, present challenging behaviour and want to fight you! This is not likely to create those emotional hormonal responses. If they did, I would be extremely concerned at a safeguarding level.

What I think Josh and his team were alluding to is that children in care deserve quality trained individuals, who can be nurturing and attentive and ensure all children feel loved. A very different expectation and one which I hugely support.

How can we make children feel loved?

- Be kind.
- Present a warm welcoming caring disposition.
- Use reassuring physical contact at the right time.
- Go out of your way to do something important.
- Know the child well, what they like and don’t like.
- Prepare special meals.
- Take an interest in their lives, go to parent’s evenings, support activities, see them do well.
- Spend quality time and enjoy shared experiences like days out and holidays.
- Always have something positive in the diary to look forward to.

How can we be strict and caring and get the balance right?

Once again we can rely on:-

- Systems and routines.
- Presence and personality

System and routines in Residential Homes:

- Adhere to the household routines, getting up and going to bed at the right time.
- Insist on a contribution to household chores and domestic tasks.
- Insist on a tidy bedroom to reduce the chaos from previous environments and lives. This helps to ensure they get used to living in order as opposed to chaos.

- Enforce house rules.
- Have high expectations of table manners at mealtimes.
- Insist on maintaining order. Have chairs put back under the table when leaving as an example.
- Insist on wearing the correct clothes for the day, school uniform or correct weather conditions.
- Be prepared to follow up negative behaviour with sanctions/natural consequences.

School classrooms:

- Greet students on arrival.
- Ensure students wear the correct uniform.
- Enter classroom and control the space - who sits where.
- Ensure lessons are interesting and at an appropriate level.
- Deliver lessons in a positive interesting and timely manner.
- Insist on full engagement.
- Lessons should have a beginning a middle and an end.
- End lessons in a structured way with all materials put away and classroom clean and tidy.
- Maintain order in between lessons.
- If there is disruptive behaviour, it is important that residential staff who are present for behavioural support, deal with this. If necessary, they should remove the child from the lesson to ensure the teacher or instructor, can remain in charge of the remaining group and focus on continuing the lesson with minimum disruption. This means the children being positive continue with their learning and receive the teachers’ full attention. (This you will note is the opposite to the example I gave earlier of my observations in a special school).
- Be prepared to follow negative behaviour up with formal sanctions.

Working environments:

- As above in every respect. Recognise that the working environments are your classroom and you need to control the space. With it being a working environment with relevant health and safety issues always present, maintaining order is much more important if not vital.

Presence and personality:

- Have good physical body posture. Never look submissive, fragile, or defensive. This will be perceived as weakness and undermine their confidence in you. They may consider you to be a victim, which they will relate to, but for the wrong reasons. It may encourage abusive or disruptive behaviour.
- Control the environment.
- Always look children in the eye, make a connection.
- Follow up with appropriate physical contact. A formal handshake is a lesson in social skills and not to be understated. Hand on shoulder gives a reassuring confidence.
- Speak firmly and with confidence.
- Focus on the positive.
- Give clear instructions. Avoid ambiguity.
- Avoid changing your mind. Sometimes it is better to follow through with a plan than to change it.
- Have positive body language and actions. Walk with a purpose when approaching difficulties. Don’t run!
- Be prepared to engage strongly and decisively. Avoid showing weakness or lack of confidence.
- Conclude your interaction at the end of an incident, or the end of a shift positively and give reassurance you will be back soon and you are looking forward to it. Talk of forthcoming events you will be part of.
- Don’t speak of relishing your time away and reluctance to return. It may be work to you and this may be normal working banter but it’s their lives you are dipping in and out of.
- Be prepared to follow up negative behaviour with sanctions.

Further analysis:

‘Britain’s strictest headmistress’ Katherine Birbal Singh has identified the same important principals I had over thirty years ago.

- Children feel safe and secure in an environment where the grownups are in control, they don’t feel safe if they are not.
- Children respond to a behaviouralist approach and thrive in that environment.
- Children with behavioural problems don’t improve unless they are in such an environment.
- The absence of a behaviouralist approach for children with behavioural problems, is likely to compound and increase their difficulties.
- Children are better prepared for the working world beyond education in such environments.

Whilst the methodology of their school may be different in many ways to take account of their cohort, their basic principles are ones we share.

In their school they had seven principles.

1. Adults must be in charge - if the teacher isn’t in charge the bully will be.
2. Gratitude needs to be taught and it starts with please and thank you.
3. Insist on high standards. Don’t make excuses, deal with the little things and the big things don’t happen.
4. Don’t indulge in a victim’s mentality. (So important from a therapeutic perspective as well as an educational one).
5. Bin smart phones, give children a digital detox. In our setting we would change that to control and monitor rather than bin.
6. Moral environment is crucial.
7. Strict works when wrapped in love.

One point Katherine makes is “60 years ago my grandmother knew this, and I didn’t have to explain it. Today I do!” Which is exactly the starting point of this chapter, my own observations over many years.

Behaviour Cultures.

Why the reference above to avoiding a victim mentality? As head of an organisation that seeks to help those who genuinely have been victimised, it is easy to see that once this happens presenting in a victim like way leads to further victimisation.

Two sociologists Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning have promoted the concept of three types of behaviour cultures that are prevalent in society. (Source, The Coddling of The American Mind.)

- Honour Culture - where people’s disagreements become an issue of honour and often resolved by violence. In days gone by some were challenged to a duel to restore their honour. Today honour killings often make the headlines along with gangland murders.
- Dignity Culture - where it is assumed people have the dignity to avoid being hurt or offended by adverse comments. The children’s rhyme “sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me” is an example of how children were prepared to deal with adversity and develop resilience within a dignity culture.
- Victim hood culture - this is where people present themselves as victims needing protection.

Victim hood culture has three main elements worthy of note.

- They regularly complain about relatively minor issues. (Although children who find this an effective strategy to gain notoriety and attention can develop allegations against people often unfounded, sometimes entirely malicious with increasing intensity and significance to those concerned.)
- They make these complaints to a third party rather than find ways to resolve the issues themselves.
- They put forward a presentation that they have been wrongly treated and are in need of protection.

Campbell and Manning express concern that in the world of complaints procedures and corporate bodies seeking to be involved in resolving conflict no matter how small, they undermine the need for individuals to find solutions to their own problems themselves.

‘The art of association’ is the term used where children, through undirected play learn and find ways of communication that help to resolve conflict. This it is said “is what democracy depends on’.

Perhaps we should consider this and ask ourselves when dealing with normal expected behaviour and interactions, if this kind of behaviour is prevalent, ask the person (child or adult) how they may consider resolving the issues themselves by way of communicating their feelings and concerns directly to the source of any conflict. In some circumstances this may be appropriate and not to quickly resort to a complaints form.

This automatic response is exactly what is described above and expressed as a concern and likely to support the victim hood beliefs.

Whilst complaints procedures are hugely important for the issues that require it, we must make sure we don’t undermine opportunities for people to learn how to resolve issues for themselves and the skills required to do so.

In respect of children in our homes the “house meeting” is hugely important in this process. Adults can help significantly in the way a meeting can be chaired to explore the issues and help children learn to express themselves appropriately and be included in the resolution process.

The way we can help people progress from a victim hood culture to a dignity culture is also important to consider. Initially my thoughts are by identifying the qualities mentioned above and highlighting them when they are prevalent, and it is appropriate to do so.

To address these in an intense way via focused work has the possibility of backfiring and promoting the victim hood belief. It may only reinforce the belief that they are victims and need protection. If not, why would you need the therapy offered? Therefore, addressing in a low intense way, possibly with a degree of humour where possible, is more likely to highlight the issues without reinforcing negative beliefs.

The focus however needs to be on treating people as you want them to be and believe they can be. Reminders of previous success, with the focus on a variety of activities that build confidence in many different ways. This has been the focus of our Curriculum throughout from its conception with the aim of building resilience increasing skill sets which increase confidence and self-belief as a foundation to further learning.

Concept Creep.

The Coddling of the American Mind. How good intentions and bad ideas are setting up a generation for

failure. Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt.

This is a remarkable book setting out how and why changes in thinking results in behaviour changes in different generations. In this they explain the concept of “Concept Creep”. This is when we start off with a well-intentioned good idea that is taken by different people to mean slightly different things and over time morphed into something completely different and far from the initial good intentions.

Behaviour models like PACE and PBS (Positive Behaviour Support) plans are particularly vulnerable to this process. As Head of Service, I have had to manage how our staff have had to deal with social workers and therapists that had particular views on the delivery of these models.

One social worker was adamant that her child should be looked after in line with the PACE model of care and had the misperception that this model required no negative consequences at all, no matter how challenging the behaviour. The misperception is that this is what the model promotes, however it is quite clear in the model’s narrative that implementing this model does not mean difficult and disruptive behaviour cannot be challenged. This is a general model of childcare and not only misinterpreted by this social worker but also, she missed the point that a specific context always takes precedence of a general context. The damage created by outside interference cannot be understated. For a child to thrive all the decision makers need to be on the same page and consistent in their delivery.

On another occasion a clinical team wanted the child they were involved in to be the subject of a PBS plan. On first glance, a “positive behaviour support” plan is something you would think should be fully supported. However, this kind of plan is specifically for children or young people with a learning disability and no capacity to learn. Within the plan as stated by “The Challenging Behaviour Foundation” it is quite clear that there should be no negative consequences, and if difficulties continue to “give them what they want.”

In this case the child didn’t have a learning difficulty and did have capacity to learn. In my view the kind of plan described can only be ethical if the child has a learning disability, no capacity to learn and in a clinical setting. The clinical setting is important as how can you possibly manage a group of children for whom some receive negative consequences for negative behaviour while others with PBS plans don’t. When dealing with a clinical team as in this case they were only interested in their patient and not at all interested in the impact of their ideas on others.

In my view it is hugely worrying that this kind of concept creep results in this kind of plan being misapplied and promoted as suitable for all children. This is institutional abuse and has the potential to do huge damage. The concept of only telling a child what they’ve done well, never challenging what they’ve done wrong is dangerous as it will undoubtedly have a long lasting impact. A bit like driving a car that can only turn left. Half your tools are missing. You’ll end up going round in circles and the final destination very much unknown.

Preparing the child for the road and not the road for the child is a good way of articulating this debate. Prepare children for the challenges of life and how to deal with them. How to deal with challenge and criticism along with alternative ways of doing things is all part of life’s natural processes. The alternative as with the PBS plan is to “prepare the road for the child”. This means change the environment to avoid any difficulties in the belief that kicking the can down the road until the issues are someone else’s problems is acceptable. In my view this is simply unethical.

In the end I had to instruct my team that under no circumstances should we agree to any PBS plan and if it was determined a necessity by a clinical team, it would also mean the need for an alternative placement. The importance of positive consequences for positive actions and negative consequences for negative

actions (both implemented as quickly as possible after the event) cannot be underestimated both for the child in question and those around watching in whatever context. Positive actions being rewarded helps others to understand what’s expected of them. Negative consequences for negative actions result in the same along with the clear message that justice will be done. This is what creates order.

If there had ever been any doubt about this it must have been overcome during the riots of the Summer of 2024.

During these riots often young people were of the misplaced belief that they could do what they wanted to whoever they targeted and they would not suffer any consequences. As one young man in Darlington was heard shouting when restrained by Police, “I’m only a child” (he was 18 years old) expecting this would result in the withdrawal of police action. He was totally mistaken as he along with fellow rioters went on to feel the full force of the law. This process wasn’t to be drawn out over months or years but immediate. Arrest imprisonment, put before a court and sentenced to time in jail in what was a totally unexpected swift decisive process. The result was immediate, the riots stopped.

As our Military experts have tried to explain many times. The use of a deterrent is not to react against an adversary in which case it may never be used. The purpose of a deterrent is to deter the adversary from his intended actions in the first place and as such is used every day.

Whilst this is the case in large scale strategic planning it is also hugely important on small scale individual interactions. It is important to learn this and not to be taught through misplaced concept creep the opposite, that there are no consequences for negative behaviour. All children growing into adults will learn this at some point in time regardless. However, it is the ethical responsibility of carers and teachers to help them understand this process as early as possible to avoid making mistakes and to live with order and harmony with those around them. This is the only ethical way; it is not ethical to allow young people to think otherwise as it quite simply sets them up to fail.

Understanding life and death

Learning about the birds and the bees

The above saying has been used for generations to mean explaining to children the facts around sex and reproduction. The fact this saying draws on an animal metaphor is no surprise as it is more comfortable to consider animal behaviour than it is to be direct.

Being direct is something I have found to be necessary whilst dealing with children who have experienced adverse childhood experiences. However, if it is more comfortable for most adults to consider this subject through animals, it is no surprise that many children can consider issues by observing animals that would most likely be avoided, if it wasn't for the need to work with animals.

During my career, I have found lambing time to be extremely valuable to these children in terms of experiencing life and death in all its forms. Lambing time is not just about pretty lambs playing in the fields, it is also about mortality, an issue I will cover in more depth later.

This story is real and I think it explains the benefits of working through issues by working with animals. Many years ago, we were working with the sheep 'dodding out'. This is where we clip the wool from around the female sheep's genitals to allow the tup, a male sheep, easy access during the mating process.

A visiting social worker came to watch and asked a young girl what we were doing. Without missing a beat, she replied, "We're clipping the shit off the sheep's fanny so the tup can get his willy in!"

From the mouths of babes!

This girl demonstrated that her knowledge of the mechanics of sexual reproduction was a matter of necessity and nothing to be concerned about. She was direct to say the least. If we don't plan and arrange the mating process, there will be no birthing process. This is a very normal part of farming life. The lack of intensity around this subject leads to effective learning and understanding in the direct context, which leads to a broader understanding of a more general context.

Greater knowledge and understanding of these issues can be a therapy in itself.

Dealing with death and mortality, learning through animals.

"Where there is livestock there is deadstock" this is a well-known farmer saying and represents only too well the stark realities of life, not only in the countryside but life in its basic holistic form. The fact we are all going to die is a reality few of us want to think about let alone deal with. Here is a bold statement which I cannot substantiate scientifically, it is none the less my observation.

"Children from rural backgrounds and to a lesser degree urban children brought up with animals are better prepared to meet life's challenges, in terms of relationships and loss including understanding mortality."



Harry the pig showing real signs of affection and care towards Sylvester the sheep in his last days.

Why do I think this?

Quite simply being brought up with animals, by its very nature, means children are going to experience all the emotions we talked about earlier, as a result of the relationships formed with animals. As animals have a shorter life expectancy than we do, it is inevitable that they will also experience the death of their animals and as a result build greater understanding and resilience from their experiences.

By way of contrast, within mainstream society it is rare to encounter death. Many go through life and if lucky enough to avoid the mortality of peers, the first time they encounter death is usually the death of a close elderly relative. This can often have a devastating impact as people are often so badly prepared for the event. If people require counselling and therapy for a predictable expected life event (the death of elderly relatives only) it is reasonable to conclude their life's journey has failed to prepare them physiologically for the life we are all expected to lead. Life's rich pattern as it were. This is, in my view, as a direct result of an artificial lifestyle created by urbanisation, where its inhabitants are protected if not shielded from the issues.

I can recall many years ago a colleague expressing his surprise that I had set up my then small children, for much heartache due to the number of animals they had. The predicted heartache was very true, they did have their hearts broken on many occasions. "Grief is the price you pay for love. It is better to have loved and lost than never have loved at all." This is all part of life's rich pattern and is to be embraced as it is all about preparing them for the world they are to encounter as adults. As a result, whilst I know when it is my turn to

die, my children will be upset but they are physiologically prepared for this and it won't impact on them in a damaging way. Life goes on and I'm sure they will continue to thrive when I am gone.

Having to deal with death in this way becomes expected. I can't count the number of animals that have literally died in my arms. Dogs, horses, and others. However, it is worth noting that out of all the numbers of horses I have owned and had to oversee their death, I can recall only five that died peacefully in their sleep. The others I have had to arrange their death by lethal injection at the hands of a vet or by being shot by a licensed slaughter man.

You could say they all should have been put down by a vet but it would be very wrong to assume that is always the best way. I can recall one horse that through no fault of anyone, managed to break its own leg.

The vet concluded that to be put down with lethal injection would risk huge amounts of pain as it collapsed to the ground. The only conclusion was it needed to be shot so it would be dead before it hit the ground.

Watching a horse take a bullet to the head is never a good experience. The best of those who can do such a task are the slaughter men who can walk up to the animal keeping their own heart rate calm and undeterred, talk calmly to the horse, put a gun to its head and pull the trigger as if they were giving it a stroke. That way the animal doesn't know what's happening and it has no indicators from those around it.

I recall on one occasion an older girl was devastated at the prospect of what was going to happen and wanted to come and say goodbye. I had to interject and stop her as it was no longer about her it was about the horse. The last thing the horse needed was a crying girl emotionally distressed saying goodbye when he didn't even know he was leaving himself.

Arranging the death of an animal in a sensitive and considered way is perhaps the most important thing we can do for that animal. It isn't good enough to provide a good life, we must ensure a good stress free death also. It is also a process, if done correctly that requires high levels of empathy and effective mirror neurones. What I can say in respect of animals not used for food, is that we have never killed something because it was no longer needed or in the way. Our way has always been to look after and respect our elderly animals and listen to them. When they have had enough, it's time to go.

Horses are complicated animals to keep alive. Colic is the most likely source of premature mortality. This can happen with the changing grass conditions as the seasons change. It can also be as simple as a change in the weather.

Within the context of creating a therapeutic environment, we must manage each incident on its own merits. Watching a horse being put down is not for the faint hearted and for emotionally damaged children, to be avoided. But the issue of death and its aftermath should not be avoided in any way. Choosing a suitable site to dig a hole to bury smaller animals is an important part of the process. Saying goodbye and paying respects for a life known and lost is all about life's rich pattern and making those cognitive connections we need, apply to our own situations.

Whilst some may say this is traumatic, we need to be clear about what trauma is. The word trauma needs to be kept for issues that would negatively impact on anyone. The unpredictable such as murder, violence and rape. Not the death of elderly relatives, animals or pets as this is expected. (Source; The Coddling of the American Mind.)

This concept is taken to another level with rural or farm children as farms produce animals to be used as food. One of the first lessons to learn is if it is an animal that is going to be killed to provide food, don't give it a name. The last thing you want to be thinking about when you eat your bacon sandwich is "was this Fred or Harry"?

You may recall I indicated earlier, when discussing pigs, that we have developed sophisticated coping strate-

gies to be able to deal with these kinds of issues. These coping strategies that allow us to partition parts of our thinking to be able to deal with the killing and eating of animals, can be taken too far as with most things in life.

It is easier to accept the realities of life, death and slaughter if we are convinced, they were humanly killed or they aren't intelligent enough to know what's happening. Or in the extreme, they don't matter.

'Cognitive distortion' is a psychological term which basically means twisted thinking. It's my view this process was designed to allow us to deal with the realities of survival, in modern terms it can be used to justify illegal or immoral actions. In its simpler form it allows us to bypass the realities of life and convince ourselves that there is no harm done.

In my view, it is more respectful to understand the realities and undertake them in a considered empathic way than it is to pretend to ourselves there isn't an issue. Therefore, knowing where your food comes from and what's involved in the process is hugely important.

Without going too 'Disney' and risk breaking into song, it is all about 'the circle of life'. Nature relies on animals dying to make way for new life. If we didn't slaughter full grown mature cattle, there would be no room for the spring calves.

This is a real-life balancing act as there simply wouldn't be enough grass to feed them. On one occasion during drought conditions, I have had to consider the humane destruction of livestock as there was simply no grass. Praying for rain became not just a reaction but a necessary strategy.

It is a stark reminder that a definitive area of land can only sustain a definitive number of livestock. If something goes wrong, without the option of importing food from elsewhere you risk a disaster. Fortunately, it started to rain, the grass grew and all was well again.

To understand death and mortality is to understand and appreciate life!

I've been close to death on several occasions. The closest was having dived to a depth of 130 feet, I ran out of oxygen at 65 feet on the return to the surface. This was no fault of my own and was the result of a culmination of circumstances.

I saw my son above me and had the real life decision whether to use his oxygen through his spare air valve and risk his life as well or to accept my fate and return to the depth I had come from. This had the very real risk we would both die.

I made the decision to assess the amount of oxygen available to him. If he had 1000lbs or more we both had enough to return to the surface. If less than 1000lbs it was an unacceptable risk and I would have to accept my fate.

I swam to him and grabbed his air gauge and saw it was on exactly 1000lbs. I used his air and thankfully we both made it to the surface.

By being so close to death I fully appreciated and understood life. A moment I will never forget and one that made me appreciate that the complexity of life's events is often beyond our comprehension and we must appreciate and make the most of every moment.



Tommy, aged 29, on his final day



Harry the pig and his new friend Bill the Shetland pony.

Summary.

- Be aware of the benefits of working with animals.
- How these benefits are so much more valuable if you have people who understand and work with animals.
- Have an understanding as to the hidden intelligence of animals.
- How we can appreciate the varying context of intelligence more if we assess behaviour without relying on language.
- How animals communicate.
- The value of different animals to a therapeutic process.
- The impact of interacting with animals on our hormones.
- The power of working with horses.
- Learning opportunities that come from working with animals.
- The importance of being strict wrapped in love.
- How managing behaviour maintains a positive environment.
- The dangers of "Concept Creep"
- How children learn through their experiences and how learning through animals can help them relate these experiences to their own.

Healthy Eating healthy lifestyles.

Within my career of nearly forty years, I have been able to observe a distinctive societal change. Thirty years ago, the children admitted to our service where underweight, had been denied dietary nourishment as well as emotional nourishment. Our first instincts were to nurture and feed up!

Thirty years on and the change is profound. Whilst they have still suffered emotional poverty many are overweight and have lacked any worthwhile exercise. The focus now is on moderating the intake of processed foods and sweets and getting them involved in exercise as well as educating them to make informed choices.

If you are serious about promoting health, you cannot avoid the need to look at diet. The digestive system is the starting point of all other systems and is intrinsically linked to those other systems' performance. Many health problems start at diet including our mental health.

Our taste is an acquired response to what we are familiar with. Most of the children who come our way have been encouraged by parents and everyone else involved to relish burgers, french fries and other takeaway meals. Let's not forget fizzy drinks full of sugar. The amount of research done on the damage excess fat and sugar can do to our body is beyond question. It is not for me to repeat the work which can be easily found elsewhere. It is however for the purpose of this book worth discussing that diet and food are an essential part of a therapeutic environment. Restricting a harmful diet, promoting healthy alternative options, and giving time for this new diet to become familiar.

It was once said to me you express love through food. A sentiment I believe to be very true. The time and passion that goes into quality meals versus the convenience of just providing something to eat proves this.

In our setting we can link this to the important factors mentioned above, in terms of growing and rearing our own food. Whilst fresh home-grown fruit and vegetables are initially rejected it is a regular surprise how quickly children adapt to this and even relish it. Likewise with meat produced on the farm, I initially thought this would meet with huge rejection. This was not the case, which reminds us how adaptable children are to what are very much new concepts. We must however give time for the unfamiliar to become familiar and not give in too quickly to the request for the familiar 'can we just have chips?'

The importance of knowing where food comes from is reinforced by recent studies in America. In June 2017, The Washington Post published an online poll of a representative sample of Americans. 7% of respondents (16 million people) believed that chocolate milk came from brown cows. The department of agriculture in the USA published that one in five (20%) didn't know where hamburger meat came from. In another study this rises to 40% for under twelves. Only 30% knew that cheese is made from milk. That means 70% didn't know.

Source - The Psychology of Stupidity. Jean-François Marmion.

Summary.

- Use food to express love and commitment.
- Make a real effort to expand the palate and therefore the culinary experiences of your students.
- Promote healthy eating and healthy lifestyles.
- Food is also a great way to open up a discussion about geography and cultures from around the world.

Activities that have a therapeutic benefit.

Providing a therapeutic environment is one thing but what are you going to do in that environment? What can you do that is also part of a therapeutic process?

Activities need to be considered for their value and evaluated for what they bring to the process. Some activities can be helpful others detrimental, perhaps considered in a three point plan.

- Harmful.
- Essential.
- Therapeutic.

For example, use of alcohol, drugs or substance misuse and watching pornography would be examples of harmful activities. Any activity that has an addictive quality or a negative psychological effect is also potentially harmful.

Undertaking education is essential along with learning life skills and employment skills. This also includes any sport and the arts.

Other activities can be described as 'therapeutic' as they are helping a person to overcome damage to themselves and to heal.

So, what are examples of therapeutic activities? Perhaps consider the following which are connected to what we have learned so far.

- A walk in the countryside and woodlands.
- Growing plants.
- Planting trees.
- Fishing
- Working with animals.
- Horse riding.

It is important to consider your cohort and how you can motivate them to be involved in something that has a direct or indirect benefit.

For example, a group of young people from straightforward backgrounds may not think there is much benefit from a walk in the woods. However, explain this includes a ride on a zip wire through the trees and this may be the motivation needed to get them into the woods and then they may benefit from the whole process. It may well be that experience which inspires them to want to visit the woods again for the purpose of the woods and not the zip wire.

If, however, your cohort have experienced adverse childhood experiences and you are trying to help them calm their adrenaline down to a more normal base line level, the zip wire could be entirely unhelpful. It could result in increased adrenaline and then behavioural difficulties as the children deal with the post-event anti-climax. This is an issue we have often found when visiting theme parks. It always seems a good idea at the time but often doesn't end well.

In addition, it may be that you would think the zip wire is a great activity and will be great fun and

enjoyment. The child however may be full of anxiety and very scared of what may happen. We learned early in our experiences never to say the activity today is a surprise. This may mean something fun to you but it could mean something extremely frightening to some or all your cohort, depending on their experiences. They need what we call ‘contemplation time’.

Prejudging their understanding of the conversation is also a potential mistake. Children are very good at copying adult behaviour and may give every indication they know what you’re talking about but, they haven’t a clue! (Remember the children who copied the dogs digging a hole!) What they imagine could be entirely wrong and scary.

Dr Graham Hill is one of this country’s top cops when it comes to child abuse and abductions. He was the lead officer in the Madeline McCann investigation. I had the great pleasure of attending one of his lectures, he explained that in his experience all ‘motivation’ can be attributed to three elements in life.

- Autonomy, the ability to come and go as you please.
- Control, the ability to control people, animals, objects.
- Relationships, the ability to build relationships.

The examples he used were, if you were to ask a policeman what was their motivation to join the police? If they were honest, it would be the ability to exercise control over people. If however, you were to ask a social worker they would most likely say it was the relationships with the people they help. In my observations I would add that, if you were to ask a self-employed builder it would most definitely be autonomy, the ability to choose where and when you work.

It is my observation that this hypothesis is entirely accurate. In addition, it is likely that we are motivated by elements of the above to varying degrees, with some elements more profound than others. It could also be that it isn’t all three but one or two. The issues arise when one element becomes overtly dominant at the expense of the others. When they are well balanced, this indicates a well-balanced individual.

Understanding your cohort and what motives each individual using the above criteria is a good starting point. For example, a walk in the woods, learning to use a compass and read a map, taps into the need for autonomy. If done with a group, it builds relationships with those in that group and it achieves of all the benefits we discussed earlier. In addition, every time you see something for the first time you grow neurones (Ruby Wax, A Brave New World) which stimulates the brain and encourages learning.

The smaller the group the better, as large groups become a social activity in a changing landscape and so much of what is important can be missed.

On the farm we purchased as a therapeutic retreat, there is a public footpath going through the middle of it. This footpath is regularly used by hikers and is part of a registered route.

One day I was in our lookout platform hidden from view. I saw three deer happily grazing in one of our fields next to the footpath. They were next to a wood and sheltered from the approach of the footpath. Then I saw a group of over forty school children walking down the footpath with three teachers. All the gear and no eyes on the deer!

As they carried on walking, they walked past the wood into the eyesight of the deer and walked straight past the deer only thirty yards way. The deer stood very still as is the protocol if you’re a deer and watched them pass by. Not a single student or teacher saw the deer and they probably had never been as close in their

lives. They were quite simply looking down at their feet chatting away and the deer continued to graze after they passed by. It had become a moving social club and the benefits and extra value had literally passed them by. This is a good example of hitting the target but missing the point.

Growing plants and planting trees taps into the nurturing process which leads to relationships. Nurturing something with others also builds relationships with others. Add the use of machinery and ‘control’ becomes an important motivational factor.

Working with animals has high levels of the relationship factor. It also includes control as it usually involves controlling animals, demonstrated very clearly when riding horses. As said before, the very nature of the activity brings you into contact with nature and enhances all the factors mentioned throughout this book.

It is therefore very clear to see how valuable the therapeutic benefits of a farming environment can be. It goes a long way to substantiate the care farm industry, from the very start, it involves everything discussed throughout this book.

It may be a surprise to some to think of fishing as a therapeutic activity. As a certified diver I have been lucky enough to dive at an advanced level on some high-risk dives and I have been up close and personal with all kinds of underwater wildlife including many sharks. I would be the first to say that wildlife below the surface is due as much respect as those above the surface however, the positive attributes out way the negatives in many ways.

I have been amazed at how many dysregulated children, many with ADHD, are able to sit quietly for long periods of time whilst fishing. This brings the child into contact with nature and seems to have a hypnotic affect. It also brings them into close contact with an instructor in a calm and structured way.

Once a fish is caught, I have been hugely impressed with the way the instructors ensure the safe return to the water and here there is clear empathy as the process is considered from the fish’s perspective.

As a countryman, I have mixed views on this as in my book, if you’re going to catch a fish, kill it cook it eat it or leave it alone. Don’t catch it then put it back. On our lake, we must have fish that have been caught and returned safely many times. However, the results of catch and return can be powerful. Many children have been helped to be able to regulate their behaviour and control their emotions because of the fact they were introduced to fishing.

Embracing the changing seasons.

As human beings, we are intrinsically linked to our environment, in ways we perhaps don’t understand or appreciate. One factor that we can’t avoid, and which does impact on us all, is the changing seasons and resulting changes in levels of daylight. Our ability to produce Vitamin D is affected by our reduced access to daylight. In winter months, people in urban environments are probably more impacted than rural people working in the great outdoors because their work requires many to be indoors during the only available daylight hours.

The first issue to identify and clear up is that a discussion about the seasons is not a discussion about the weather. I often hear it being said that the seasons are changing. They are not, the weather at a particular time of year is a variable, but the seasons are influenced by the amount of daylight and are therefore a constant.

The ancient Celts understood this only too well as their lives depended upon the right actions at the right times of year. The Romans built their year around the pivotal points in the solar calendar, these being.

- Winter Solstice (on or around the 21st of December) often called Mid Winters Day.
- The Spring Equinox (on or around the 21st of March.)
- The Summer Solstice (on or around the 21st of June) often called Mid Summers Day.
- The Autumn Equinox (on or around the 21st of September.)

The Ancient Celts pivotal points of the year were not the above but the halfway points between these dates. Six weeks after each date was a time of the changing seasons and were celebrated with festivals.

- The 1st of February - Imbolc a lambing festival. (The start of spring)
- The 1st of May - Beltane a festival to celebrate the start of summer when the grass grows and the cattle were moved to their summer pastures. (The start of summer)
- The 1st of August - Lughnasadh a harvest festival (The start of autumn).
- The 1st of November - Samhain, a festival to celebrate the return of the cattle from the summer pastures and the start of slaughtering animals for the winter food stores. As the Celts calendar starts the evening before, this was at the time we celebrate Halloween. (Source - The Celts, The great courses, Amazon Prime.)

The first obvious point to discuss is ‘how can the beginning of August be the start of autumn’? The fact is the ancient Celts were highly tuned into the natural world and they were correct in that the crops could only be harvested because they had completed their life cycle and were ready to harvest. Those who spend time in the countryside will know that the quality and type of light changes in August and the nights are beginning to creep back. The weather is often good because the earth as a big rock in the solar system absorbs heat from the sun and holds it like a radiator. Therefore, the weather is often a month behind due to the earth holding the warmth.

The Romans and the Celts were both right we have 8 pivotal points in our calendar that are still significant and the rural calendar is still oriented around those dates today.

- The 1st of February will see spring flowers beginning to bloom and lambs in the field.
- The spring equinox sees the clocks go forward to give us more daylight in the evening.
- Livestock needs to be moved off pastureland that will be used to cut for hay, as the grass starts growing and moved to summer grazing by the 1st of May.
- The 21st of June is when all farmers aim to cut their grass for hay as this is the time of year the goodness in the grass is at its high point. Cut early and there won’t be the volume of grass and each week after this date it begins to lose its nutritional value and therefore its value to the animals that are going to eat it?
- The 1st of August will see the harvest in full swing. Some activities like shooting game birds begins this month. The shooting season ends at the end of January for all game birds. Thereby being an autumn winter activity but stops for spring.
- The autumn equinox sees the nights cutting in and the harvest completed. The pressure is now on the farmers to get the crops sown and planted before the end of October, by which time the ground will be too wet to work.
- The 1st of November is the time of year to prepare for winter. Livestock farmers are selling lambs for slaughter. Cattle are often still brought in from the fields and are also at their premium condition for slaughter if they have been eating lush fresh grass all summer and autumn.
- The winter solstice (21st December) is a welcome turning point as it means we are at our darkest time of the year. Things can only get better! This is when we bring nature into our homes in the form of trees and add colourful lights to brighten our spirits and celebrate Christmas. The winter solstice is perhaps the original New Year’s Day not just the birth of Christ but the birth of the New Year.

Being in tune with nature is a rewarding process in itself. Using the farming year described above gives us

our timetable of activities in keeping with the rhythms of nature. By embracing the seasons this gives us the changing activities and keeps our bodies synchronised with nature. This in itself is part of a healing process, as being part of that therapeutic environment called ‘the natural world!’

Impact of weather and the changing seasons

As a young teacher I can recall learning from other teachers that the weather had a direct effect on children in the classroom. A rainy day makes children sleepy, windy weather results in hyperactivity, snow, excitable, sunny days result in restlessness.

Many would agree that the weather has a direct effect on our mental health. Looking further afield countries north of the Arctic Circle experience higher rates of suicide during the dark winter months. SAD or ‘Seasonal Affective Disorder’ is thought to affect many.

As a young man I formed the belief that the month of October was an unlucky month for me. As time went on I realised that as a person responsive to the needs of others it wasn’t myself that was experiencing bad luck, but many around me. I’ve monitored this since 1987 and as a result the last two weeks in October and the first two weeks in November are known to my office as the ‘Silly Season’. This is a time when sickness and emotional crises among staff and children seem to reach a peak. Year upon year this seems to be relevant and when I looked at the factors there seemed to be a simple explanation that can be explained by looking at the Solar Calendar. I also believe that this is the calendar most country-people work to, this led me to design what I have called the Countryman’s Calendar. I designed this a number of years ago to be helpful to people suffering with SAD, I believe it is useful in the way it helps people perceive the changing seasons.

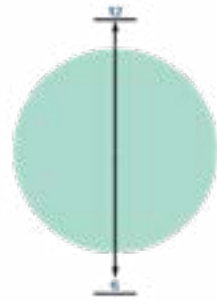
The first question I asked people around me was. “How do you visualise the year? As a continuous time line one following into the next, or as a circle, like a clock face which is a repetitive cycle?” Amongst the people around me (which I admit is by no means sufficient to be a scientific experiment but enough to be thought provoking), a pattern emerged. Those that saw the year as a simple time-line were mainly from urban backgrounds where the time of year had little if any relevance to their jobs or lifestyle.

Those that saw the year as a clock face were mainly from a more rural background, their lifestyle and employment tasks were directly related to the time of year and the changing seasons.

The fact is whether you have an urban or rural lifestyle we are all affected by the changing seasons with or without knowing it and as society has progressed it has lost touch with the natural world and many facts have been forgotten. (Desmond Morris Urban Zoo)

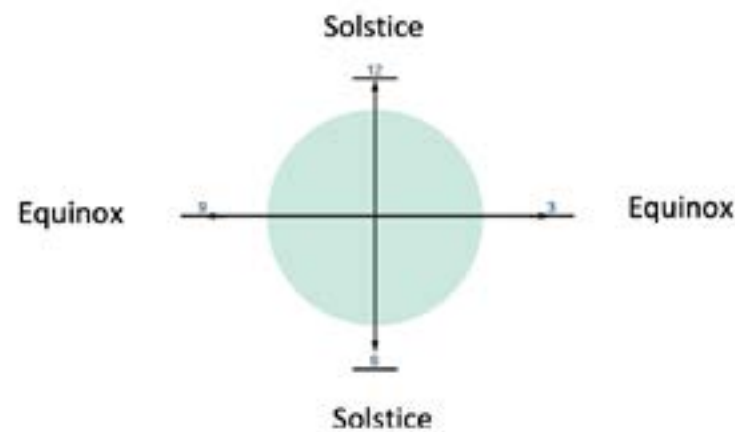
I was listening to a popular BBC Radio 2 programme where they were asking the question ‘Why does the longest day seem to last for a while and then it gets dark?’ The answer continued to escape them, but can be found by looking at the Solar Calendar, and in fact was known to the pagans (as their life depended on it). This was later adopted and adapted by the Christians, known as the Gregorian calendar. The following, once understood, seems simple but took me until my forties to figure out.

If we think of the year as a clock face and start at the number 12 this represents the Winter Solstice. On or around the 21st of December. Draw a line straight down to the number 6 and we have the Summer Solstice. On or around the 21st June. Our Year is divided into two. Most people know about the longest and the shortest day.



Now here's the next trick, which I find few people know about. If we go to the number 3 this represents the Spring Equinox, on or around the 21st of March. An important time for me as it represents the time of the year when in a single 24 hour period there is equal amounts of daylight and darkness, at a time when the daylight hours are increasing and the warmer summer months are on their way (significant if you lived as I did in a stone house, poorly insulated, with no central heating.) Draw a line straight across and you find number 9 that represents the Autumn Equinox.

The time of year when once again there are equal amounts of daylight and darkness in a 24 hour period but as the nights draw in the daylight hours are getting less and represents the start of the darker winter months.



This was brought home to me in the autumn of 1995. As a child I had travelled extensively with my parents, but as an adult driving a fledgling business I had never been away from home (that was also work) until my new bride-to-be swept me off my feet and took me to Jamaica to get married. We left a bright beautiful England on the tenth of September 1995 and were married, retuning two weeks later. To my horror we returned from the bright colourful beauty of the Caribbean to the dark and miserable storm clouds of England in autumn. It had only been two weeks but the landscape I had left behind was gone for the winter. It took me a while to realise my depressed state was not due to being newly married but we had gone over the autumn equinox. On or around the 21st of each relevant month it is either the Winter or Summer Solstice or the Spring or Autumn Equinox.

Now we have dates to work from we can quickly add the rest of the year, as the Earth moves slowly around the Sun taking all year to do so. The effect on the earth is that of gradual change until reaching these tipping points. If we have 12 months in a year and 4 seasons, then it is a simple equation to work out that there are 3 months in each season. But that doesn't fit, or does it? If we use the meteorological calendar that works off the changing temperatures it doesn't but with the solar calendar it does. This is very similar to the Horticultural Calendar, as plants depend on sunlight for growth and development. It goes something like this

Spring - starts in the second week of February, March and April.

Summer - Starts in the second week of May, June, July. Which explains why the 21st of June is called Mid-Summers Day. (How could it be Mid-Summers Day if Summer starts on the 1st June as the meteorological Calendar states?)

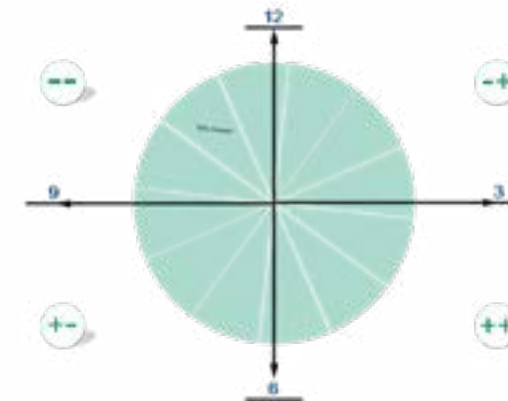
Now for the missing piece of the Jigsaw.

Autumn - starts in the second week of August, September and October.

Winter – Second week in November December January. Again as with the Mid Summers Day, how can we have Mid Winters day on the 21st of December three weeks after the so-called start of winter, the 1st of December? This is because the Metrological Calendar based on weather and temperature is a month behind the Solar Calendar.

It is the halfway point between the equinox and the solstice that defines the time of the changing seasons.

Easter - lambing time, whit week - hay time, summer - harvest, October - (many can still remember was called until recently) tatty picking week! Christmas - turkey plucking and the big winter feast. The early schools not only based their holiday times around this farming year, but also the times 9am – 3pm, allowed the children to do choirs on the farm before and after lessons.



How is this relevant to the silly season? The answer is if we look at the year from January in quarters.

The first quarter is dark but it's getting lighter. This gives us a negative followed by a positive (which is denoted as - +) the second quarter is light and it's getting lighter. This can be seen as a positive followed by a positive, ++. The third quarter is light but it's beginning to get darker + - The last quarter which covers the silly season is dark and it's only going to get darker - -. Until the second half of November when we begin to get ready for that winter celebration taken from the Pagans by the Christians - 'Christmas'. At this time we decorate our homes and add coloured lights to make everything look more cheerful. Four days before the main event we have the Winter Solstice, the next tipping point when we then move from a double negative to a negative followed by a positive, - + it's dark, but it's getting lighter.

The point of the Countryman's Calendar is that it demonstrates what's going on and despite our perception of a dark miserable six months of winter; it is actually only twelve weeks



It is my observation that we all feel these changes and they affect our mood and more importantly for some our resistance to illnesses and resilience to difficulties. Whilst the difficult time seems to be October and November, we already acknowledge that Christmas is a difficult time of year specifically for children in care because as the rest of the world seems to be enjoying itself with overindulgence, material items (in the form of presents) and time with loving families. Children in care, by definition, don't have this. Whilst some may get to go home, these are the ones I worry about the most, as the expectations never live up to reality. This over emotionally charged time of year usually leads to disappointment.

As a result we bombard this time of year with positive energy and experiences. Towards the end of November, to avoid the main Christmas rush, we usually have a trip to London. This takes in one of the world's most spectacular cities ready for the festive season. Museums and attractions intermingled with the red and blue of the Household Cavalry and the Blues and Royals, and of course Christmas lights.

The last Friday in November has become the traditional day for each house to go and choose its Christmas tree and deliver it to the home. By having a specific date, we avoid the uneducated fashion of putting them up earlier in November (by doing so devaluing the whole process) and at the same time not leaving it too late.

The second week sees our annual Christmas party, a formal dinner dance complete with band and silver service sit-down meal, making it a social occasion to be looked forward to for weeks before. The build up to Christmas continues with the delivery of turkeys to all homes including our gift of a turkey to members of staff. (Some of the children if appropriate may have been involved in the preparation and dressing of the turkeys). A visit to a Church Carol Service is also an expectation for staff and children.

The budget also allows for the purchase of gifts by the children for the specific staff on duty on Christmas Day, to be given by the children at that time when they are opening their presents. This process encourages the use of empathic skills and thinking of others. The thought that goes into these presents gives another opportunity to demonstrate kindness.

The effect bucks the trend in the industry. When other services, (in any other industry they would be called our competitors) are spending money on increased staffing levels and overtime to manage the critical period, our service is enjoying an idyllic Christmas. Never underestimate the power of positive experiences, both current but also looking forward to those organised in the diary for the future.



Spring – Lambing time



Summer- Hacking out



Autumn



Summer – Sheep shearing



Autumn – Tidying the garden



Winter – Planting a new hedge



Winter – Cutting Christmas trees

Within our therapeutic environment, we find the importance of always having something to look forward to hugely valuable in encouraging positive thinking.

Summary.

- Appreciate the elements that can make an activity harmful, essential, or therapeutic.
- Appreciate the value of simple activities.
- Understand motivational factors.
- The importance of understanding the solar cycle and embracing the seasons.

Nature Friendly Farming.

My ancestors were coal miners and engineers. Farming was not in our history or scope of reference. As a premature child with flat feet, buck teeth and poor eyesight, educationalist dismissed my prospects as being restricted to that of a learning difficulties child who may be able to do some form of practical work.

My mother instinctively did two highly relevant things. She instilled a high level of empathic thinking and nurtured a love of animals. This was to lead to a love of horses which she did her best to facilitate. Riding lessons at a local riding school eventually led to the purchase my own horse. A huge achievement in the Mid 1970s for a wages clerk and an electrical engineer. This resulted in the horse being kept on a local farm.

My time looking after and riding my horse resulted in spending more and more time on the farm helping the farmers son. He was to become my first agricultural role model and the dynamic of farmer and farm help I was later to recreate in our school.

The interest in farming resulted in myself spending as much time doing farm work as time with my horses, purely for the love of it. The love of farming led my family, who were determined to find a future for me, to buy a derelict farmhouse in what was then a hugely aspirational restoration project. This was to be the property at the age of 22 I was to buy off them as my mother deteriorated with a terminal illness. This was to become the first environment I transformed into a care farm type project.

Growing into adulthood my first proper job was on the farm next door. Running alongside this I had developed a skill set as an artist and began teaching women's institute art classes at the age of 17. Empathic skills, creative thinking and help from The Princes Trust resulted in setting myself up as a professional artist at the age of 20 and my teaching career took me into the area of special education. Returning home on an evening to feed calves and pet lambs.

This brought me into contact with teachers who wanted to set up their own school who would never be able to do so as they didn't have the free range thinking ability and entrepreneurial skills required. But as an untrained free thinker, I did!

A chance conversation with a school leader who explained that his wife was a social work team manager who had a budget to spend on activities for children in children's homes during the summer holidays but couldn't find anything to purchase. Two hours later I had a full six week programme worked out and a meeting the following day confirmed the start of our organisation at the age of 24.

Children in local children's homes were collected in a Land Rover and taken to our small holding to learn to ride and play with animals. The odd game of baseball being played in a neighbour's field, followed by a walk down the river.

The local villagers were entirely positive and displayed none of the 'nimby' type attitudes I would later encounter in other areas. They always supported my mission and for that they have my eternal gratitude and respect.

The first environment had a quarter of an acre. Seven years later I was able to rent a four acre field. Five years later our first farm set up for the job which would become our first school site had 25 acres. Five years

later the farm on the moors that was to be a therapeutic retreat had another 40 acres. Five years after that the larger farm came along at 210 acres, then another development project with another 55 acres.

In 2022 my neighbour who had been my first employer and the one who let us play rounders in his field at the very beginning of this journey was forced to sell his land. He asked if we could be the ones to buy it.

As a result, we now have over 560 acres and it has been hugely rewarding in the way we farm it. As I don't have generations of learning and preconceived ideas about how this should be done, we go about things very differently.

- We include the local farming community, including my first boss as much as possible.
- We have a slightly different set of priorities brought about because of the organisation. These being - 1/ EDUCATION - 2/ CONSERVATION - 3/ PRODUCTION. In that order.

Probably the opposite of every other farmer I know.

The government have for a long time subsidised farming with financial help. Today there are all kinds of financial incentive schemes available with the honourable intention of saying to farmers, if you want our money it must benefit wider society.

We have been able to sign up to stewardship schemes that follow the same principals I had established independently. For example, we planted fields of the bumble bird mix as seen earlier. These plants feed the insects during the summer months and the birds during the winter. We leave areas of land to go wild and established ponds in suitable locations. We have also planted thousands of trees.

One scheme is designed to protect ground nesting birds. This means we don't use any fertiliser, keep machinery off the land from the middle of March until the end of June. The problem of reduced grass to harvest as winter fodder is solved by grazing with sheep over the winter months who provide the fertiliser free of charge. We then take them off the fields early so the grass has a longer time to grow.

This means we aren't burning fossil fuels by driving tractors to harrow and roll the land, doing much damage to wildlife in the process. It takes a bit longer for the grass to grow to full height and there is less of a volume of crop but the benefits outweigh the downside. If it takes 80% of your costs in terms of time in a tractor burning fuel and the cost of adding chemicals etc to get 20% more grass, it's simply not worth the extra effort. Especially as the government are subsidising the difference in the financial cost. At the same time significantly reducing the damage modern farming practices does to the wildlife and the landscape we rely on.

The correlation between the natural world and food production is reducing rapidly to feed more and more people. During a conversation with a local farmer, I asked "what do you do, what is your role in society?" He replied, "to produce food". "Great" I said, "how many people in this village eat the food you produce?" "None" he replied, and that is the problem. Going back to a time where local farmers produced food for local people in an environmentally responsible way is a worthwhile aspiration. This process I have found extremely rewarding and inspiring.

During a worldwide pandemic, our organisation learnt how being able to produce our own food was a huge asset. As a country impacted by war, the ability to be energy and food self-reliant must be on the agenda of any sensible politician. However, to do this we must be conscious of the need wherever possible to do this alongside nature and not at the expense of the natural world.

Music in a therapeutic context.

As a parent and professional working with children, I have always encouraged the children in my care to listen to a variety of different types of music.

It is my observation that many social workers or support workers often transport children in their own car and on collection are quite happy to let the child take control of the car music system or listen to music in their headphones. This is not advisable for two reasons.

Firstly, it says you are happy for the child to either assume control or avoid contact by being isolated in their own world away from you, as you are not connected to their headphones. If it can start with music, it will be assumed for other things also and results in the leadership part of the relationship being eroded.

Secondly, it's a missed opportunity to broaden their horizons and experience other genres.

I used to always start with quiet, to establish control. Then classical music knowing it would be dismissed initially. It's amazing how many children are adaptable to learning new experiences and after a while this was sought after. I would then move on to country and western or folk and often return to the familiar with rock and pop.

The kind of music is important, to control mood and behaviour. If a child is overexcited and their adrenalin is going, giving them their choice of music would result in an increased musical beat and an increased heartbeat.

If we used calming music, with a slower beat this could help to calm the child down to a more normal baseline level of heart rate and reduced anxiety.

Music is (despite my earlier comment about colours being the first senses stimulated through sight) an earlier sense to be stimulated as we hear the 'music' of our mother's heartbeat in the womb. Meaning we are familiar with a repetitive beat before we are born.

Our 'primeval ear' is part of the brain that is linked to our defensive systems. Long before music was turned into an art form, drums were used to communicate instructions on the battle fields. We are instinctively linked to react to the repetition of a beat and its increase or decrease in frequency. The primeval ear identifies and recognises simple beats, not complex music.

Using music as a background to classroom lessons can be a helpful tool in the toolbox as can be musical dance, not just as a lesson in education but as a therapeutic process to help regulate anxiety and emotions in those who struggle to do so.

Musical theatre seems to tap into the primeval ear as it is often simple music with a repetitive beat within a range that is comfortable.

As part of our lockdown strategy, in the first national lockdown in 2020 as all activities became 'in house', and the need to maintain a level of activity increasingly important, we introduced music and dance.

Whilst I was always aware of the importance of music within a school curriculum I was amazed at the significance of its impact. Using part of an old grain shed and a few Bluetooth speakers, our group of children who previously would never have thought to perform in front of others, thrived in this new activity. Partly due to the nature of the music but also in response to the leadership shown by the instructor.

It is this argument above, in terms of the ability for music to be such a positive life-enhancing element, from which the counterbalance must be considered. Music of an aggressive beat and attitude along with lyrics that promote abuse and other negative behaviours can have a significant impact in a negative way.

In terms of creating a therapeutic environment, this must be prevented as it has a negative impact and erodes the positive environment you are trying to create.



Summary.

- Recognising the importance of calming music.
- Recognise the benefits of exploring different genres.
- Understand our relationship to music through our primeval ear.

Part 2 – How to Create a Valued Based Environment.

Introduction.

The culture and ethos of any organisation starts at the top and the spirit cascades down. Therefore, the subject of ethical leadership has to be at the forefront of any leader who sees the benefits of establishing a values based environment. Above all this must be genuine and heartfelt.

As Gandhi said, “be the change you want to see in others”.

Throughout my career I have seen the perception that to help people, you tell them all about their problems and then somehow because of increased knowledge they are able to help themselves. This may work for the more able but it doesn’t help those with emotional problems or those with learning difficulties. Quite often I see practitioners grossly overestimating the ability of those they are working with and often not understanding themselves the limited scope of reference they have.

By way of example, in 2021 I walked into a classroom where a group of students were discussing the murder of George Floyd. The black American who was killed by an American policeman who kept his knee on his throat. In America.

I said to the children “where did this happen”? America came the answer with a smile. Where is that I said? - Not a clue. Where is the United Kingdom on a map of the world? No idea. Do you understand a map of the world. No.

I soon realised that the discussion needed to start with where this happened and indeed where was the USA in relation to ourselves. These children thought this happened somewhere near to us and in fact their perception was it could happen to them any time. This only goes to greatly undermine the work done by British Police (with these children) on developing trust and understanding of their role in our society.

The teacher was doing what he thought he needed to, exploring the issue of Black Lives Matter but had not recognised the limited ability amongst a group of children that has had years of developing avoidance strategies and presenting like they knew, when they really didn’t know at all.

So, the starting point should be to never assume people know what you’re talking about.

In the 1990s the big issue in health and education was promoting children’s self-esteem. This was interpreted as the need to teach children about self-esteem and not necessarily put anything in place to do something about it.

Today we see the same thing happening in schools when it comes to values. A values lesson on a Wednesday afternoon, has value but only if the values discussed are lived by the school from the top down and evident in all aspects of the lifestyle that is created.

As I grew our organisation I realised the importance of ethical leadership, not that I could articulate it at the time.

I was only 24 when I started the organisation. All my staff were older and I had to inspire them to join me.

For those leaving an established job there had to be much more than just another job. A chance to do things differently and better. Caring for troubled children was at heart of this. Providing a really nice place to live. Good worthwhile things to do and surrounded by good people to learn from. Simple isn’t it.

As things developed and we were able to offer so much to the children that came into our service, I began to detect a degree of jealousy. Some staff felt that (as an example) the children in our care, many of whom had also made mistakes and hurt others were overly compensated and lucky to have horse riding lessons when their own children couldn’t access these things. The answer was simple, bring them in and we’ll teach them also. This attitude came naturally to me, I didn’t have to learn it. I did however have to realise what I was feeling and thinking.

If you care about people, you must care about everyone. You can’t categorise into ‘those we get paid for’ and those ‘we pay to care for’. Not only that you must care about their children also.

Whilst this was just one example, today we have teachers grown up children working on the farms. Holiday cottages available for staff and their families to use and occasionally the odd horse on free livery. This is not about how to pacify your workforce; this is about having a genuine desire to help those around you. Being prepared to use the resources available for all involved.

The result a positive stable functioning community established to look after and educate part of our society that are anything but positive, stable, and functioning when they first arrive.

This perhaps leads us to the most important aspect of this kind of work. If you want people to improve, place them with others who are as you want them to be. Don’t place them with others who have their own issues who will make them worse. This is relevant at all stages in all contexts.

For example, our homes vary in size and number of occupants. We never have children all the same age and stage of their career with us in the same house. A functioning family group doesn’t operate like that. We have children grouped in terms of the risks they may pose to others but at different ages and stages. Therefore, the new one’s benefit from the ones that have already made good progress.

When working within the community don’t group all the problem people together, place them with others who are good role models and set good examples. Peers learn from themselves more than they do from their leaders, be it in school or the workplace. This needs to be managed correctly for the best outcome. If you fail to manage this, you’re failing to manage at all.

“If we treat people as they are, we make them worse. If we treat people as they ought to be, we help them to become what they can become.” Goths.

Within this promote an ethical vocabulary, this develops ethical intelligence and from this you will create ethical leadership in others. This is at all levels.

Recently I interviewed a talented graduate for a role as a residential care worker. We put him through an intense process to evaluate his motivation and ensure he would be able to do the basics as well as his strengths.

In this he was puzzled at our commitment to him. I explained. Whether we are developing properties, working the land, with animals, children, or staff we want them all to be the best they can be. I explained if we were happy to employ him, I hope it wouldn’t be for long as to be the best he can be he needed to utilise

his skill sets at the level he could which would mean doing further research and study for the benefit of others.

He was to feel for the first time in an interview that he would be joining a community, and that community was going to do the best they could for him even if that meant encouraging him to spread his wings and leave us sooner than he perhaps had envisaged.

The above is relevant for any organisation, not just schools, and guess what, it's good business! If you want to run a successful organisation, be it a school or a business or both, you need good people. Recruiting costs money, retaining staff is important and ensuring the business has good products, whether this is material or in school terms, producing good competent young people. Having a values-based organisation is not woolly tree hugging stuff. It is good business whatever business you're in.

The influence of contracts on social care and education.

"Institutions will try to preserve the problem to which they are the solution" Clay Shirkey Professor at NYU and author of "Here comes everyone" and "Cognitive Surplus".

Our experience of managing social services contracts is different also. This perspective may come as a huge shock to some and an embarrassing reality to others.

In the 1990s the concept of care in the community was born. Along with this the concept of 'service providers' and 'service users'. (The use of the English language here is not great. It's never helpful to refer to certain people as 'users' and for this to be normalised. As this book explains the influence of language on people's behaviour is important to recognise.)

The concept was rather than having large state run organisations that cost huge amounts of money to run, they would recognise the unit costs and make this available to smaller organisations who could reduce the unit costs.

At some point in time the focus shifted to wanting to ensure individual local authorities were only paying the direct costs for a particular child and not contribute towards the service that others may be receiving also within that establishment. In other words, they didn't want to pay for the availability of a specific activity they just wanted to pay for it if it was used.

Therefore, they developed tariffs and payment schemes based on 'core costs' and then 'specific costs.' Of course, the kinds of activities I've promoted within this book were never on the tariff list. But talking therapy and extra staffing for crisis work when things go wrong were.

Certain organisations went along with this perhaps because their accountants worked out how they could make it work. Never let accountants run a business and certainly never let those in suits direct the treatment or therapy program for the children (or adults) in your care. The care and rehabilitation of people doesn't always fit into a business model as prescriptive as this, if ever.

The result was 'service users' are admitted to a facility on the basis that if they deteriorate, they may need extra services which can be charged for. Guess what, many deteriorate needing extra services.

From the 'service providers' perspective how can you have therapists available when needed but when no longer needed carry on paying for them to be available but not be able to charge for that. The answer, make

sure they are needed or when 'service users' don't need the extra services, move them on and replace them with people who do. How does that impact on carers who know that if a child gets too settled, they will be moved. If they don't need extra services, they could be moved. The focus is on the negative to justify the continuing if not increase in costs.

The consequences are that there is never the opportunity to create a culture of progress and rehabilitation. The successful ones, if there are any are moved on often too quickly before their progress is embedded. But also, the newcomers don't get to see the progress in others before they are moved on. The result is none of what I have discussed above is ever able to happen. And this has been designed to be so by those in suits who thought they were managing costs and getting the best value for the public purse.

For some time prior to the 2020s inflation had been relatively low and under control. Often around 1 or 2 percent per year. This resulted in there not being a desperate need to increase fees to keep up with inflation. Over the years even inflation at this level can have an impact. As a provider of long term placements which cover a number of years this has an impact. To illustrate the point at one time we contacted the contracts department of one local authority to explain our fees for an existing child would have to increase to reflect the cost of inflation. The person on the other end didn't know what inflation was and hadn't heard of it.

As the 2020's got going and the inflation rate went above 10% everyone knew what inflation was. However, in their wisdom they decided that increased costs could not be applied to existing placements, only new placements. We were advised to give notice on our existing placements and replace with new children at higher rates by the Local Authorities themselves to meet their contractual restrictions. The person thought that once notice was served the local authorities would back down and pay. It is my understanding they didn't, and children were moved. This in my view was not ethical practice.

The result is that through the actions of those very far removed from the reality on the ground there is a culture of short term unstable unsustainable and ultimately regularly unsuccessful placements for children in what they call 'The Looked After System'.

There is an unbelievable irony in this, as this methodology is not looking after anyone and is ultimately self-defeating.

The concept that those who have an interest in a problem never really want it to be solved seems to be an unhealthy reality.

Surely, we can use ethical intelligence and ethical leadership to do better than this! What would the impact on the culture be if placements were incentivised to be long term and successful? As a businessman familiar with weighing up the odds, taking risks and making investments, whilst the initial cost may be a concern the long term return on the investment would be more than significant.

This kind of positive culture is what we have in my organisation, but we had to create it by going against the grain of conventional thinking.

How did we manage this process? Very simply we didn't play ball. We said, "that is the price of our service, pay it or go elsewhere". They paid for new placements however the reality of ethical leadership is sometimes you must accept to take a short term loss to uphold your integrity. Meaning an ongoing shortfall for those that have been with us for many years.

The prospect of dividing the service up into, as just one minor example, those that get horse riding lessons and those that don't was an administrative nightmare. (They would be happy to pay the increased administrative costs but not the costs of the riding lessons.) Not only that but we would then be giving the opportunity for some important assets to be avoided by those motivated by reducing costs and we would no longer be in control with our judgement based on need.

I've seen some organisations fall into this trap and have suffered dreadfully as the decision making and control has gone to those who didn't know and were not correctly motivated to make the right decisions.

However, it isn't just contracts for health and social care where the negative is rewarded. One of my early mentors was the distinguished professor Dr Finley Graham. When referring to the rehabilitation of offenders his mantra was "Make them taxpayers." If they have a meaningful daytime activity, which could mean anything from voluntary work but ideally employment, this will bring structure, a social circle which means an independent support structure and money to be independent and pay the rent. This is true for anyone and not exclusively offenders.

Over the years we have on many occasions trained young people to have a positive work ethic, aspirations for their future and the ability to be employable. The question of employability is important. There are many young people who leave education with qualifications but are not employable. This is a good example of hitting the target but missing the point. Being employable means, you must have many other skills often not directly taught in education. These are often called soft skills which I shall discuss in much more detail later.

The problem becomes relevant when a young person leaves our care at 18 years of age and needs somewhere to live as well as somewhere to work. The provision of services made available to these young people by Local Authorities has for a long time now been impressive to say the least. Accommodation, often really good quality, and support. In addition, an advisor with the role of making sure the young person has access to all the financial benefits they are entitled to.

Can you imagine my frustration of having spent five years training someone to have the necessary soft skills and the specific skills to have the competence to be employable. Not only that but they want to work and aspire for their future and want to contribute. Only to be told by their personal advisors that being employed would complicate their housing benefit and it was important that they were not employed. That this was the direction they should take, don't worry about getting a job as the other benefits would mean they didn't lose out.

This is not an anecdotal example but a regular predictable experience over the years, and one we must address and factor into our plans. On one occasion I had a support worker phone me up to give me a formal dressing down for encouraging a young person to get a job, "what did I think I was doing!" You can imagine how the rest of the conversation ended, it's one I won't ever write down.

The sad thing is this is a culture and it doesn't have to be that way. The benefit system often promotes and perpetuates poverty as it makes people financially dependent rather than independent. Therefore, having young people start their adult life independent of the benefit system must be a minimum target to aspire to. Not to encourage benefits at this age and stage as this will likely impact on the rest of their lives. Your first experience of something is often profound and is imprinted on your mind forever. Therefore, having this transitional stage managed with positive actions is so important.

Finance with no expectation is:

Positive reinforcement for negative behaviour. Inverted Picnic!

Positive consequences for positive actions and negative consequences for negative actions is a natural process. Quite often we inadvertently invert this with negative consequences. It is never wise to go against nature.

It's about managing a culture and ethos. Wouldn't it be more ethical to say to anyone in receipt of benefits "There is nothing for nothing" any assistance is given on the condition they must seek to do one or more of three simple requirements.

- Education
- Training for employment
- Voluntary work.

But there is 'nothing for nothing'. Those who require help must engage in making their life or those of their communities better in some, even just a small way. When they achieve work let's not make it that they are penalised. Let there be an incentive for positive progress and let's make sure small steps to progress are recognised.

Positive reinforcement for positive behaviour.

Whilst this may not be possible for the long term unemployed, shouldn't we try to manage young people entering this system every year with better expectations. To have no expectations means we think they have no value.

Developing a work ethic and employment culture.

"Don't go around saying the world owes you a living, it owes you nothing, it was here first". Mark Twain

The Authors of "The Coddling of the American Mind" challenge us to consider some unpalatable truths. One being that not all cultures are equal in their ability to prepare people to be productive in an advanced economy.

"It is agreed that cultures and subcultures instil different goals, skills and virtues in their members".

The examples I have given above demonstrate this as the "leaving care culture" in my view often does much to perpetuate poverty by promoting a continued financial dependency if not a moral dependency also.

However, the leaving care culture is probably a sub culture within the larger culture of poor economic engagement. When we take a step back and look at the reality of where we are now, it is clear to see that that the culture of many in deprived areas in the UK. (Along with an education system that has lost sight of its purpose, this being to continually educate students to pass tests rather than promote a desire for continued ongoing learning and engagement in our economy, or simply put, prepared for the workplace.) We can see we fall markedly short when compared to other cultures.

For example, while many in impoverished areas are at home cleaning their new trainers and playing on their gaming devices all purchased with finance from the benefit system. Other countries are sending over their young people to work in bars and restaurants and many other jobs, who have since childhood had an established work ethic having been prepared to effectively engage in an economy as they grew up as children.

The reasons for this are complex but as outlined in *The Coddling of the American Mind*, possibly due to an increased fragility of children over the years brought about as a result of a culture of over protectiveness towards children. Fears of accidents and abductions which statistically are minimal and unrealistic to the value offered in return have resulted in most children not engaging in paid work until they reach adulthood.

Not long ago, many children engaged in newspaper delivery rounds, milk delivery rounds and other paid jobs before going to school. The Autumn half term holiday to many generations of children until relatively recently, certainly within living memory, was referred to as “Potato picking week”. As many children from urban backgrounds were directly involved in the potato harvest. Indeed, the academic year is based around the need to have rural children at home working on the farm at key times of the year.

The development of efficient farm machinery used to harvest potatoes on mass along with increased Health and Safety culture certainly added to the decline of this specific activity.

Whilst I am certainly ‘not’ suggesting that we should seek out dangerous employment opportunities and avoid health and safety or safeguarding concerns, we need to recognise where we are in relation to our competitors in the economy and find ways of addressing the short fall.

Children in our service are encouraged from a young age to take responsibility for tasks and receive an incentive allowance, also learning the most important lesson of all, how to listen to and follow instructions. This is particularly evident in our authentic working environments like farms, stables and gardens but also for domestic tasks at home. The level of responsibility increases to the point that when approaching 18 years it may well be really difficult for visitors to differentiate students from staff.

One of my proudest professional moments was when a young man approaching 18 years old who had been out all night, had to come and see me for a verbal warning. He telephoned me, made an appointment and then drove himself in his own car which he had bought with his own earned income, to meet me, all whilst living in one of our residential homes. Whilst he did receive a dressing down for being out all night without us knowing where he was, I had to try hard not to smile whilst doing so. Many years later after having served twelve years in The British Army; he is still in regular contact.

Political Scientist Yair Ghitza and Andrew Gelman looking for voting patterns in Americans and childhood experiences on political views identified a window of higher impressionability in terms of forming views and opinions ranging from 14 years old to 24 years old, peaking at 18 years old. In their view during this time, views and opinions are formed and become established often for the rest of their lives.

This very much correlates with my view that it is necessary to establish a work ethic and preparedness for engaging in employment during this time, particularly important prior to 18 years of age. If we leave this until after graduation from university the opportunity to establish a strong work ethic is lost.

In the US this acknowledgment has resulted in a call for a compulsory gap year prior to the university stage to undertake a form of National Service, not military as you may think but some form of community service in a working environment. If you think about the role of local authorities in professional departments ranging from police to nurses and parks and gardens, the opportunity for ‘mentorship’ in an authentic working environment is huge. Not to mention engagement with local businesses. We just need to recognise the importance of training our young people properly. This being all students with capabilities not just the ones we need to keep occupied to avoid getting into trouble.

Students who have missed this gap in establishing a work ethic at the right age and stage in my experience, having interviewed many for jobs in our service don’t have the work ethic required and their focus is on what you can do for them and not what they can do for you. In a time where there is much focus on further education and kicking the can down the road in terms of employment, it is my fear the effectiveness of the work force is impacted. As anyone who runs a business will tell you at the moment trying to find trades people to complete required tasks is extremely hard.

At the opposite end of the economic spectrum, if at 18 years of age you are told not to get a job and be content with a life on benefits, this view is unlikely to change later in life. The die is cast and paid professionals in the form of personal advisors have added to the certainty that the poor will remain poor, possibly if not probably for the rest of their lives. This doesn’t just impact on them but all of us as their opportunity to contribute to our economy is lost also.

Earlier I mentioned the agricultural industry. Whilst teams of potato pickers are now no longer needed having been replaced by skilled tractor drivers and machinery operators, these operators almost certainly learned their skills as children prior to the age of 18 years old. It is still legal in the UK to learn to drive a tractor at 13 years old.

The agricultural culture is extremely successful at preparing their young people to engage in work. In many cases only short distances from those in urban areas that completely fail to do so, demonstrating it’s not the geography but the culture that needs to change. Whilst parents have a role to play in this, so does the education system and importantly local authorities who may need to rethink their role in this in more ways than one.

There are other positive examples of this in the workplace. As you will have gathered a lot of our students get involved in rural activities and trades. Those that learn to ride a horse well are often encouraged to go to the Northern Racing College at Doncaster. In my view this is an excellent establishment which demonstrates good values every day. Young people are taught a trade and how to function in the racing industry. It is a course that in any other college would take two years. This college takes students through the accreditation process and ready for work in three months. How? Racing is a seven day a week industry with early mornings and often late nights.

They don’t have people saying, “it’s the journey not the destination and let’s do three days a week and take two years over it.” They have a destination in mind and need to get on with it, that destination being employment in the racing industry and engaging in the economy.

Whilst we are proud of the progress, we have made to get students ready for the opportunity to go to racing college, the transformation once there, is also amazing.

These students grow in confidence knowing they have a job to do and the purpose of them being there is to go to work in a racing yard when they’ve completed their training. This ‘Fastrack’ educational journey is direct and to the point.

- Training - 12 weeks
- Placement on a racing yard
- Employment
- Accommodation.

The important piece of the jigsaw for our young people is the employment often has accommodation also.



One of our students preparing for racing college



Our student leading 'Ursus' a horse born and raised at our school being led into the winner's enclosure at Newcastle Racecourse by our ex-student on work placement.



On the gallops at Racing College



David and Andrea Bartlett in the winner's enclosure with horse and student both raised at Toy Top Farm

The military have been doing the same thing forever. Long hours in all weathers but a community to buy into and somewhere to live. This is also a favoured route for the ones who suit this lifestyle of which there have been many. For an educationalist and a carer, it is an incredibly proud moment when you see your students at a passing out ceremony whether this be racing or military.

By way of illustration, we have also experienced an enigma in this process. The student who went to racing college and completed his training but decided not to go to work placement. The work was hard and he really wasn't quick enough. The enigma is that he would be the only one on the training course who didn't go to work placement and who already had an allowance paid to him by his Local Authority to compensate him for being slow. Did the allowance reduce his motivation or was it the case that the allowance recognised a real deficiency that warranted funding for the rest of his life without any expectation in return?

The problem is not that we support the vulnerable, it is that it is unconditional. We expect nothing back in return. Unconditional funding like unconditional love is open to abuse. Abuse promotes abuse. Funding needs to be a contract with expectations on both sides, not an entitlement. The culture needs to be managed and the correct ethos created.

This is not a cost saving exercise. Indeed, to manage the culture would need a rethink and completely restructure education and training. However, we can all help with this in creating an ethical vocabulary and culture in our own settings. On more than one occasions I have seen banners in schools saying - "It's all about you". Is this the correct message? Shouldn't it be "It's all about you and what you can do for others"? As an employer this is particularly pertinent in a career's office.

Summary.

- Make your assessments inclusive of all facts, look at the bigger picture, make your judgments wisely and your decision making ethical.
- Use ethical leadership at all levels.
- In business there is always consequences to actions. If you're in the people business, there will be consequences to people.
- Make sure these are the right consequences to the right people, in the right way.
- Use ethical leadership to manage the culture and ethos of the service.
- Be aware of negative and positive cultures.
- The value of a National Mentorship Programme.

Also recognise that your students are your product. Invest in your product, it will always have your name on it. In 2023 after years of planning and aspirations we were able to buy a house next to one of our residential homes. This property is to provide accommodation to care leavers. The conditions of the placement are that they must be engaged in a meaningful daytime activity and if they are employed in a low paid job, it will be a small peppercorn rent to ensure they benefit from going to work. This is the only way to beat the system, it's just 'ourselves' that must carry the cost, the free thinking profit making entrepreneur. Like I say sometimes you must take a loss to uphold your integrity.

Necessity is the mother of invention, hardship is the motivation to change.

However, if we artificially reduce hardship in an unsustainable way, or the soften the fear of hardship, we reduce proportionally the motivation to change.

In the year following the opening of this home, the young people have maintained the home in good order.

One has always been in work while the other has had two jobs and lost them both. His social work team advised him to go on benefits. I maintained the position the home was only for young people in work or full-time education. The fear of having to leave was the motivation to both enrol in education and get a part time job. Positive reinforcement, support and occasional tough love is needed to get people through these difficult stages to remain on a positive functioning pathway.

Value Based Education.



David Bartlett visiting a nursery school in Soweto, South Africa

Whenever you start to consider values today and talk about them with colleagues or friends, the strangest thing happens nearly every time. Someone uses the term or says, "You mean old fashioned values?" Do I? Are they old fashioned and when did they go out of fashion?

In my view they are as old as the job of being a parent. We live in a relatively civilised world now, that is if you are lucky enough to live in the United Kingdom! Look around the world and you will see it is full of conflict, but we are certainly not in a world of tooth and claw, fighting in isolation for survival every day. In fact, it's a pretty good time to be alive and mankind and the societies within it are overall doing very well indeed compared to their ancestors. This is because each generation is looking to build on the foundations of the last, because we were taught by our parents to do so. The art of bringing up children from cave man days onwards has been successful due to good parenting, preparing their children for the world around them and the life they are to lead.

Good parenting was in fact discovered by good parents and not by academics. These academics would wish you to believe that not only they discovered it but also that it was only discovered recently! The academics have been fortunate enough to be able to observe the good parents (which most are) and identify which bits work and which bits don't. Then write books about them.

Somewhere in recent time something went wrong, we forgot the obvious and I think highly likely we listened to some academics wishing to make a name for themselves, who quite simply dropped the ball. They had us looking the other way and they had us forgetting what our parents taught us, which is the importance of values and virtues. This is the only conceivable answer to the question, when did they become old

fashioned? That means they have become out of fashion and forgotten.

So in answer to the question how old are values? The answer must be prehistoric. In fact, to quote Aristotle’

“Children become just by performing just acts. By imitating virtue, we become virtuous. Starting with politeness the beginning of respect and gratitude, where morality begins. From these other skills such as prudence which allows us to think of what is good for us. This governs other virtues such as temperance, courage, and justice”.

Ah ha, so there you have it, I wonder what his mum had to say about that! Possibly the first academic to put forward what his mum taught him as his own ideas!!

From the above text it is clear to see that he had a pretty good idea of another important concept as well, which is sequential learning. The well-established if not obvious idea that children need to learn certain things in order to be able to move on to the next thing competently. Something I will return to later.

‘When did values become out of fashion or old fashioned?’ In my opinion (and it is just my opinion) the answer is recently. If we have been talking in terms of since the dawn of mankind, it is with in the blink of an eye. Post World War Two, in fact and dare I say, it but its probable decline was to come out of forward progressive 1960s thinking. At this time people were encouraged to think for themselves and break established moulds. It is also a time that the Church of England, has and continues to see, dramatically declining numbers in Church services and the notion of a proactive Sunday School a thing of distant memory. This is not to say that the Church of England is the only religion promoting worthwhile values, far from it but in post war Britain it was probably the main source of values education for the family unit as a whole.

There are many reasons for this but a contributing factor has to be that we are living in isolation much more, as communities that were once strongly held together through work are now distributed as families become mobile in order to move to find work.

This also comes at a time when progressive governments have tried to find ways of demonstrating how much they and their party, whichever one it was, has done for education. The focus has been on what can be measured more easily. The development of a National Curriculum in 1988 took away the flexibility for teachers to teach what they thought was relevant for their children. It is at this point that certain assumptions were made regarding parents and I think likewise that parents were making about teachers. Each thought the other was doing it! Teaching values!

The fact is that in most functional homes (in a roundabout way), parents have been teaching values.

In functional homes children have generally got the idea, to a level that means they can function in society, and I would probably include myself in that description. Being able to give an account of a particular value and its definition would have certainly tested the memory banks. That was until I read ‘From My Heart Transforming Lives Through Values’ by Dr Neil Hawkes. In this marvellous book he explains the importance of naming values and then measuring how well you live up to them. This process being fundamental to helping children learn about values and this then in sequence helps everything else in life fit together. He often refers to this as the forgotten vocabulary.

For many children who live with parents who have not been able to live up to key values, they have not been able to get the message. The subliminal clues that are present in most functional homes are just not there.

So how are they to learn? It has always amazed me that the process of sequential learning has also all but been forgotten and we have an education system that is determined to fit children into the process with or without key skills, social and emotional as well as academic, regardless and are then surprised when it all goes wrong.

A horse trainer would never consider asking a rider to get on a young horse that hasn’t been trained to accept a rider. It would be traumatic for the horse and may damage any chance anyone will have in the future of successfully training it. It would also be incredibly dangerous for the rider.

Remember the words of Monty Roberts, the wonderful wise old cowboy when he said “If all of learning is 1-10 the most important parts are 0-3” I believe, as he does, the same goes for children.

You may think my comments are verging on the political, so be it. The fact is how we organise society and what values we put before others is politics itself and although many people believe you shouldn’t get involved in politics this doesn’t help the debate.

Another factor that I’ve often mentioned which I feel has had a negative impact on how we bring up our children is the way the 1989 Children Act was interpreted by different agencies. This is an Act of Parliament which I have read countless times and believe it to be absolutely and fundamentally sound. It came into force on the 14/10/1991.

Following the implication of the Act, the way it was implemented, and the way professionals took out the points they wanted to and suppressed others, was shocking.

The implementation placed children at the centre of everything, rights without responsibilities. Values became even more overlooked. As a young teacher I can recall expressions of alarm and disbelief as it was worked through in the staff room of then one of the biggest special schools in the country. I distinctly recall comments such as ‘there will be riots on the streets in twenty years’ time’ (2011 did in fact see such riots on an unforgivable scale).

Not long after, we began to read in the local papers and through the education grape-vine reports of dawn raids on Head Teachers who had broken up fights in the playground being arrested for “child abuse” due to the way they had been forced to get hold of the culprits. Can you imagine the cruelty imposed on someone who had spent all their life working to promote the education of children being subjected to such a process, even if it never got to court! What would it do for their personal professional development, never mind their self-esteem and self-respect. Shock waves ran through the professional services, and many resigned themselves to the fact that their job was now limited and precarious, new survival strategies needed to be developed. In most cases stick to the curriculum and those that can’t behave would be excluded or moved on. In summary, within a few years the national curriculum had changed what we teach our children, and the Children Act changed the relationships adults had with children.

This also happened at the same time the academic world turned its back on the behaviourist approach and its demise which started in the second half of the 20th Century was complete by the end of the 1980s.

If you ask Google about “behaviourism” you will get many answers depending on the nuances of the way the question is worded. One answer stated that this was an approach that was dropped as it implied human beings are too similar to animals. In my view this grossly underestimates the significance of animals and their abilities, it places us on a pedestal above the natural world which is never wise and ignores our needs as natural beings in a natural world.

The significance of this is clear, these changes in academic thinking resulted in the kind of ‘concept creep’ which at best left a vacuum. If we had moved away from a behaviourist approach you need to replace it with something else. Teaching values and the importance of values was vital, but this wasn’t recognised, and teaching values didn’t make the National Curriculum.

But what of the impact on society? I believe that we see the impact daily and are paying the price for it out of our taxes at an unaffordable rate.

With just a few in mind to demonstrate the point.

Binge Drinking

Could it be conceivable two or three generations ago to have our city streets littered with people who have had too much to drink? It’s at this point younger people (under thirty) are saying “What’s the problem? It’s normal” and the older people are saying “Damned right it wouldn’t have happened, you would have been arrested for being drunk and disorderly and worst-case scenario thrown in the police cells to sober up overnight to be released full of apology and embarrassment the following morning!”. Today hardly anyone gets arrested for being drunk and disorderly, the cells couldn’t cope with it. There is a greater cost, as this not only takes up huge amount of police time, but it’s treated as a health problem, taking up ambulances and paramedics and clogging up accident and emergency departments. (28/04/2015 - 1 in 3 admissions to A&E are because of alcohol - BBC News) At the same time cancer sufferers are denied life-prolonging medicines despite maybe having spent a lifetime paying into their National Insurance, because it’s too expensive. There is no money to pay for it.

All this because as Aristotle may say ‘We failed to teach those young adults about prudence’. Which asks us to consider what is good for us. The young adults who like to get picked up by ambulances may exclaim “But we pay taxes!” not enough my friend, not enough!

The Banking Crisis

In 2008 the world came very close to being thrown back to the dark ages as it became apparent the world’s supply of money was disappearing and most of what we thought we had was gone. Many young bankers, I say young because on the financial markets, they were. In earlier less experienced days when I was trying to get my business ventures to the next level, I spent time with these guys, on the stock dealing room floor. I recall one of them asking me to re-mortgage my house to pay for this new stock that was a dead cert. When I enquired as to the depth of his experience, he replied that he was twenty two. It was in these times of losing relatively large amounts of cash in the early noughties that I was reminded of my values which was to invest in myself and get on and graft. But as we were saying these young guys were selling high value mortgages to people who couldn’t afford them against houses that weren’t worth the money. Their value was in fashionable ideas that house prices only go up regardless. A lot of money literally went south in Florida holiday homes which in many cases were wooden sheds on a sand bank! When the realisation was made that the bank’s asset sheet was based on hope and a prayer, the house of cards came crashing in.

When in this process did the young bankers stop and think, should I be doing this, is it right, am I doing the right thing for my bank and my customers? Where was the loyalty, the self-governance or morality? ‘Out the window as long as I get my bonus (commission) cheque’. What of integrity? They fell afoul of one of the most dangerous negative values of all ‘greed’. Greed that nearly financially crippled the world.

So how is this relevant to us? Apart from the fact we have had to endure years of austerity because of these guy’s poor values and the fact that our NHS is haemorrhaging money with increasing need. It is because it is a question of values or the lack of them and the fact that in our work, we see the absence of boundaries and self-governing daily.

Obesity

Over the years of watching new children be admitted to our facilities, a definite change has occurred. In the early 1990’s all you wanted to do was get some good home cooking into them and build them up into fine young people. Now the story is reversed, and we find overweight young people who we need to teach how to moderate their intake and provide healthy diets and get them out, to begin with just moving around, exercise and motivation being the next step. A very simple equation must be played out because of negative values such as ‘gluttony’ and a lack of direction, the course of action required is eat less and do more.

The government needs to start the process of placing values at the heart of these issues, adopting a behaviourist approach, and making personal responsibility, actions, and consequences relevant to everyone. Politicians also need to convince the population that they have re-discovered the values of honesty and integrity if we are to see improvement in this area.

Low level crime and anti-social behaviour

The 2014 Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act defined low value shoplifting as a summary offence which resulted in police forces deciding they would no longer investigate thefts from shops under the value of £200.

The fact that this was announced to the country through the news media indicated to me that those decision makers have very little concern for the concept of managing the culture and ethos of an evolving society.

This in effect meant that whilst decision makers placed the value of police involvement at £200, they have failed to recognise the value of educating young people of the importance of respecting law and order.

In earlier generations most young people felt that if they did something wrong, they would most likely be found out and experience negative consequences. The fear of this resulted in an external boundary being permanently in place in a way that helps to develop internal boundaries due to an effective deterrent as the negative consequences were to be avoided.

Today there is no fear of being found out or caught out. With a conviction rate of less than 5% of reported crime this means it is highly unlikely any offender will experience any negative consequences whatsoever. As a result, there is very little motivation to develop internal boundaries.

The concept of an effective deterrent is something that appears to be disappearing from our collective consciousness and many won’t appreciate what a deterrent is or its value.

Fear is owned by the shop keeper and other victims or the bystander who dare not intervene in case of allegations of unreasonable conduct or taking the law into their own hands. This factor alone means that society has lost the ability to regulate itself. They say it takes a community to bring up a child but if the community dare not say anything or intervene, the concept of learning boundaries from those around us is undermined.

Any behaviouralist with real life practical experience will tell you that if you deal with small issues, you avoid big issues. The avoidance of dealing with small crime means people are getting sucked into a way of behaving that goes unchallenged and then leads to increasingly bigger issues and offences.

There are previous experiences of exactly this kind of problem solving in modern western society. In 1993 Rudy Giuliani was elected Mayor of New York City. In his book “Leadership” he describes how crime at all levels was having a detrimental impact on its citizens. He articulates that the police were not motivated to deal with low level crime. He was concerned that as you approached New York by train the first thing you saw was graffiti. The first impression was negative.

He asked the police to do something about it and arrest those doing graffiti. Their response was that they didn’t have the grounds for arrest as the properties owners had not made a complaint.

His reply was to arrest them for Jay walking instead and ensure they go through a criminal justice process. They did and the impact on all crime was massive. The way he turned New York City around from a place to avoid to a place everyone wanted to go to is internationally recognised. As is his impact on law and order and reducing crime rates.

Whilst his later career was more questionable, at the time, I took huge guidance from his book ‘Leadership’ not just because I liked the way he cleaned up New York City but because his methods resonated with me, and I was doing the same kind of protocols in my own work.

Giuliani (2002) called one of these protocols “The Broken Window Theory”. This simple protocol was if you have a broken window, get it repaired straight away! If you don’t, it won’t be long before the perception is broken windows are ok and you will end up with many more broken windows. If you get it fixed immediately and don’t have any broken windows, it may be a long time before another window is broken. This of course applies to many other things also, not just windows.

The solution to a more positive functioning society in the future must be to deal with the small problems to stop them from becoming big problems. Therefore, tackling low level crime is important.

An important preventative measure is to teach values as a priority in early years and throughout children’s school years and robustly enforce them. By doing so helping to establish internal boundaries that are then imprinted on the child’s brain that will keep them and others safe throughout their lives.

This means that policy makers must support those practitioners at the coal face to deal with these challenges, not just with the children but their parents also.

This also means being bold enough to maintain standards and to challenge those who fall short. It means being able to ensure the value of justice is fairly balanced and in the event that the opportunity to complain is misused, to challenge the inappropriate use of the complaints procedure in any institution and ensure negative consequences are experienced for such abuse.

Dangers in a digital world.

The digital revolution has brought about huge benefits to people all over the world. However, it also comes with huge risks. In many ways the digital world simply reflects real world and is the medium by which good

and bad can prosper in equal measure.

The idea that we can protect our children from harm in either the digital or the real world is eventually unsustainable in the long term. What we need to do is teach our children to be resilient. Resilient in the real world and resilient in the digital world also. It is my belief that these two factors are intrinsically linked. Children who are resilient in the real world are much better equipped to deal with digital world challenges and dangers.

The dictionary definition of resilience is ‘the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties, toughness’.

In a 2014 report on building resilience in schools, Public Health England defined this as ‘the capacity to bounce back from adversity’.

Harvard university describes it as ‘the ability to overcome serious hardship’.

Dr Richard Graham defined digital resilience specifically as ‘the ability to manage online stress and adversity’.

(Source: Ordinary magic for the digital age: by Racheal Rosen for Parent zone January 2017).

Whilst we may be able to build the metaphorical castle walls for a period to keep the dangers at bay, eventually all children must be exposed to these dangers or they will reach adulthood totally unequipped to deal with the challenges they will most definitely encounter. Preparing our children for the next stage of their lives is the job of all adults in whatever context or capacity, parents, and teachers alike.

In this area of discussion there are three concepts to consider.

- By encouraging our children to be resilient in the real world we are increasing their digital resilience.
- By encouraging our children to have good values they are more likely to be able to identify risks and better placed to manage these risks.
- By having good values, they are unlikely to be the source of difficulties to others.

Therefore, it may be a surprise to learn that by doing outdoor activities, sports and encountering and overcoming dangers they are learning values and building resilience in the real world. This in my view and experience has a direct correlation to building the digital resilience needed to keep them safe.

Millennials and the IGen generations.

Earlier I stated how I thought the time around the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties were a pivotal moment in time due to the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 and the Children Act 1989. This pivotal moment changing both the content of the school experience along with the relationships in the child/professional dynamic resulting changes in behaviour. This being the first I can recall as having personally lived through this time.

Historians will also say that the time after the first and second World Wars also saw huge societal changes. So, it may be a fact that occasionally certain events come together like a perfect storm, and we experience a shift in society that we only realise when we look back and reflect on times gone by.

The authors of “The Coddling of the American Mind” put forward a hypothesis that is also very worthy of

consideration. They wish to open the discussion that young people today going through the college/university system from 2013 onwards are much more “fragile” (vulnerable less resilient) than previous generations. They explain there is a definite difference in the way young minds work at the same age and stage between what they call the millennials, born 1982 - 1994 to that of what they call the iGen generation born 1995 onwards.

Their hypothesis is complex but in summary they say the iGen young people experienced at a key age and stage in their lives the launch of smart phones and social media. The combination of both of these factors along with an increasingly over protectiveness towards growing children and the absence of free play resulted in these young people having significantly less real life experiences than earlier contemporary’s.

What experiences they did have being dominated by social media and the concept of echo chambers where cognitive distortions are never challenged and constantly promoted through the “likes” feedback loop.

This fragility manifesting itself in an expected culture of not being challenged with anything you don’t agree with and promoting a victimhood culture as discussed earlier.

They express huge concern over this impact on the ability of education establishments to encourage broad discussion and free speech. The need to ensure nothing of any offence is caused results in the kind of echo chamber reflected in the digital world but with real life consequences.

They back up their concerns with statistics demonstrating deteriorating mental health and need for mental health services. We are at a time when every other discussion is about mental health and the perception that if you are not experiencing a nirvana type state of mind you are experiencing deteriorating mental health.

We are now having to explain to people that being stressed over forthcoming exams is not a sign of mental health issues, it’s called anxiety and something you need to experience and learn to cope with.

We should perhaps be careful that we don’t continually promote a victim hood culture and increase fragility as opposed to learning what’s normal and expected. The discussion needs to move from “recognising mental health” to “improving resilience” as quickly as possible.

They also state that children who have more than two hours a day screen time are at proportionate risk of depression and suicidal thoughts. It is unclear if this is the cause or those in depression spend more time looking at screens and not enough time doing real life experiences and social interactions.

A personal story that demonstrates how I learnt values as a child.

By now you’ve maybe got the idea that I am quite keen on teaching values. The fact is I always have been. The only area I think I have failed in the past, probably through a limited education myself, is in the need to identify key words describing values and then measure how well we live up to them, the way described by Dr Neil Hawkes. Before we do that and look at key words, I would like to take the opportunity to tell another story and this one is aptly fitting. Where does my strong value base come from? Answer, the same person that Aristotle’s came from, most things in life start with your mum.

I would first go back to my maternal grandparents. My grandfather was born in 1895, yes, that is **1895** and

was a very strong Labour and Union man. The 12th son of a miner- the whole family saved money enough to be able to ensure that he never went down the pit. He worked for the local council, in their offices, and became, I am led to believe, one of the founding members, or contributors of The Labour Party. His wife, my grandmother, became a suffragette and was very politically motivated in the early 1920’s. She was born in 1899 and with regret, passed away in 1996 – I say ‘with regret’ as had she lived only a few years more, she would have been one of the very few people ever to have lived across the three centuries.

Despite coming from a very poor, mining background, they brought their children up to work hard and do well. One of their sons, my uncle, was one of the people who left the United Kingdom to move to South Africa in the 60’s, and like a lot of people who emigrated there at that time, found life to be good – big house, swimming pool and “staff”, from the local black community.

In 1971 my mother took me there, to see the country and to decide whether it was a place we should also make our home. The trip was meant to last for six months and quickly became fraught with dangers. South Africa in the 60’s and 70’s was not a good place - apartheid was at its height and permeated life and culture of the place to an extraordinary degree – to a level that was completely unacceptable to my mother. She was the one who would stand in the Post Office, in the queue for ‘Whites Only’ and when she got to the counter, would pull a black man over from the opposite queue – who had been waiting far longer as the rules were that no black person could be served when a white person was waiting – and she would refuse to move until he was served.

Actions like this did not go down well and it soon came to a head when we were to go on Safari to the Kruger National Park. The country is one of the most beautiful in the world; the sunsets and mountain ranges are imprinted upon my mind today. However, an event would take place that would leave a lasting impression on a small five year olds’ mind and one that has, in all its distant memory, become part of me.

Our trip was to last several nights and at one point we were to reside overnight in a small village of mud-huts. Safari in the 70’s was very different to what it is today: not as commercialised and these were literally ‘mud-huts’ albeit done to a good standard. However, the family housekeeper, a stoic woman, one of the most loyal and conscientious people you could ever find, was directed towards a tin-sheet shed at the outer-edge of the village, where she was to reside with the other housekeepers, on a bare concrete floor, open to the Bush and where the previous week, someone had been taken by a lion, from their hut.

Keeping cool and her powder as dry as ever, my mother waited until nightfall. I was tucked up in my bed but acutely aware of what was going on. She disappeared and quickly returned, not just with our housekeeper but all the house keepers. I can recall there being literally no room on the floor in our hut, as everyone there was found a safe place to sleep. This was not without its dangers, which were to be experienced at first-hand.

The following morning as the sun rose, I can remember the sound of the distant Land Rovers roaring towards the village. Acting on a tip-off, the South African Police had come to confront this ‘disgraceful English woman’ who had dared to go against the law and arrest any black person they could find in breach of their conditions.

They all jumped out of bed and I can remember them rushing out of the backdoor, out of windows, and scurrying back to their tin-sheet shed.

My mother, disabled through ill-health most of her life, but with a heart of a lion, confronted the South African Police with their machine guns pointing at the doorstep. She had made it – they were all back where

they were supposed to be – but just in time! The Police made their point and my mother made hers.

It will be of no surprise to you to hear me say that her actions on that occasion, and in everyday life since, when she was helping people of all capacities, was inspirational.

I was brought up knowing that protecting the weak and vulnerable, was the most honourable of things to do. It is with that in mind that I continue to promote the values that she taught me, with the knowledge that a lot of our young people have not had the advantages that I had.

Just looking at this as a small child I was to see and learn so many values in this one experience. Courage, compassion, kindness, humility, responsibly, tolerance, justice, integrity. These are the ones that immediately come to mind.

Promoting Empathy

‘The development of empathy is the antidote to both childhood and adult violence.’
(World Wild Alternatives to Violence Report 2005)

As the above story demonstrates the most important lesson, I learned was how important it is to think of others, to consider issues from other people’s perspectives, of being empathic. It is indeed this element of one’s personality that is in my view fundamental to successful relationships with others and as no person is an island, the ability to be empathic is also fundamental to your own personal emotional wellbeing also.

Trying to ascertain what is empathy and how it works has often been one the mysteries of working with young people. Some young people just don’t seem to have it whilst other people seem to have it in abundance. So, before we go any further, maybe we should ask ourselves the question, ‘what is empathy and how can we influence young people who don’t appear to have any?’

Dr Robert Winston in his book, ‘The Human Mind’ describes how within the brain we have what are called ‘Mirror neurons’. This is a part of the brain that makes you cringe when you see someone bang their head or feel emotional at a powerful film. Or quite simply, in a meeting find yourself reflecting a similar body language to those around you – these are a functioning part of the brain – some people have them work well; some people don’t and some people, particularly some of our young people, struggle to have that part of their brain develop at all. Probably because they are focusing on too many other important issues like surviving the day without abuse, to worry and think about other people.

Dr Winston also goes on to describe separately, another occasion when a child was brought to the doctors for lack of sight in one eye. Tests again and again, couldn’t find the problem. The eye appeared to be a normal, functioning eye in every sense of the word. Only through enquiry, it was ascertained that at birth, the child had an eye infection and the eye was patched up. The thinking behind this relevance is that the eye was never really switched on at birth in the way that eyes normally are. There are elements of our functioning which require activating in the correct order at the correct time.

My experience has led me to believe that it is very similar in terms of promoting empathy; that in an environment where you’re never asked to consider anyone else’s feelings or situation, you are less likely to use these skills, but over a period of living in an environment where you are, these skills can be switched on, enhanced, and developed and that is very much what we are trying to achieve when we consider how we create an environment which promotes the development of empathy. It is likely that those elements

of the brain have already been switched on but are functioning at a much less degree and like many things to do with learning, where we need to exercise the brain to enhance its’ ability to function in a particular area, as our teachers would state for mathematics etc., this part of the brain equally requires promoting and exercise.

Neuroplasticity is the word used to describe how the brain can be taught to grow and develop in different ways because of nurturing. This puts the science behind our optimism, for the capacity for change and explains that children are not fixed by means of genetic makeup, but mouldable and highly impressionable.

It is my understanding that neuroplasticity can only take place when the brain is in a relaxed state.

This would explain –

A/ Why children appear to be developmentally stuck at the age abuse took place because of stress. (Toxic Stress, Garner et al, 2012/Lieberman 2012)

B/ That this delay is overcome and neuroplasticity begins to take place as children feel safe and secure.

Promoting the language of values as part of our everyday vocabulary.

Creating a lovely environment is one thing but what’s important is how people live in that environment. Children learn from adults and it is therefore so important that the adults live and promote good values. This happens from a very young age.

It was Aristotle that once said.

“Children become just by doing just acts”.

“By imitating virtue, we become virtuous, starting with politeness, the beginning of respect.”

In other words, when a child is taught how to say please and thank you, this is not just for the gratification of those around them, this is the start of a process that stimulates those mirror neurones and develops empathy as this is the beginning of respect but also the process of thinking of others.

As discussed earlier, the promotion of a child’s vocabulary is important but it must also include the language of thinking of others. Working with animals promotes this from the start but we mustn’t assume the basics are in place. Whilst it is quite usual for most children to be taught about, please, thank you and good manners from a young age, this is not always in place. This doesn’t mean it can be forgotten about or overlooked. To do this can result in a failure of the cognitive processes that are so important to relationship building which can have a negative impact throughout their lives.

Developing empathy is perhaps the most important life skill there is. It starts with please and thank you but should be developed further, simple tasks like asking a child to open the farm gate to allow entry to visitors or farm machinery is one such way in our setting.

To open and close a gate is to recognise that the gate is there to protect the animals if they escape their enclosure. It means the driver doesn’t have to get out of their vehicle, open the gate, return to vehicle, move through the gate, and then get out once again to close the gate. By being helpful and opening a gate we are keeping everything safe and allowing the vehicle to pass in one movement.

Working with and caring for plants and animals is to learn about nurturing. To experience nurturing is one thing but it’s not a given that the ability to nurture is automatically transferred. This is learned through repetitive examples directly experienced over time and put into practice with plants and animals that can then be transferable skills to their own children when the time comes.

Aristotle also said “Your character is developed through habituation. If you do things repeatedly eventually it will become part of your character.” Our organisation went through the process of debating what we all thought our corporate values should be and then analysing what they would mean in practise. These values had to be universal for all and not different values for children and others for staff. We had to agree and share common values. This isn’t as easy as you may think. For example, one senior member of staff was adamant that the value of “Loyalty” should feature strongly. In most circumstances this would be appropriate. Then factor in that our population of children often must question their loyalties to abusive parents, the concept of loyalty under any

circumstance doesn’t pass the test of being appropriate to our circumstances.

So - What are Values?

What are Values?

Principles or standards of behaviour.

One's judgement of what is important in life.

“Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.”

- Aristotle

‘A value is a principle that guides our thinking and behaviour’

‘The values that we hold in our hearts are expressed in our behaviours and can be described as our virtues’

Value = Principle

- Values are the ideals or standards that people use to direct their behaviour.
- Values are what people strive to realise in their lives.

Virtue = Behaviour

- A behaviour showing high moral standards.
- A quality considered morally good or desirable in a person.

Vice is the opposite—a habit that spoils one’s chances of achieving personal happiness. By definition, vice is bad; there cannot be a good vice.

In First Nation/Native American and Aboriginal culture, to take more than you need was considered a sign of mental illness. This is not as far away from our own learning as greed and gluttony are considered as vices which are a sign of poor behaviour or personality.

Values	Virtues	Vices
1. Integrity	1. Frugality	1. Wastefulness
2. Kindness	2. Industry	2. Laziness
3. Courage	3. Contentment	3. Discontent
4. Respect	4. Chastity	4. Promiscuity
5. Responsibility	5. Perseverance	5. Yielding
6. Happiness	6. Persistence	6. Discontinuity
7. Love	7. Fair-mindedness	7. Prejudice
8. Unity	8. Tolerance	8. Intolerance
9. Honesty	9. Self-respect	9. Dishonour
10. Friendship	10. Humility	10. Arrogance
11. Freedom	11. Politeness	11. Rudeness
12. Patience	12. Charisma	12. Repulsiveness
13. Appreciation	13. Friendliness	13. Unfriendliness
14. Co-operation	14. Sportsmanship	14. Dishonesty
15. Harmony	15. Cleanliness	15. Dirtiness

(Source: I Am – Amazon Prime).
Through much discussion and soul searching we decided our corporate values should be the following:

COURAGE

The ability to do something that frightens you.

To be brave.

- Trying a food that you’ve never tried before.
- Engaging in a new experience.
- Doing something that might be a little risky such as riding a horse or bike for the first time.
- Standing up for a person who is being picked on.
- Helping a person or animal in need, even if it might put you in a little bit of danger.
- Standing up for yourself.
- Doing something by yourself for the first time.

INTEGRITY

The quality of being honest and having strong moral principles.

Knowing what is right and wrong.

- Keep your promises even if it takes extra effort.
- Do not gossip or talking badly about someone.
- Do not let someone else take the blame for something you did.
- Show respect to co-workers with appropriate conversation and empathy.
- Be responsible. Do what you say you will do.

RESPONSIBILITY

Being accountable, dependable, and trustworthy.

Taking responsibility means never blaming anyone else for anything you are being, doing or feeling.

- Be accountable.
- Stop blaming.
- Acknowledge what happens.
- Accentuate the positive. Move through your day with positive attitude.
- A responsible person continues to grow emotionally.
- Say “thank you.” Accept praise graciously. When someone acknowledges you, say, “thank you.”
- Practice healthy self→ focus.

RESPECT

Having due regard for the feelings, wishes, or rights of others.

Respect can be both given and received.

- Listen to others when they speak.
- Value other people’s opinions.
- Be considerate of people’s likes and dislikes.
- Don’t mock or tease people.
- Be sensitive to other people’s feelings.
- Don’t pressure someone to do something they don’t want to do.
- Show manners towards people, you will make them feel valuable.

KINDNESS

Helpfulness towards someone in need, not in return for anything.

To be kind to yourself and to others.

- Be a friend who listens.
- Be kind to someone you dislike.
- Listen with all your senses.
- Cook a meal for someone.
- Show Your Appreciation to Someone in Your Life
- Make someone a drink without asking.
- Hold a door open.

The Golden Mean

In the assessment tool below, you can see that being well balanced in the middle is the ideal and a target to aspire to or achieve. What Aristotle called “The Golden Mean”. At either side is the opposite of the value we are promoting, and a judgment is required to determine where the person we are considering fits on to this scale. These elements of positive in the middle of two negative elements or vices is self-explanatory and gives us much to consider if the value of values is lost, they are filled by not a vacuum but the vice. Using and being aware of this kind of information and the use of the language of values is so important in terms of being able to articulate a strength or a weakness and by doing so we share a common language and understanding. This assessment tool is available in the online assessment tool discussed later.



Summary.

- The importance of using the language of values.
- The significance of please and thank you.
- The importance of adults demonstrating good values.
- The importance of carefully selecting your corporate values.
- The power of the language of values.

The value of experiences.

Parenting styles.

In my experience over the years attitudes vary tremendously towards different types of activities. Initially in the 1990s the attitude amongst residential staff was let children do what they want. It was a huge battle to get people to see the need for some form of structured activities outside of school time. Whilst they did as instructed, it took probably ten years before this was embedded so much it became the norm. If I let my guard down, they would revert to doing very little if anything structured. The purchase of the farms was met with similar resistance, if they weren’t instructed to go to the farm there would always be something else to do, probably whilst getting a bit of shopping. Now years later there is a strong desire to have children experience structured activities and attend our farms as many have seen the benefits time and time again and also see the consequences of not engaging in structured activities whatever they are.

Sociologist Annette Lareau author of “Unequal childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life and Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam author of “The American Dream in Crisis (Source: The Coddling of the American Mind) both found that there was a significant contrast between parenting styles and attitudes at different positions on the socioeconomic spectrum.

Middle class and above parents were much more likely to be competitive in their aspirations for their children. Their parenting style would seek to ensure a full calendar of activities designed to stimulate learning and prepare children for the life their parents hope they would live. They would spend more time talking to and reasoning with their children. This style Lareau called “Concerted cultivation”.

In contrast working class and below parents were much more likely to take the attitude that children will find their own way in life and leave them to do their own thing. They would also spend less time talking to and reasoning with their children. Lareau calls this style “Natural Growth” parenting.

At first glance, it would appear that children who have been raised with a “natural growth” parenting style would benefit much more from free play and the ability to explore the world around them, make mistakes and figure things out encountering the thousands of experiences we need to grow into balanced independent thinking adults.

However, the world we live in now means many of these experiences are reduced to those found on a screen. Being left to their own ‘devices’ would mean exactly that, more screen time. There is a fine line between natural growth parenting and neglect. In social care the line has already been crossed hence the need for our services. Again, the absence of taking time to talk to children and reason with them is very evident in many of the situations children referred to our service have experienced.

However, they also warn against the over protection and structure of “Concerted Cultivation” in that reducing the opportunities for “free play” reduces all the benefits mentioned above and can have a detrimental impact also. The issue is of course balance. All things in life depend on balance. However, in our setting we are taking children for whom the balance has already been badly impacted.

Opportunities for totally genuine free play may be lost due to behaviour problems that can and often do lead to safeguarding concerns. Therefore, there was and is a definite need to provide as many experiences as

possible in a structured way to help children grow into well rounded adults. Today it still amazes me that the correlation between experiences and the scope of reference a young person can use to guide them through their lives is not recognised or valued the way it should. I visit and assess so many children, many have been in the care system for years with such a limited scope of reference because they literally haven't been anywhere or done anything. As corporate parents we should have aspirations for the children in our care and conscious of our responsibilities to provide those experiences.

This also raises the question of the kind of experiences and the quality of the structured opportunities. Children who are exposed to history, culture, and learning from a nearby market town may well get more out of that experience than a child taken to Benidorm to sit next to a pool. Learning how to analyse activities and recognise their value in terms of what they bring to a child's development is something I will cover within this chapter.

Attitudes towards education.

It's interesting that the social scientists above have divided the class groups at the point above and below middle class. Defining class is something that is of course more complex and controversial than this with many types of exceptions within the discussion. Rather than saying certain classes behave in certain ways it is perhaps more appropriate to define the class by the attitude rather than expect behaviour from a certain class.

In my experience there is a different attitude to education along the same socioeconomic groups, these being middle class and above demonstrate the following attitudes to education, these being:

- EDUCATION (learning new skills in and out of school - promoted, supported encouraged)
- ASPIRATION (desire to embrace change, grow and develop)
- HARD WORK (turned into a competition or culture)
- FULFILMENT (satisfying and rewarding outcome)

These attitudes directly promote the engagement in an economic society and financial independence.

Whilst the lower socioeconomic classes demonstrate to varying degrees the following.

- ACCEPTANCE (no desire to change situation)
- OPPRESSION (feelings of it's always someone else's decisions or actions)
- RESTRICTION (self-limited opportunities)
- AVOIDANCE (why do something now if we can leave it until later, we may not have to do it at all)

These attitudes directly promote a victim hood culture and moral dependency.

Getting past these barriers is the lifelong challenge every educationalist faces. Not just with students but all those involved who have pre imposed expectations.

Those who want to have a positive influence on young people should always be advising and promoting successful life strategies and avoid being sucked into a victim hood culture.

Playing

We must not forget the value of fun. Paddling in the river, making a camp etc. It is worth looking at the "National Trust ", 50 things to do before you're 11 ¾ (<https://www.50things.org.uk/>). Whilst many young people are older, they may have missed out, so we should make sure that they have done as many things on the list as they can. Flying a kite, building a den, climbing a tree, visiting an island to name but a few.

All young people need the opportunity to play, however in special education due to the nature of their problems, there usually needs to be some kind of guidance and usually 'role model leadership' and always clear boundaries. However, when possible, stand back!

To the experienced parent, the children playing nicely without concern, produces the most beautiful music. You can also tell the second it changes to something less harmonious.

Desmond Morris describes the Play Rules as being:

- You shall investigate the unfamiliar, until it has become familiar.
- You shall impose rhythmic, repetition on the familiar.
- You shall vary this repetition in as many ways as possible.

You shall select the most satisfying of these variations and develop these at the expense of others.

- You shall combine and recombine these variations with one another.
- You shall do all of this for its own sake and as an end to itself.

Certainly, these are the rules of play that I have applied to my holidays, which are a grown up way of playing. These rules could be applied to many of the activities above also.

Here, also a word of warning. In his experiments with apes, he concluded that the absence of play often resulted in juveniles being anti sexual and anti-parental. Now where have I heard that one before? In a world where we have an increasing population of anti-sexual and anti-parental people, we would be wise to ask if there is a correlation between this and the way children's play has changed. We have gone from digging holes and jumping in puddles to ever increasing screen time in no time at all.

Play is such an important part of a child's development and yet for many young people, who are often older than their years, for them it has already gone wrong. How can we help to put it right? Going back for some young people and being allowed the time to heal and regain aspects of a missed childhood must be invaluable as long as it is safe to do so!

Free play

It is said that through free play, (no adult support or supervision) children develop what is known as "The Art of Association" the ability to make free enquiry, interact, negotiate, communicate and resolve problems, which are essential to democracy.

By eroding the value of free play we could be impacting on the free world, now there's a thought. (Source; The Coddling of The American Mind.) for more information on the value of free play Google search - No Rules School.

Some years ago, at the start of the summer holidays, I took my children who at the time were an eleven year old boy and a seven year old girl to our farm on the moors. It was a hot July day and we walked down to the river at the bottom of the valley. I sat under a tree and promptly fell asleep. Slightly dozing I could hear them playing in the river and creating the most beautiful music. Every July since I have wanted to recreate that moment, due to the weather or circumstances it has never happened again. Now they are older, if the situation allowed the opportunity, he'd drown her!

"Seize the moment"

The time we have to influence children is so short. For children with difficulties the window of opportunity is forever closing and we don't have time to waste doing negative or ineffectual activities or experiences.

Likewise, one of the exercises have done with children in distress many times with a positive impact is to help them put their life into context. I ask them to draw a grid with seventy squares.

I then ask them to colour in the number that represents their age. With this complete I say to them the hard truth of life, 'sometime in the future you're going to die. We all are going to die if you're lucky you might live to seventy. If you're really lucky you might improve on this. As the first ever child I helped to look after was killed in a car crash in his early thirties let's agree you will be lucky to get to 70. Therefore, looking at the grid with squares each representing a year in your life, do you want to ruin your chances of having a good life now when you've got all these boxes to go because of something someone (or many) has done in one of these coloured boxes.' Hard tough love is so very often needed and this is just one example that helps children put their lives in perspective.

Example of a 13 year old's grid.

If we think of playing as a starting point to activities that develop because of introducing the element of adult interaction these can be easily guided towards structured learning. It is however important to recognise that for many children there is huge value (activities that promote values) in some of the simplest activities. Likewise, there is the potential to encounter dangers (activities that can erode values or promote vices) in the simplest of things also.

Within the world of children in the care system we see this all the time. Often carers under the belief that they should be providing whatever the child wants to do often get seduced by high adrenaline activities which are often expensive, time limited and then have a negative effect on the child as they must manage the anti-climax of the return to normal base level being.

It is possible using a simple framework to measure anything. In terms of leading people to provide a cohesive delivery of activities and understand what they were exposing children too, I developed a framework to measure activities against what we value.

So, let's take a look at this hypothesis.

Positive activities in my internal assessment systems can be measured to promote wellbeing against the following criteria.

- Broaden Horizons (increase a child's scope of reference)
- Educational
- Therapeutic
- Improve Skills
- Leisure
- Physical fitness

However, to be successful in these areas each one needs to have its own way of being measured.

Broaden Horizons - to be successful in this area how does the activity measure against the below criteria? (This is dependent on your cohort).

- Outside familiar environment
- Experiential
- Exposed to a different culture.
- Exposed to an increased vocabulary.

Educational - to be successful in this area how does the activity measure against the below criteria?

- Require communication and listening skills.
- Have cross curriculum content.
- Be inspiring.
- Encourage creativity.

Therapeutic - to be successful in this area how does the activity measure against the criteria below?

- Be enjoyable.
- Stimulating senses.
- Have positive interactions with others.
- Promote empathy.

Improving skill - to be successful in this area how does the activity measure against the criteria below.

- Require the use of dexterity.
- Require hand eye coordination.
- Require focus and increased concentration.
- Promote confidence.

Improving social skills - to be successful in this area how does the activity measure against the criteria below.

- Promote good communication skills.
- Promote confidence.
- Promote the need for good presentation.
- Require interactions with unknown people.

Leisure - to be successful in this area how does the activity measure against the criteria below?

- Enjoyable
- Stimulating

- Relaxing
- Structured

Physical fitness - to be successful in this area how does the activist measure against the criteria below?

- Involve increased cardiovascular exercise.
- Improve stamina.
- Involve teamwork.
- Exposure to fresh air.

Measuring Elements

To see how this can be measured let us have a look at a good activity and evaluate what is going on? To consider the attributes, we need to measure the elements?

To consider broadening horizons, we are going to look at the elements listed above under that section and give each element a value from 1 - 5. 1 being not a lot of that element being involved to 5 meaning a lot of that element is involved. There is an element of guess-work and personal judgement, don't be frightened to play with it.

Whilst we may have different people debating the question; is it a 4 or a 5? or even a 3 or a 4, it is unlikely that you would be in dispute over a 1 or 5. Therefore, the small areas of discussion are balanced out, to give an overall picture and it's the overall picture that counts.

The graphs below demonstrate the process.

By adding the values together, you arrive at a total, which to conclude the value of the attributes, fits into a range as follows.

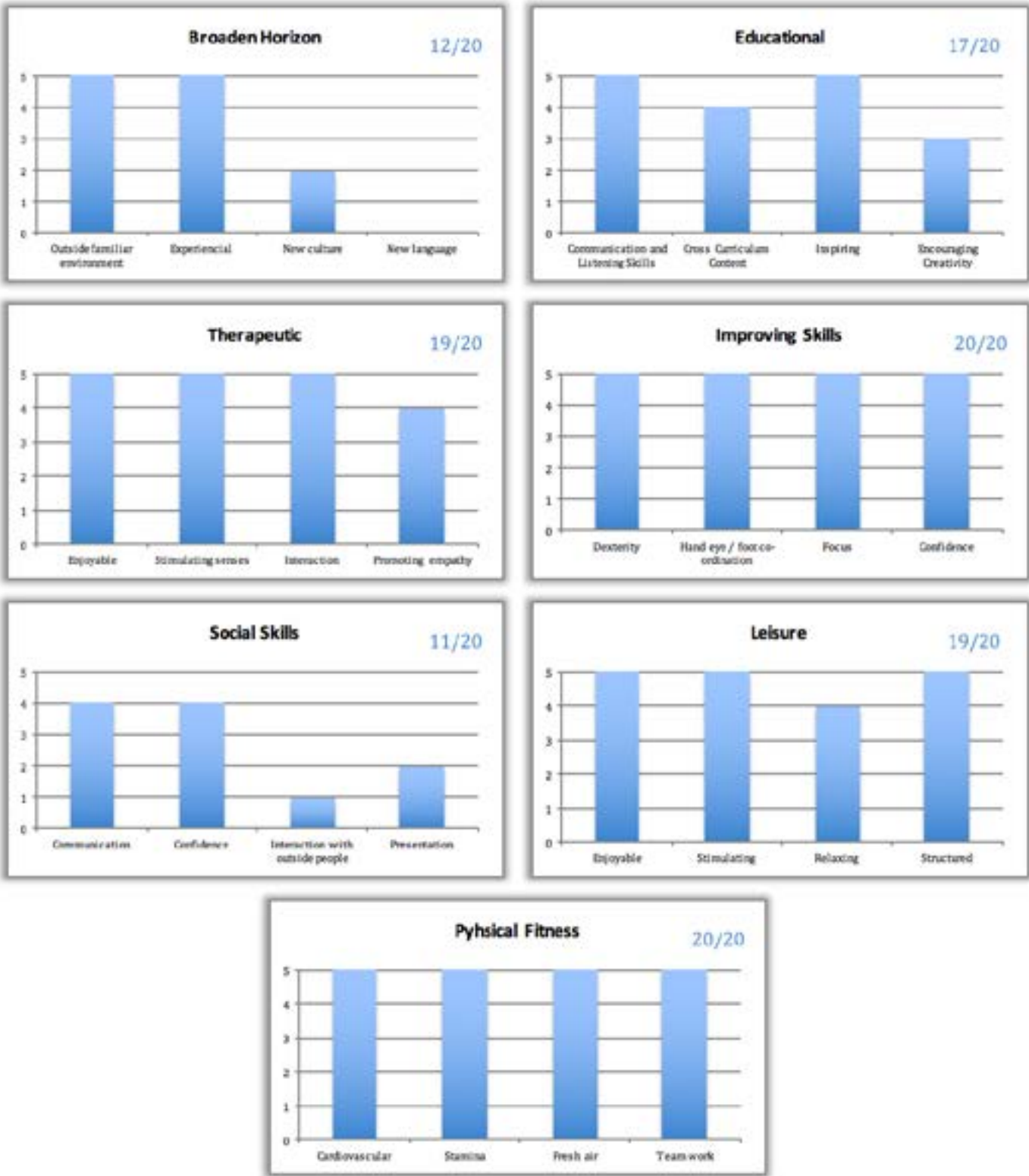
On the final graph, which measures the attributes, you can see that mountain biking is one of those activities that literately ticks all the right boxes, with a high value in all attributes.

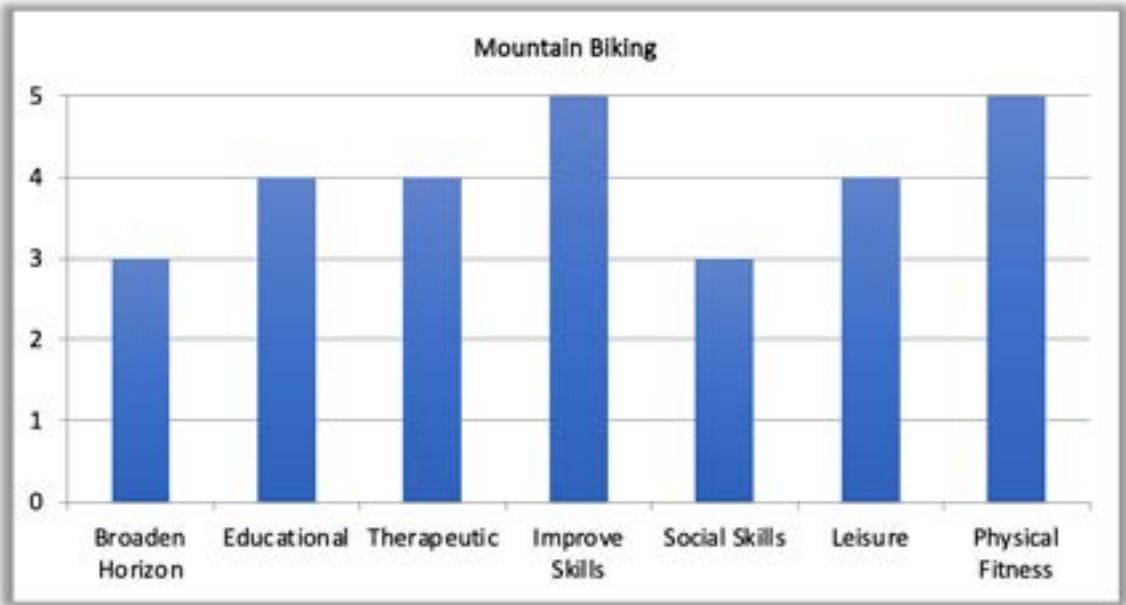
0-4 = 1 5-9=2 10-14=3 15-19=4 20=5

Looking at the range of activities

Mountain Biking

Graph showing assessment of elements





It continues to be my aspiration that all young people at Pear Tree, providing it’s appropriate, experience the following at some point during their time with us:

- Receive a new bike for Christmas.
- Receive education and training on how to use and maintain their bike.
- Take their bike with them on discharge.



The end of a long journey – students complete the Coast to Coast Challenge

Cinema

Here, there are no broadening of horizons, it cannot be called educational and there are elements of therapeutic activity. It is not an activity that will improve skills, or social skills, or anything to do with physical fitness. It is, however, a good leisure activity to do for the right reasons, at the right time! Such as a treat or to see the latest must-see blockbuster. Personally, I would keep this for the films that are at their best on the big screen and never during the day! The result is children full of energy, looking for something else to do on an evening.

Going to the theatre

This, you may feel is the same as going to the cinema, however, it demonstrates an important point in that this is a different kind of experience. It incorporates many more elements and different values due to the nature of the performance.

For example, it broadens horizons due to the environment and expectations of the theatre.

There is a strong educational attribute due to the elements listed. There is interaction with the performers, and it encompasses the arts, singing, stage craft, scenery design etc. in a way that could be argued for the cinema. Theatre is real and literally in front of your eyes not lost in the Hollywood bling.

This is without question often inspiring as the show often incorporates young people of all ages, they again are not distant Hollywood figures but real people in front of you. All this must help to encourage creativity!

Therapy also scores higher due to the infrequency of the attendance, it is altogether a more stimulating experience, and there is interaction with people and performers.

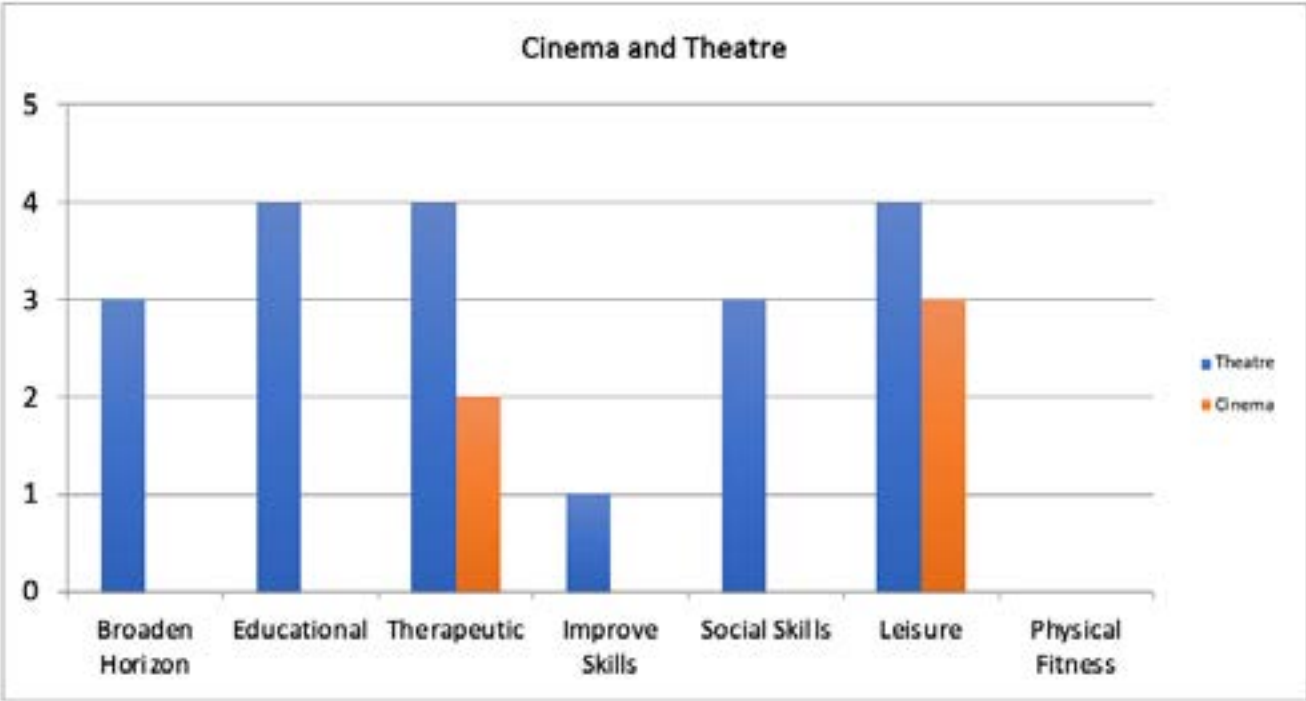
I would also argue that it incorporates an element of promoting empathy due to the nature of the story being shown. This is not exclusive to the stage against the film industry which as a strong supporter of the arts covers many in depth thought provoking stories also. However, these are often the ones missed and the nature of the stories which our children visit, which are more superficial in the film industry. However, even pantomimes have morals and hidden meanings which are much more evident.

There is also evidence of improving skills due to the need to focus and concentrate. It incorporates social skills due to the need to dress smartly (or should be, if not it is a missed opportunity). Along with interaction and direct communication from the actor on stage.

Finally, the leisure aspect is stronger, due to higher values and the element of structure in terms of the expectations and protocols of the theatre, once evident at the cinema also but lost now, as our anything goes culture takes over. This is no surprise but physical fitness is not featured.

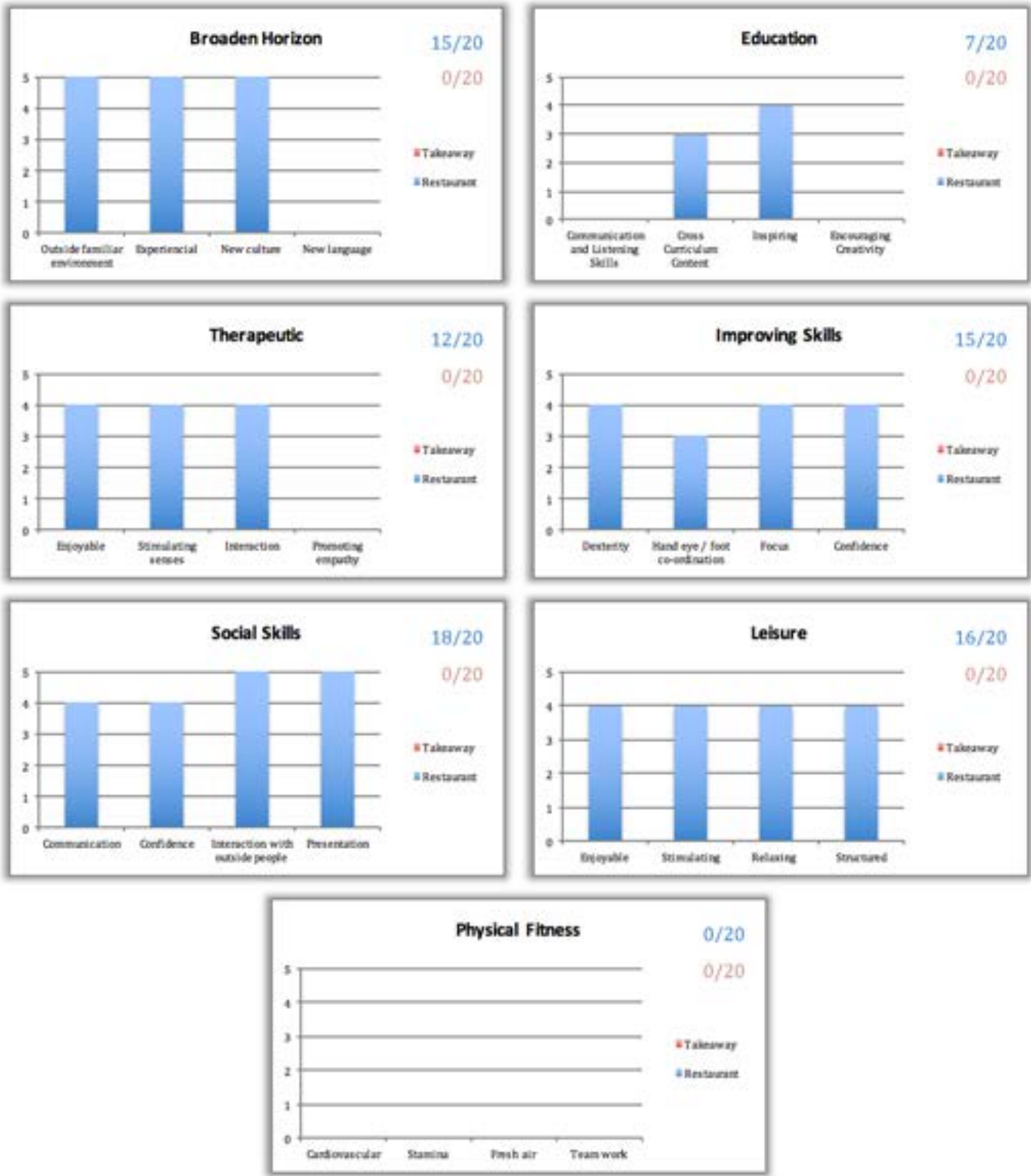
All these reasons are why going to the theatre is listed as a requirement in the ‘Personal Holistic Competence Assessment’.

Graph showing assessment and summary of attributes.



Meals out at a restaurant/Meals out at a takeaway

Graph showing assessment of elements



When I say takeaway, perhaps I mean junk food at a restaurant that also serves takeaway!

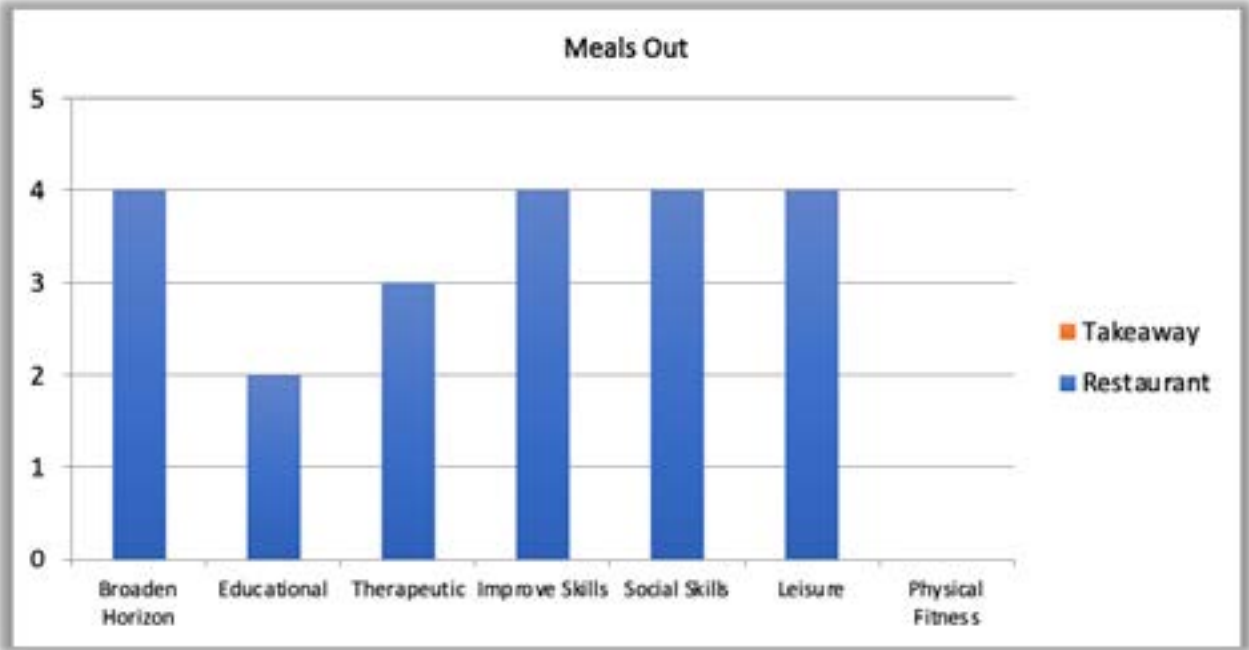
Years ago, I can recall two members of staff debating the correct place to go during a visit to a nearby market town. One person said we should only visit the cafe. The other opted for the tearooms. The first suggestion because it was more appropriate and the second because it was a different environment. There was no difference in cost.

The answer of course, is they are both right depending on what's going on at the time and what kind of experience that you want at that time. It certainly raised discussion about being able to take our young people anywhere at any time and expect good behaviour and it also demonstrated the fact that the second person wanted to give them a more special experience and “broaden their horizons”.

If you use our system to measure the experience, you’ll see that in a restaurant there is broadening of horizons and all the other attributes add to the nature of the experience. Even skills are improved, due to learning about the correct cutlery and focusing on the process. Promoting good social skills is very evident.

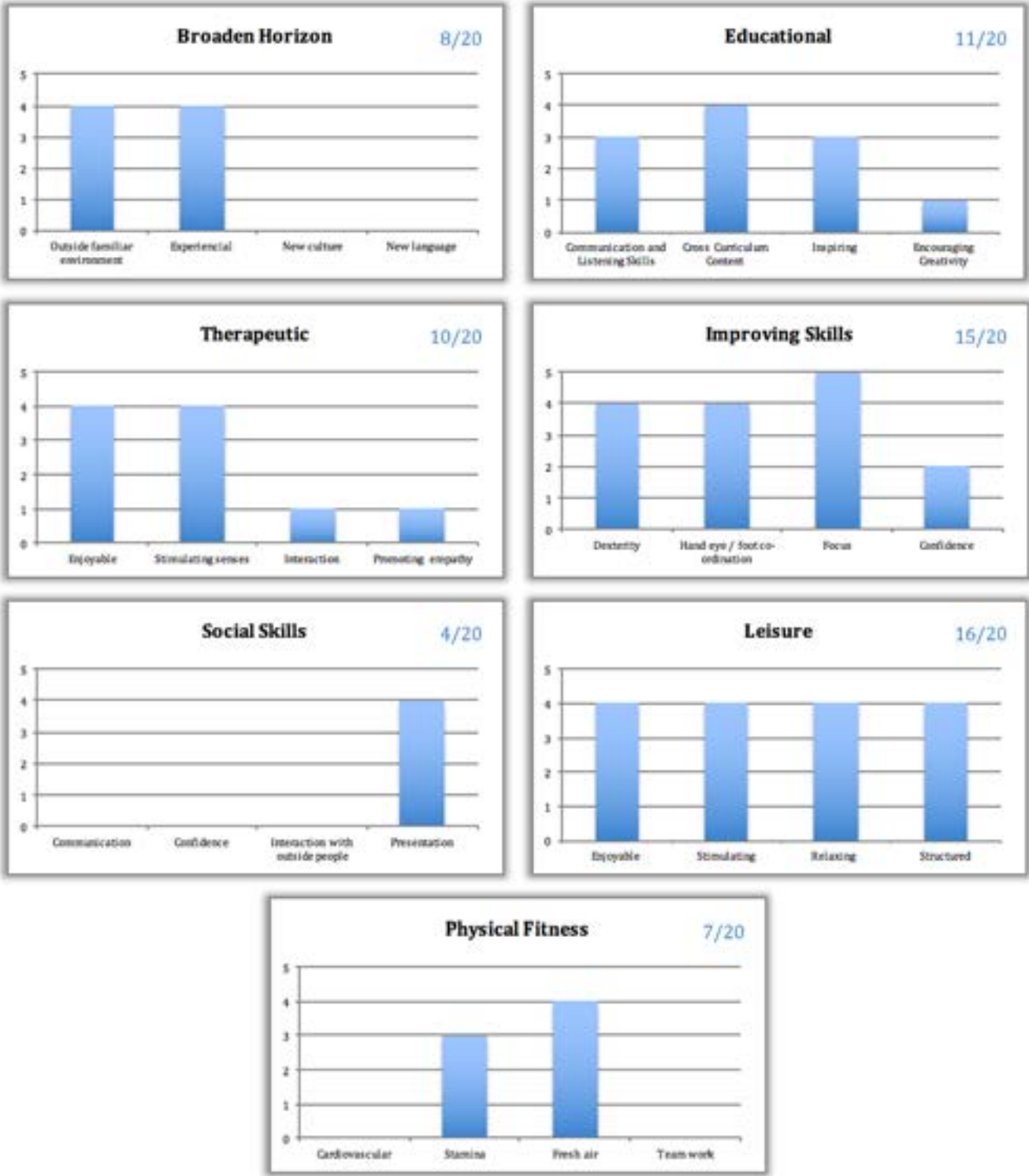
However, if you go to a junk food takeaway chain, it literally brings nothing to the table other than being fed and not very well at that!

Graph showing assessment and summary of attributes.



Fishing

Graph showing assessment of elements

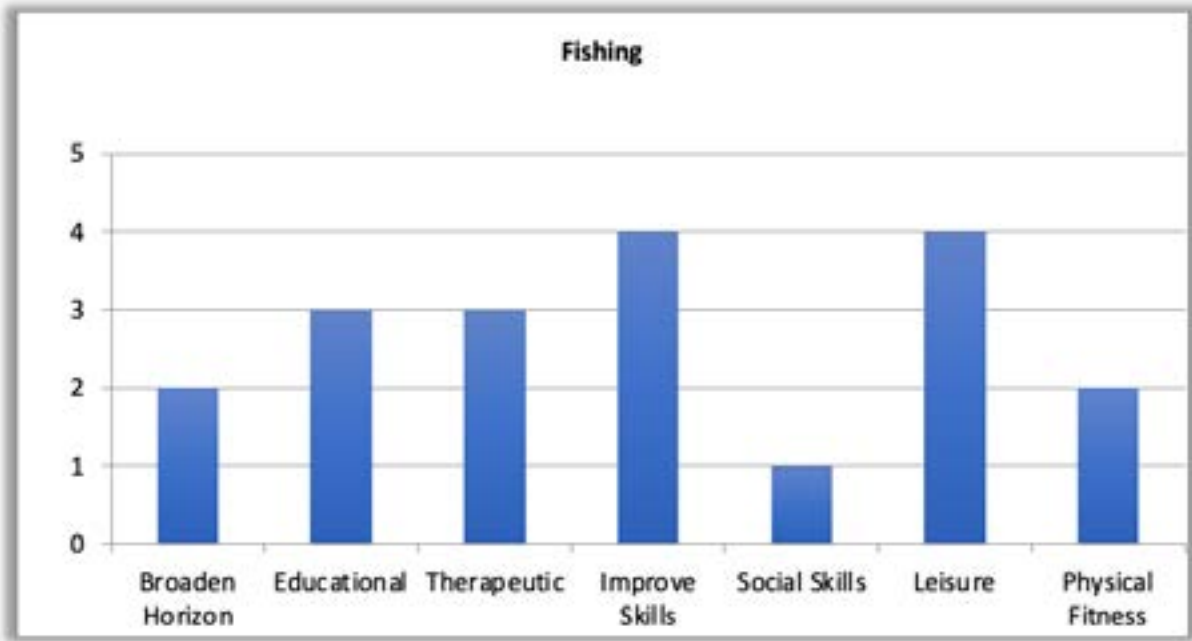


Many people love fishing. After football, it is the nation's second favourite sport.

Looking at our system, it is clear to see that it has many benefits for young people, many elements resulting in each attribute being registered. The development of the fisheries project, means that it has been able to develop strongly as a cross curricular activity, involving geography, science and environmental studies and rural science. Also, learning to tie flies is very creative.

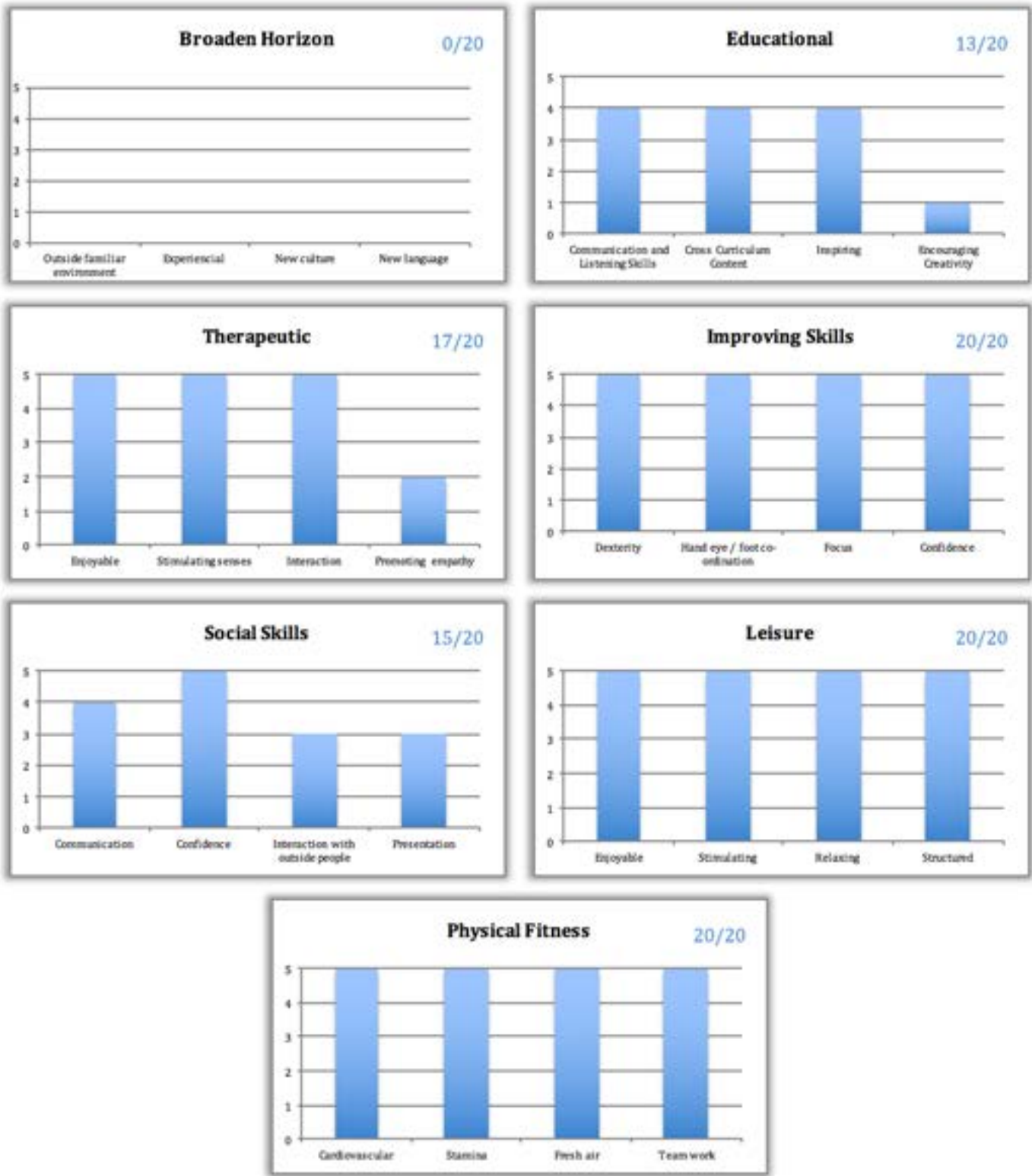
Contrary to first impressions, even when dispatching fish, there is the promotion of empathy as you are considering the event from the fish's perspective and how to do it as humanely as possible.

Graph showing assessment and summary of attributes.

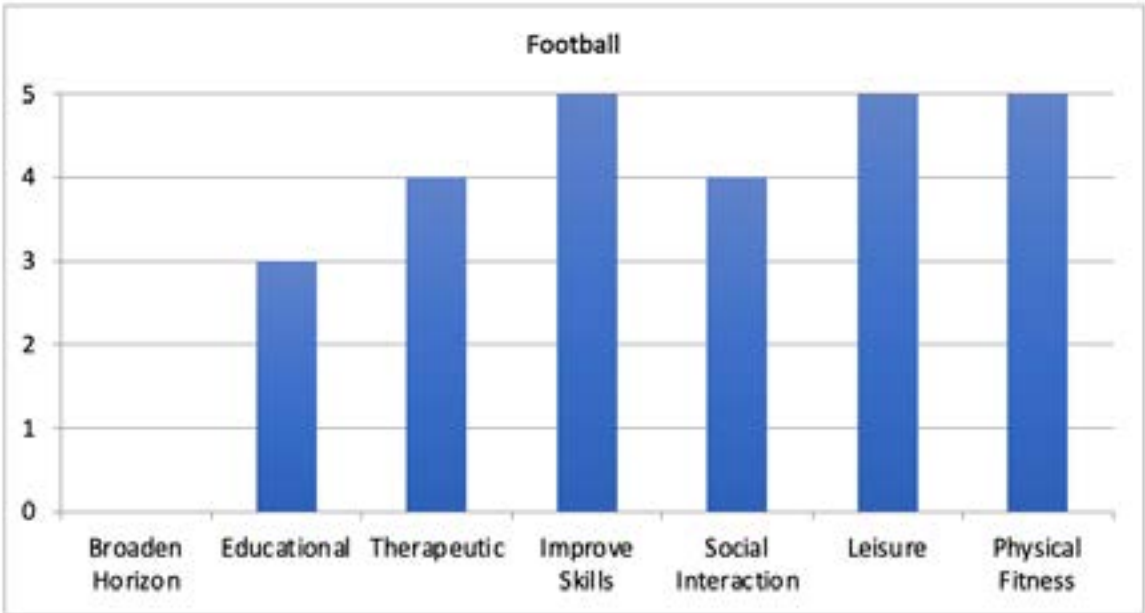


Football

Graph showing assessment of elements

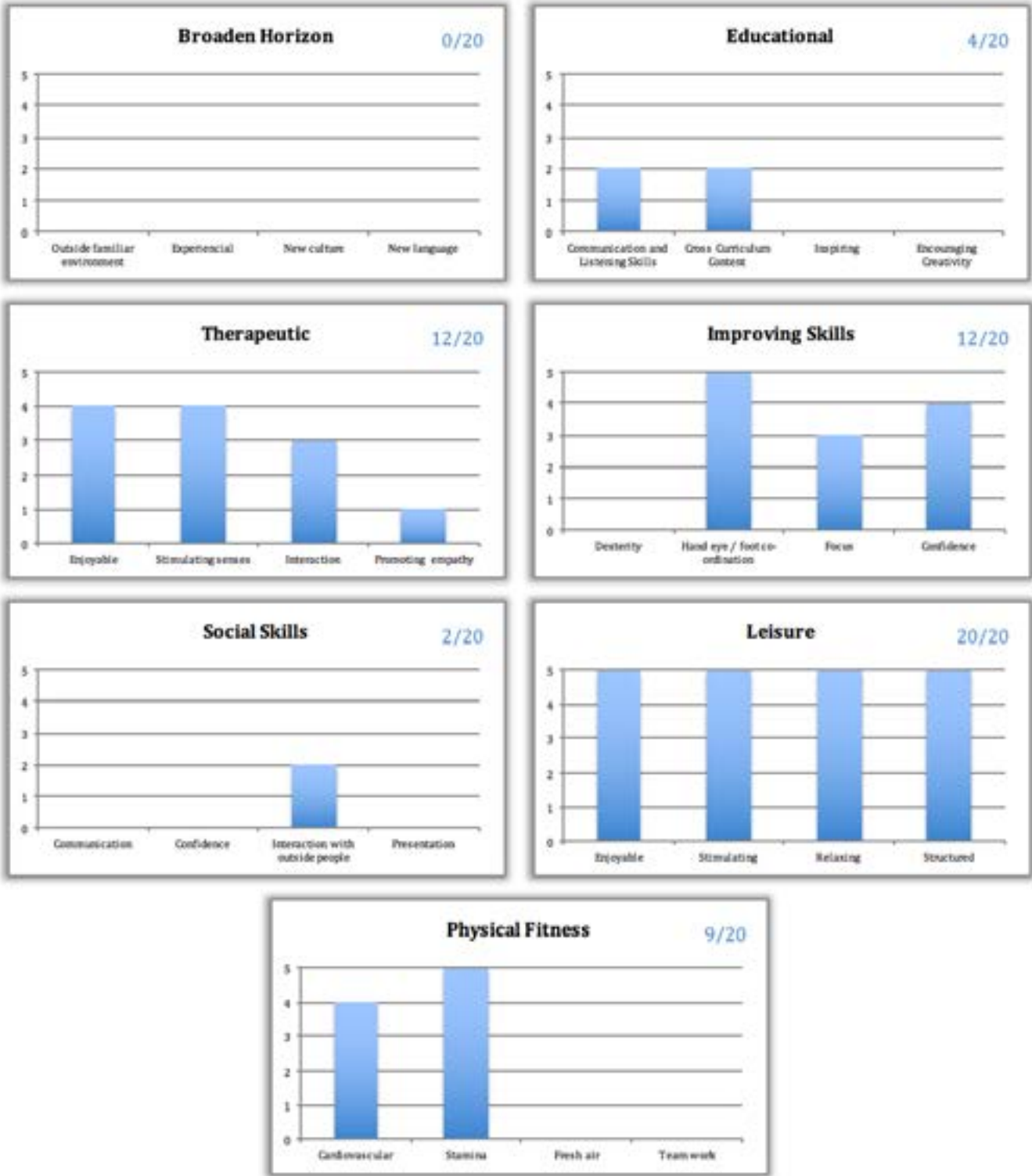


The element worth talking about here is 'teamwork!' A good game depends on good teamwork, and anyone who doesn't understand it, is soon taught it by their team mates. The camaraderie that is forthcoming, is so important and as a result, many other elements begin to thrive.



Swimming

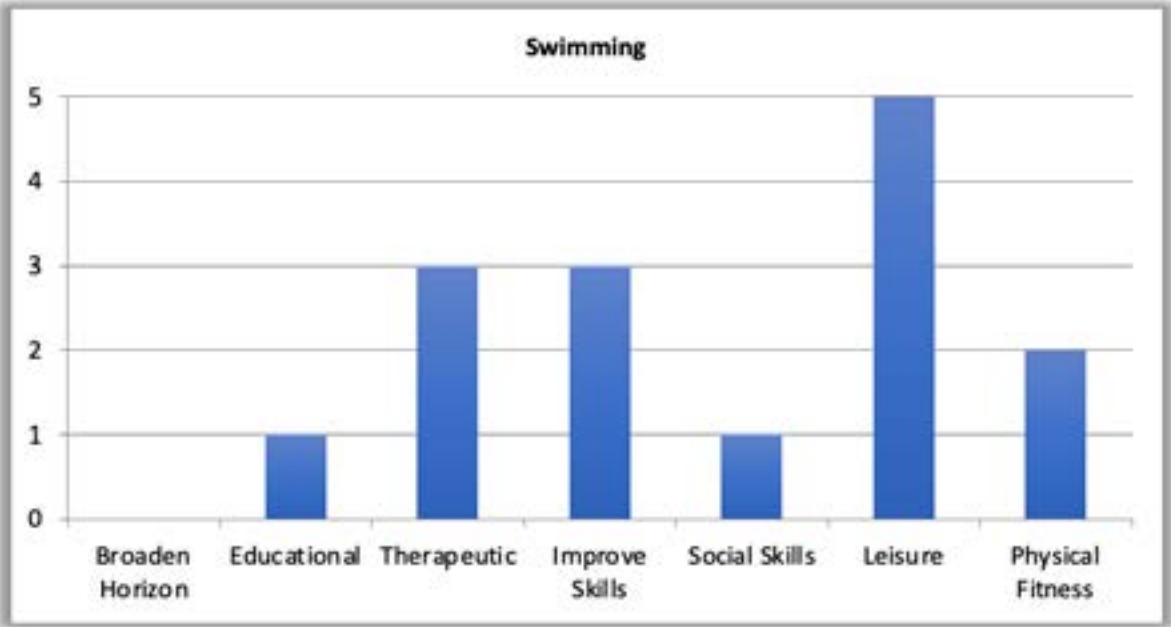
Graph showing assessment of elements



This is one of those activities that can be of good value or just a play about depending on how it is delivered. In the context of a swimming club its value increases, due to the elements of structure, teamwork, interaction etc. In the context of an evening's activity, it becomes a worthwhile leisure activity.

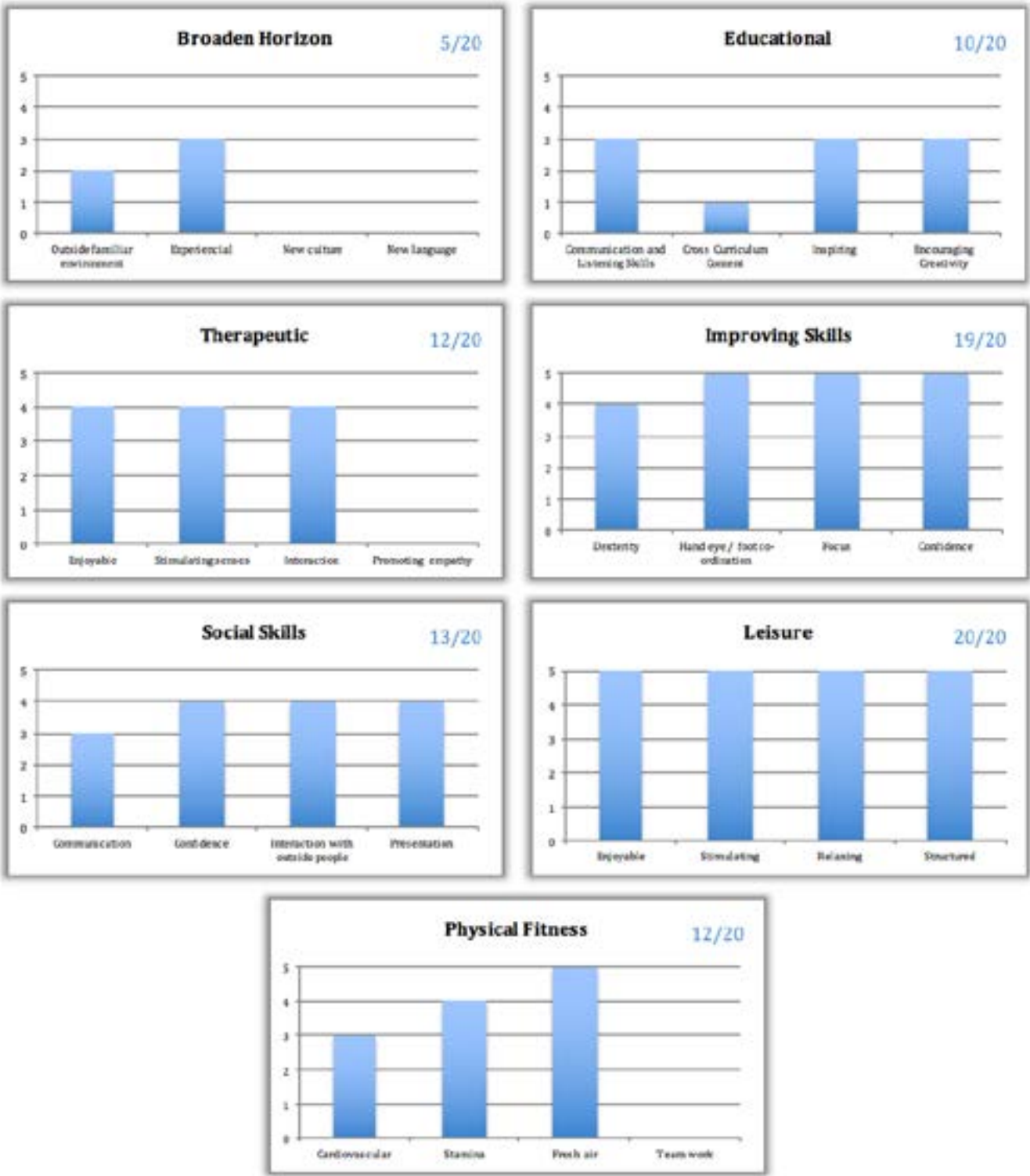
Whenever young people are taken swimming, by adding some structure and instruction, you make the most out of it and increase its value.

Graph showing assessment and summary of attributes.



Ice Skating

Graph showing assessment and summary of attributes

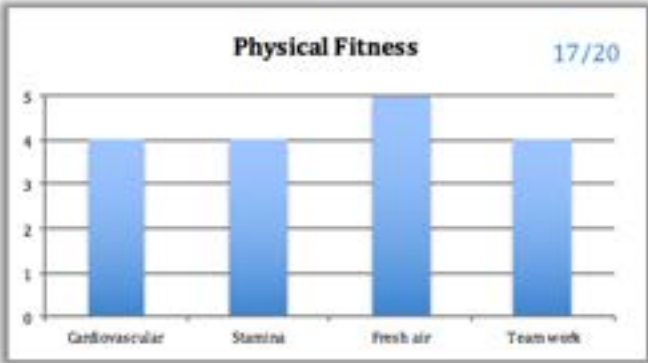
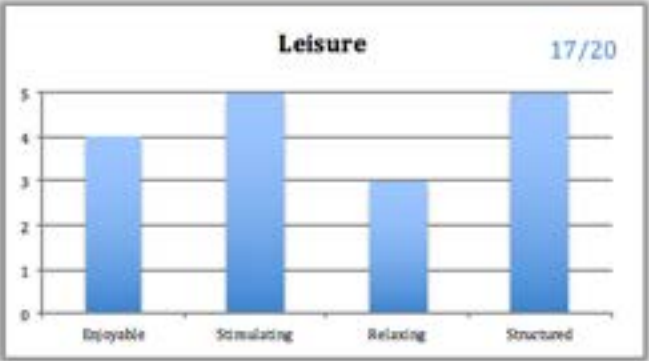
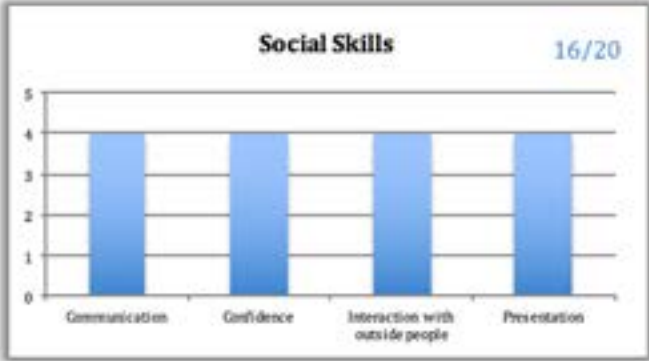
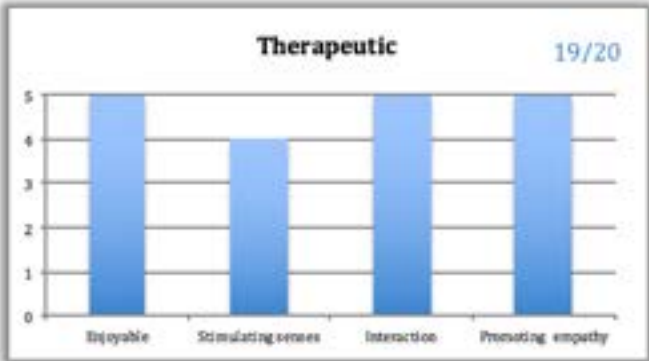
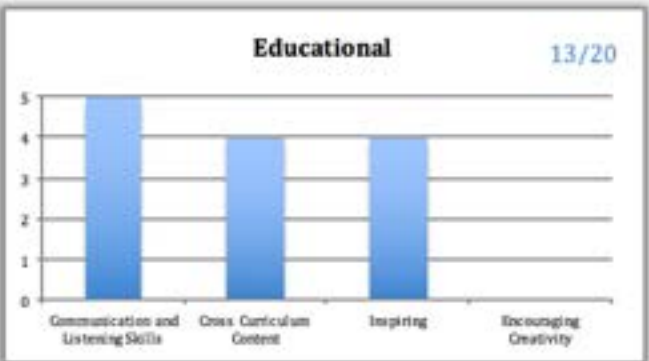
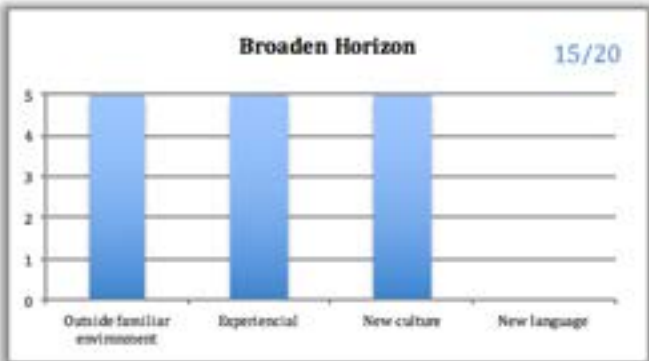
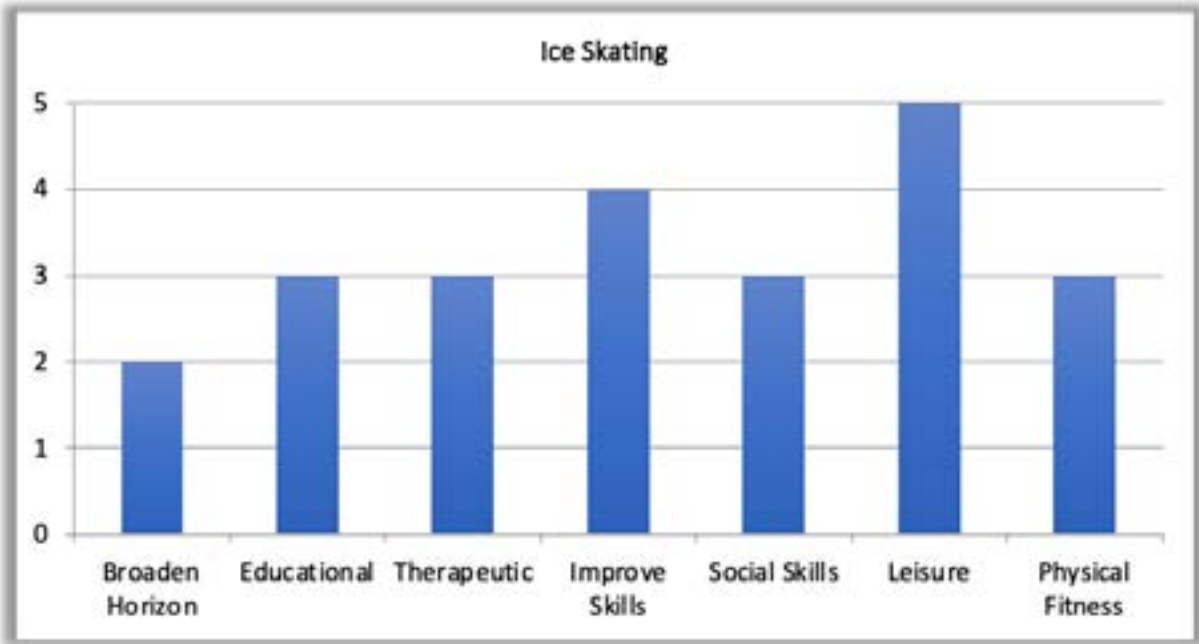


This is also a good fun thing to do! Whilst it broadens horizons and is educational, it is strong on improving skills, physical fitness, and leisure.

Horse Riding

Graph showing assessment of elements

Graph showing assessment and summary of attributes.



I've always said that the actual process of riding is only 20% of the activity, the remaining 80% is in the looking after and bonding with an animal that needs the right kind of care to get results. Without the 80% you might as well ride a bike!

Therefore, when looking at this activity, it must also include stable management and working on the yard.

From our graphs, you can see that it has a high value of attributes, because of many strong elements.

The ones which I think are worth highlighting are the educational value, as there must be clear direction using communication and listening skills for safety reasons and this is always acknowledged early in a young person's time on the farm.

Indeed, Ofsted identified the way in which working with the horses gave pupils responsibility and the way in which they dealt with it was remarkable.

There is cross curriculum content in terms of different types of feed, and materials from an agricultural source, rural science, English in reading instructions and feed labels and putting the right horse into the correct stable. It involves an element of mathematics, at feed round time.

This has resulted in some of our young people have been inspired enough to go and work elsewhere (because of learning to ride) and have even been paid to do so. There is also creativity to be found when building show jumping or cross country courses and often general problem solving, although not shown here.

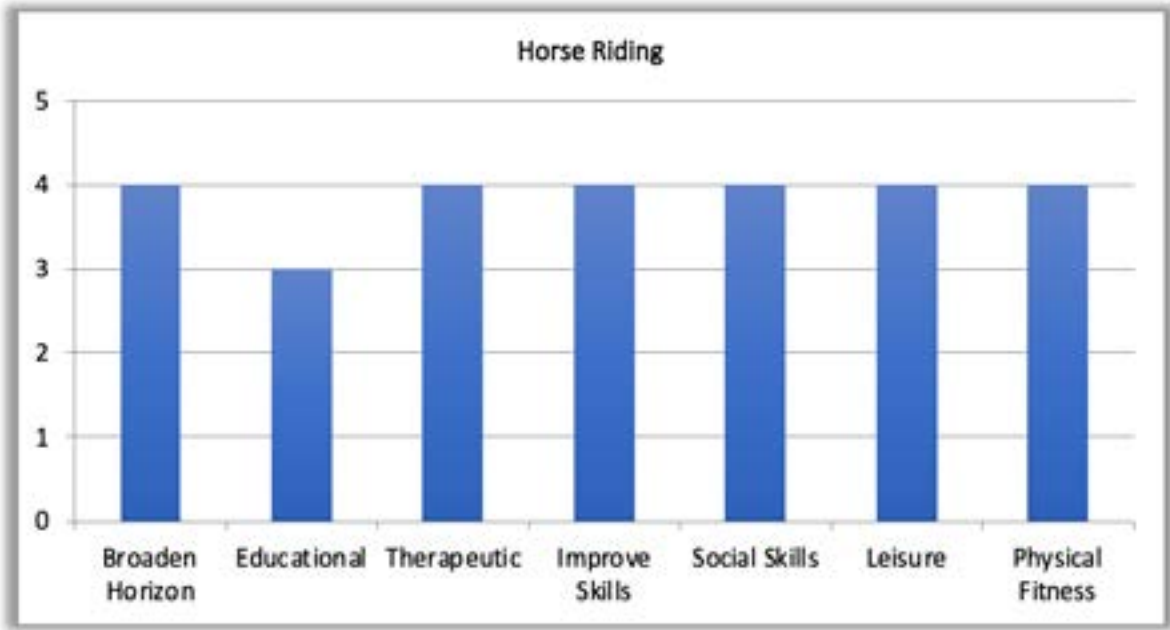
From a therapeutic perspective, it is enjoyable and stimulating. There is good interaction as whenever working with animals, you are constantly considering things from their point of view, which involves ample amounts of promoting empathy.

Improving skills comes out highly in all areas but is particularly important for building confidence. Here, it is worth talking about Desmond Morris' observations made in the sixties, regarding the fact that many children enjoy riding until adolescence when the boys begin to lose interest. He links it with the positioning of the body and thrusting movements adding to sexual awareness. If we link that to our young people's experience and recognising that they are often anxious over many things in life regardless, then helping young people overcome anxiety and build confidence mustn't be underestimated. Personally, I think that boys lose interest because it is too much like hard work for easier rewards elsewhere and they get sick of having crushed nuts!

Social skills come out high here as well as leisure. In physical fitness, the one to consider from the yard's perspective is teamwork. The values of how the yard is run are important. You will often hear me say we are not finished until we are all finished.

The young people who have gone on to other places to be employed were able to make the transition relatively seamlessly as the environment, culture and expectations were very similar.

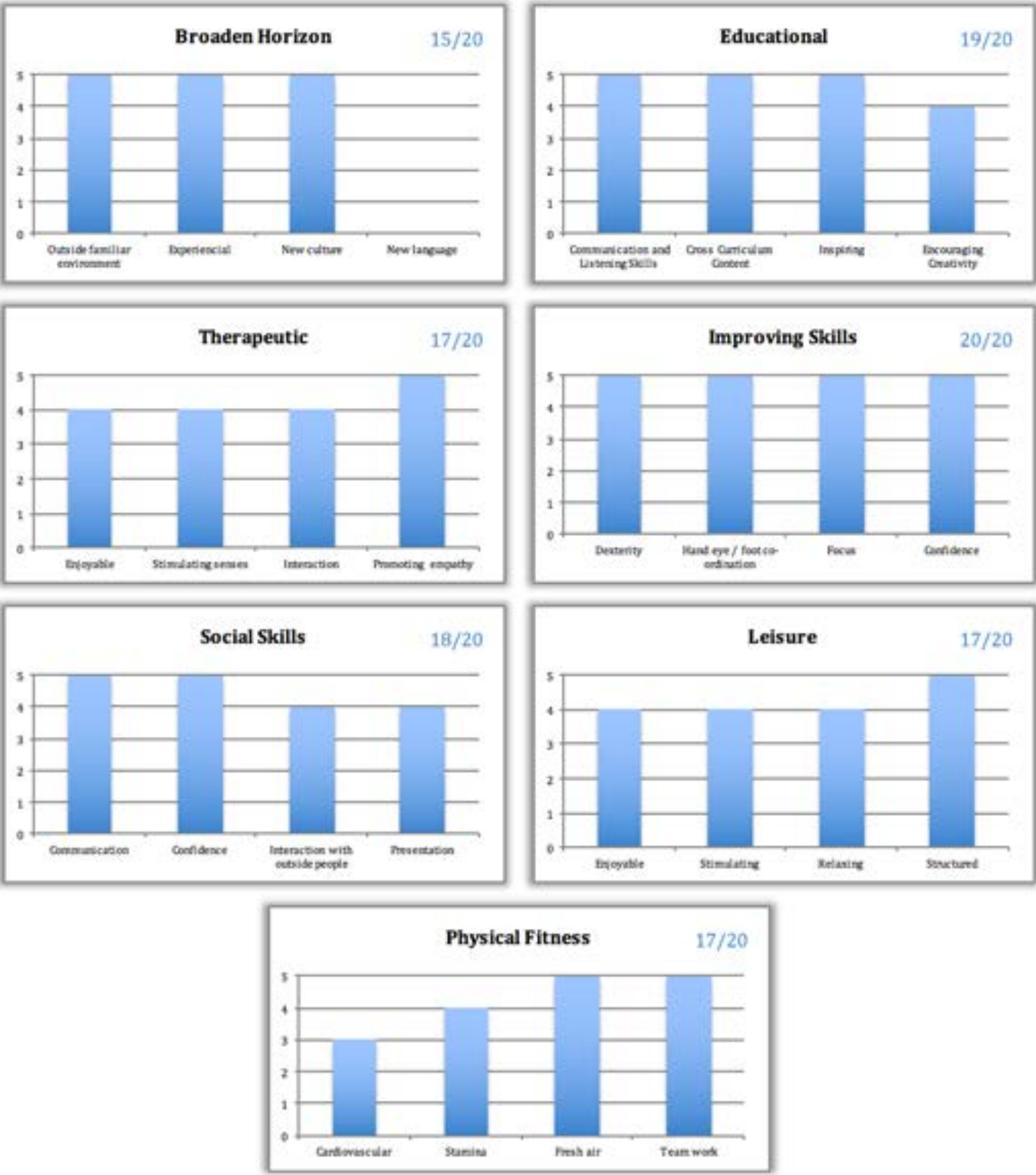
Graph showing assessment and summary of attributes.



One of our students competing at cross country.

General Farm Work and Gardening

Graph showing assessment of elements



Indeed, when looking at the range of different activities, coupled with the environment, the scope of opportunity becomes apparent.

When looking at this section, we could have measured separate activities such as using the strimmer, driving the all-terrain vehicle, or the tractor for various reasons. We could have looked at time in the garden or working in the woods. However, the fact is, that it is the overall experience that is important and the skills measured over a period and not just on one occasion. It is a diverse high value activity bringing many attributes, because of many high value elements.

It without question, broadens horizons, yet I often must deal with members of staff who tell me that their children don't want to come to the farm. They are forgetting that initially, it is very much outside of their familiar environment and the anxiety that goes with that to begin with but this is soon overcome.

There are high elements of educational value, communication, and cross curriculum in the way of English, Mathematics, Geography and Science. It is inspiring young people to want to learn more. The practical tasks and improvisation very much encourage creativity at a basic level.

From a therapeutic perspective, it has high elements, particularly promoting empathy whenever looking after livestock.

Improving skills is a strong point, as using the kind of machinery that we have, starting with driving a wheelbarrow in a straight line, leading to tractor work. Here young people can see the concept of progression with the tools available to be used which start with small tools, each one leading to another, as skills and competence are demonstrated.

- Sweeping brush
- Wheelbarrow
- Small red tractor with wheelbarrow trailer
- Ride on lawn mower.
- Full sized tractor.
- Full sized tractor with simple attachments.
- Full sized tractor with complex attachments.

In order to drive the full sized tractor you must start by using a sweeping brush and then a wheelbarrow. This is nothing new but many have overlooked the concept.

It is indeed the concept that is in plain sight for our students with progression real and achievable resulting in the reward of the next level.

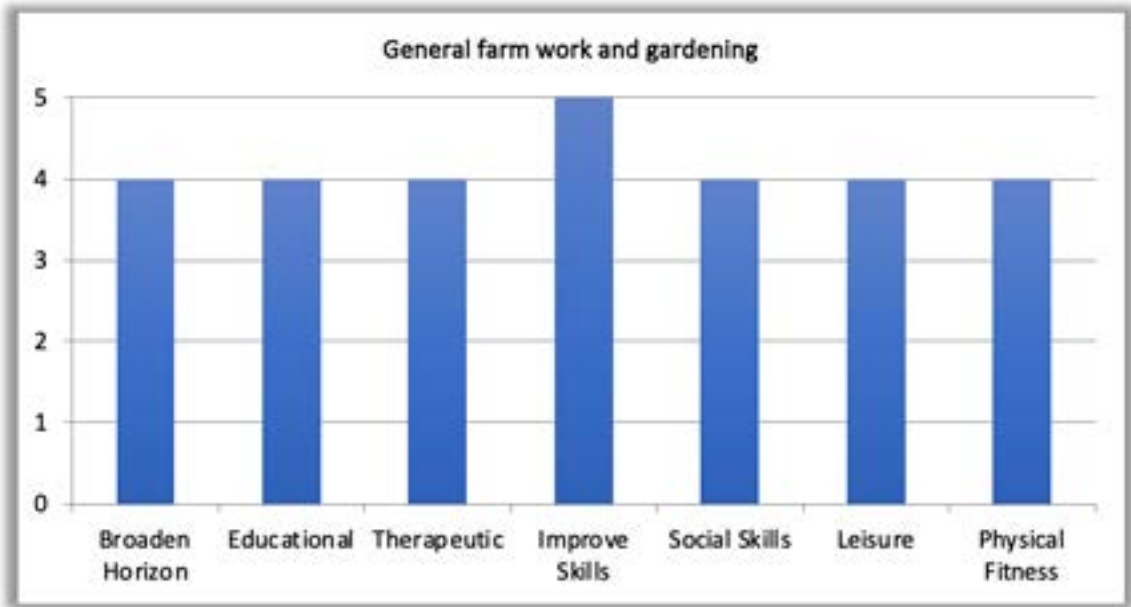
As with the horses, one young man has gone on to become a qualified forklift truck driver and worked for years in an engineering factory. This young man was no more outstanding than anyone else when he first came to us and he learned everything on the farm, demonstrating the value of transferable skills.

Social skills also have a part to play, as it is important to wear the right work clothes when regularly coming into contact with vets, farriers, feed merchants etc.

Finally, leisure and physical fitness also demonstrate strong elements. Again, the important factors here are teamwork and fresh air. This was demonstrated very well at hay time, as we had young people working together to achieve an outcome. They were exhausted but loved every minute of it.



Graph showing assessment and summary of attributes.



Dr Bruce Perry, in his presentation at Hardwick Hall on the 17th of November 2014, spoke about the benefit of calming activities and the importance of rhythm in a child’s life. He described the calming rhythm that goes with casting a line while fishing, the process of sitting quietly side by side with a carer whilst doing this activity.

He talked about a facility he had been asked to consult with to help an extremely damaged child. Here the most successful member of staff able to help this child was the caretaker. He described how he allowed the child to watch him milk the cow every morning and each day he placed a second milking stool next to him for the child. Over many weeks the child got closer and closer to him, eventually one day sitting next to him. When Dr Perry asked the caretaker, where did you learn to do that, he replied, “It was obvious, I used to work with horses”. Dr Perry Concluded by saying, “If you’ve ever come across those horse whisperers don’t dismiss them, they’ve got so much to offer”!

Many of the high value activities discussed have that rhythmical element to it and we add to this by building in routine and structure.

<http://childtrauma.org>

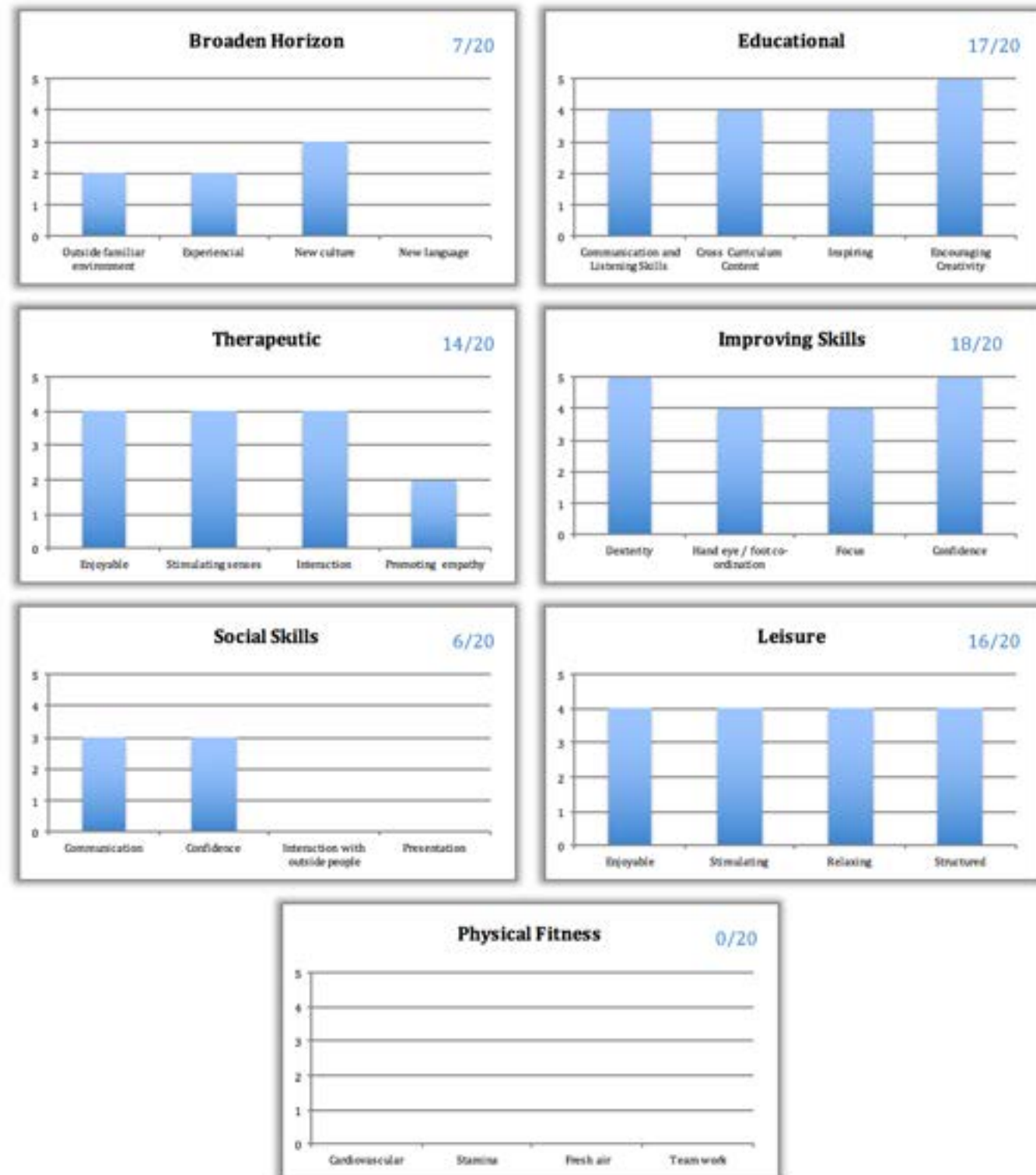
Current research is demonstrating that contact with nature (in whatever way it is organised) is improving our health more than we realise.

Young people who back pack for 3 days or more show higher creative and cognitive abilities than those that don’t.

It reduces stress, enhances cognitive abilities, problem solving, academic performance, nutrition, eyesight, improved social relationships and self-discipline (self-regulation).

Arts and Crafts.

Graph showing assessment of elements



Arts and Crafts is one of those activities that can be done in a classroom setting with a teacher or as an evening activity on the dining room table with a carer, often with equally impressive results. Providing the carer has a genuine interest in the subject and enjoys doing it. (As with many other activities also.)

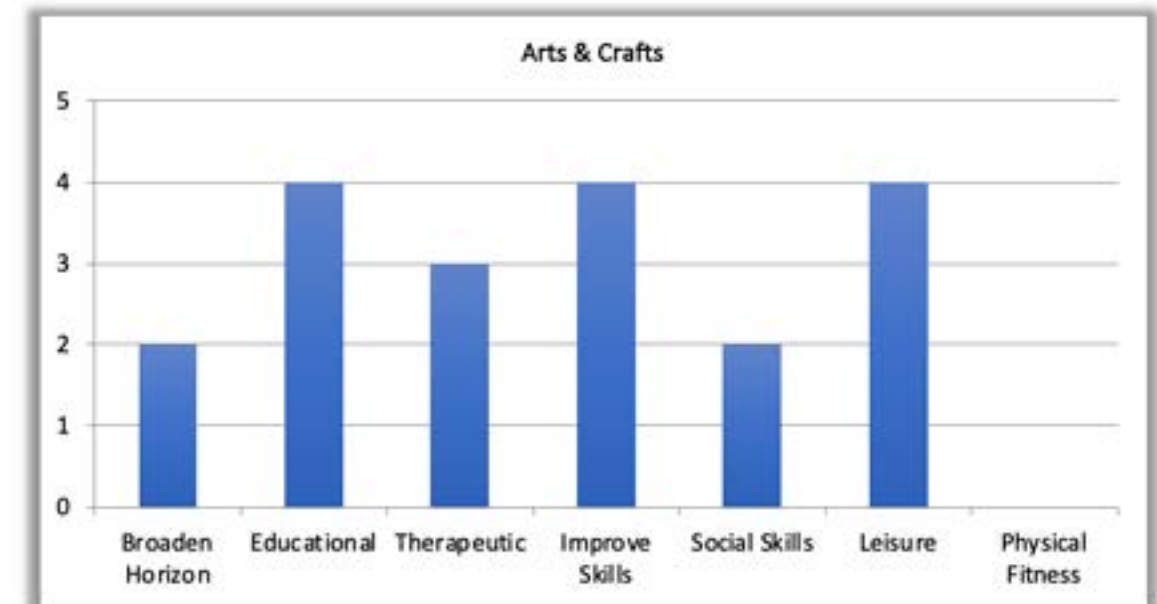
Broadening horizons is relevant as from our perspective sitting in a formal lesson having to focus on a task is outside the familiar environment. As students develop skills and become inspired to learn about different techniques and materials this naturally leads to looking at other artists work over the centuries. We add to this by taking students to the National Gallery in London, which exposes them further to the world of art and the social expectations that goes with this. By doing so we are demonstrating the ease of access to such places that are available to all and can add such richness to quality of life for no cost at all. This is inspiring.

From an educational perspective, as you would hope for an educational activity, all elements are relevant.

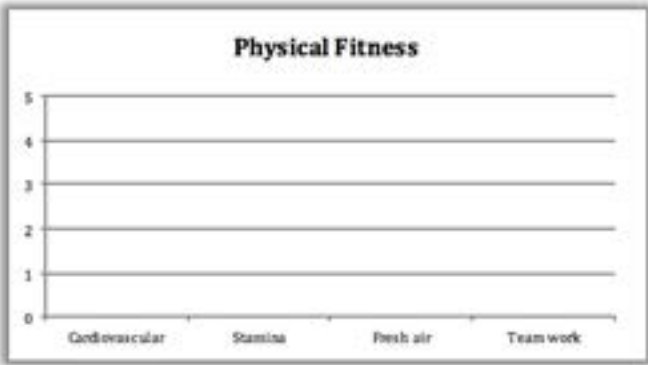
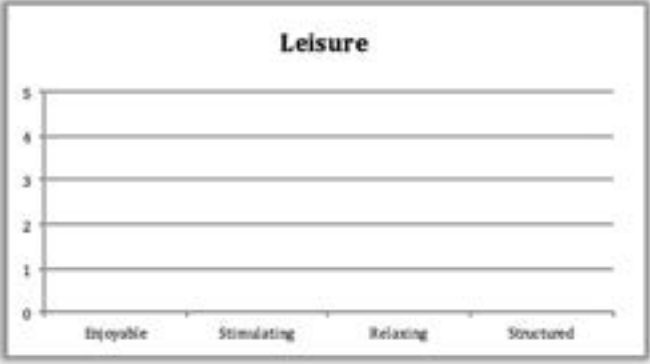
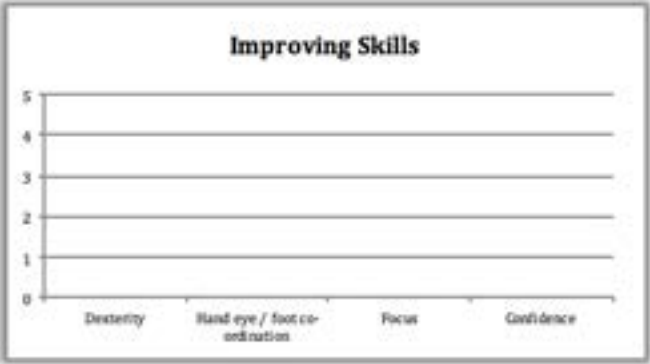
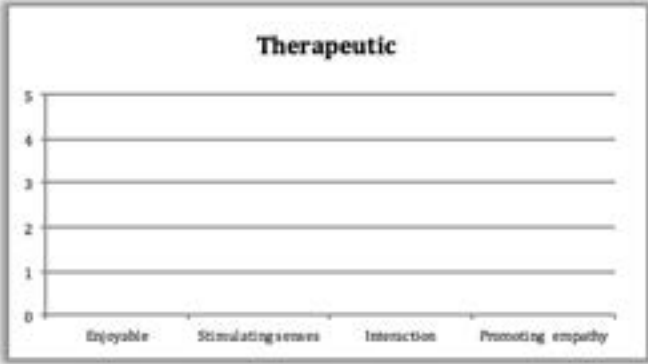
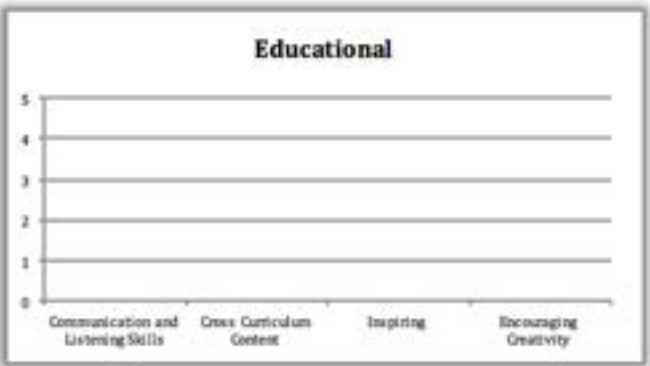
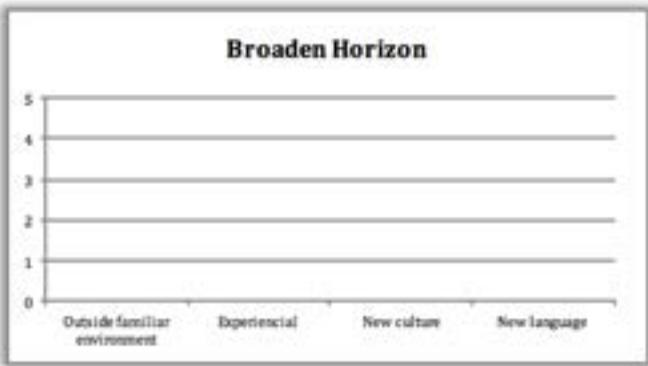
There is a therapeutic value to it and most definitely improving skills, particularly fine motor skills, or dexterity. It is at this point that I can mention a little known or talked about issue called 'Exaggerated Reward!' I will discuss this further and in more detail in the next subheading.

It isn't of course a physical activity, but it is an enjoyable, leisure activity. Several young people over the years have used their love of Art to take up Art classes independently and therefore, the subject has helped to promote their independence.

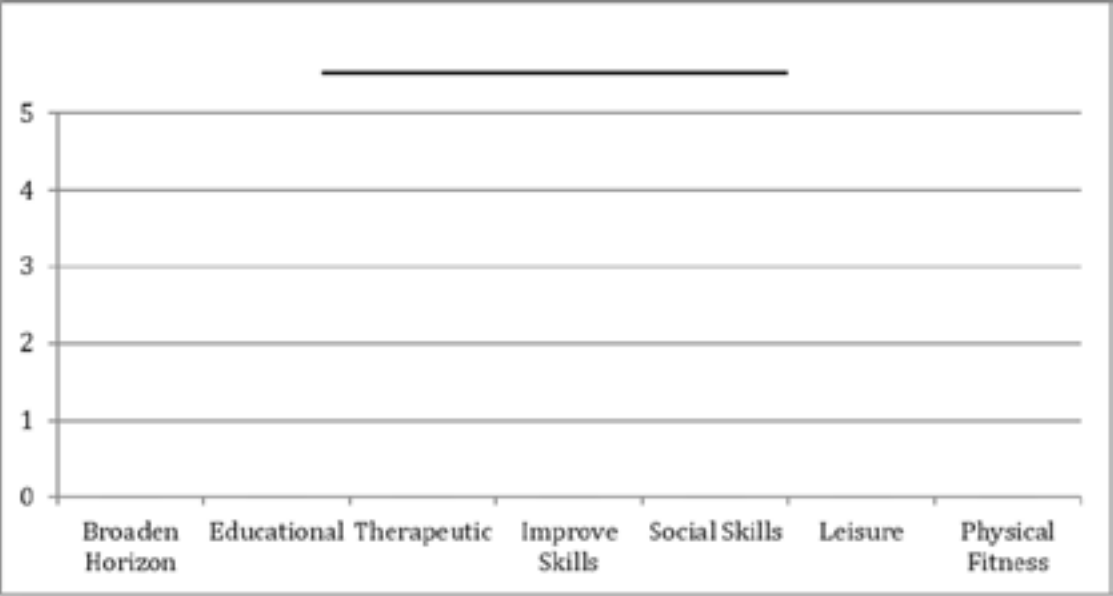
Graph showing assessment and summary of attributes.



Why not use the system to measure other activities. I suggest you do it as a group discussion. It can work for any activity!



$$\begin{aligned} 0 - 4 &= 1 \\ 5 - 9 &= 2 \\ 10 - 14 &= 3 \\ 15 - 19 &= 4 \\ 20 &= 5 \end{aligned}$$



Exaggerated Reward!

Desmond Morris in his book The Naked Ape, written in the sixties, looks at human behaviour from a zoological perspective. He describes the process called exaggerated reward.

Morris describes that amazing moment in a child’s life, when they discover how to use a pencil, or a paint brush. As a result of a slight delicate move, a mark is made which appears disproportionate to the effort used. This then quickly develops to painting a line and then a process develops next as a circle.

When a circle is painted, you then find another level of thinking, as you have two areas, one inside and one outside of the circle. By adding two dots and a curve, you then have created an amazing thing, a face that smiles back at you. This is all created with very little effort.



This process, in my opinion, goes much further than that, as painting with much more sophisticated thinking leads to colour and three dimensions being developed. Pottery, clay modelling and sculpture is also a good example of exaggerated reward, as through slight use of dexterity, creations develop in front of your eyes and literally in your hands.

It's a wonderful thing, brilliant!

Businesspeople use the same principal to make money, by adding value with little effort. Property Makeover Shows illustrate how to make the most of what you’ve got with as little effort as possible. Desmond Morris wrote his book in the sixties, and I have often wondered what he would make of the issues of today. Indeed, one of the best examples of exaggerated reward today, is the use of digital technology in the form of mobile phones and computer games.

As a result of the smallest movements of fingers and with today's technology not necessarily with any accuracy you can simulate the flying of aircraft, drive cars, and shoot hundreds of people or be connected to hundreds of people via social media. All with the smallest of movements.

When I was a child, I would have done anything for the most up to date computer game. It would have given me excitement and something which all children strive for, the ability to control something and shoot people that fall when shot, and even blow things up. From the bedroom, you can now talk to your friends and even people you don't know in another country, all with very little effort.

But you must ask yourself, if I'd spent all my youth playing computer games, would it have prepared me for adult life?

It's not just computer games that we should consider, but also other forms of entertainment such as amusement arcades, where the process is very similar.

This leads me to consider the other side of this process, ‘negative attributes!’

Negative Attributes

I’ve considered these and broken them down into seven relevant negative attributes. These are:

- 1. Addictive qualities
- 2. Negative reinforcement
- 3. Tap Tap reward
- 4. False adrenaline rush
- 5. High followed by a low
- 6. Physically detrimental
- 7. Time consuming with no positive outcome

1. Addictive qualities

Without trying to reinvent the wheel, or looking unnecessarily deeply into something, this means what it says. It is an activity/behaviour that could result in an addictive quality being promoted. Smoking is the most obvious to demonstrate the point. Despite years of debate, it is pretty much accepted that smoking is addictive. Other things may include anything where an obsessive behaviour is promoted, where the young person no longer feels in control of their behaviour, such as drugs, alcohol or perhaps pornography.

2. Negative reinforcement

This is where a young person has powerfully held beliefs, but wrong beliefs, cognitive distortions that by indulging in these activities these beliefs are reinforced. Pornography and child pornography is a good example of this.

3. ‘Tap Tap’ reward

This is the term used by a scientist studying the effects of computer games, using mice. They have found a link to addictive qualities where several taps are followed by a reward of positive reinforcement. In mice, it was food, in humans it is a point score or an achieved outcome i.e., shooting a target on a computer game or ‘likes’ via social media.

4. False adrenaline rush.

This is where a young person receives an adrenaline rush for no real reason. Again, computer games lead you into a world of make believe, where a perceived threat is evident i.e., your competitor is going to kill you, which alerts your fight or flight hormone for no real reason, as there isn’t really a threat. This subject opens for discussion, a whole topic of adrenaline and its effects, which I shall address in the next section. A false

adrenaline rush often leads to the next attribute.

5. High followed by a low.

This is self-explanatory, and whilst it is in the context of considering negative attributes, it also is worth pointing out, that over the years, many incidents have taken place by young people who have just had a good day. The only apparent explanation after the event when all is well again, is the inability to deal with an anti-climax and the need to return home and get things back to a settled state of being.

6. Physically detrimental.

This is a quality that can have a negative, physical effect on a person’s wellbeing. Drugs, alcohol or substance misuse being the obvious examples.

7. Time consuming with no positive outcome.

Whilst this may be largely open for debate, I strongly feel that we have no time to waste with our students and anything that takes up a large amount of time with no positive outcome is a negative factor.

Again, personally, my target is to make every day count. Not just in experience but moving myself and family forward. We are not going to be here forever, there is no time to waste, as the clock seems to tick a little faster every day.

Negative activities

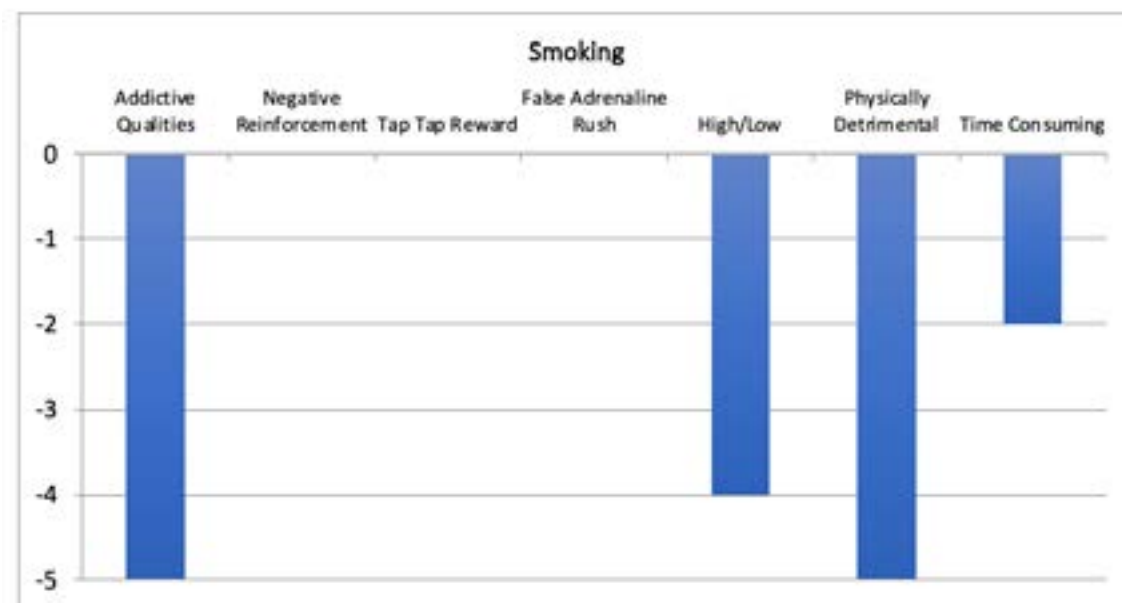
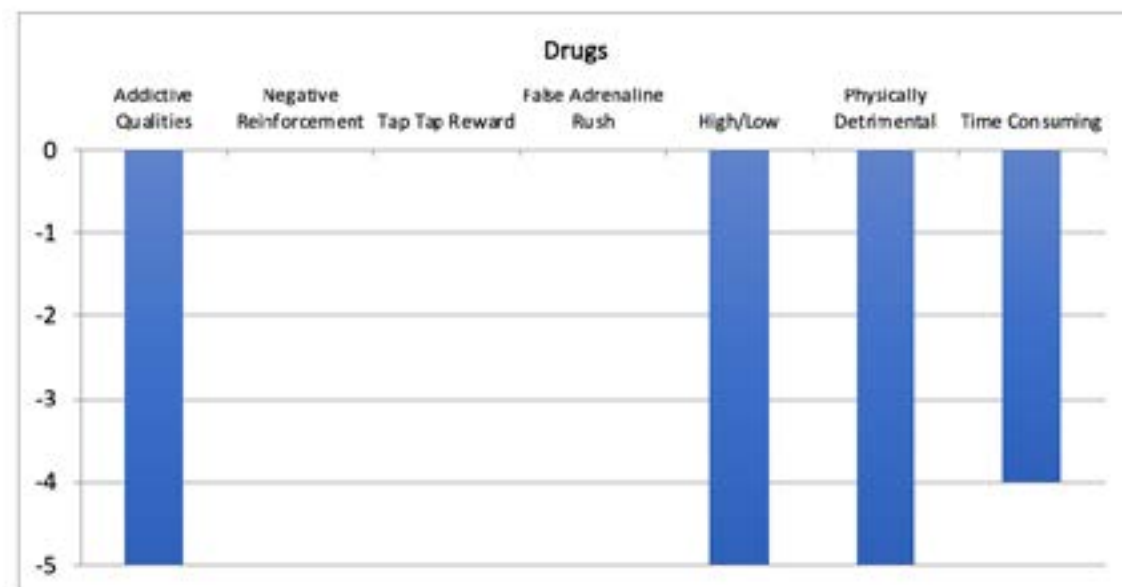
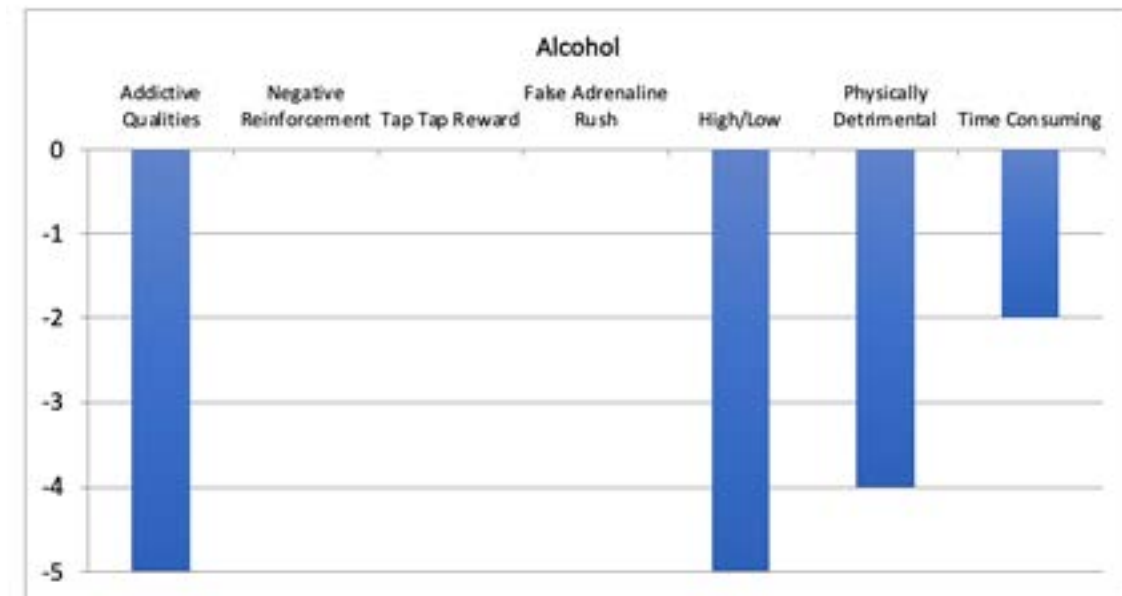
With the list above being self-evident, there is no need to go into depth with the negative elements but let us just consider a few issues against our graph system and see what things look like.

Drink, drugs, and smoking

Here, it is clear to see how with the absence of boundaries, these things can quickly get out of control. Negative qualities abound as many attributes are showing high negative measurements. Young people are going to be exposed to these things and it’s the ability to “just say no” as the 1980’s appeal said.

Our young people before being looked after by ourselves, have lived in an environment where there were no boundaries, hoping that they will be able to impose internal controls at key times without support and education is unreasonable to expect. We, therefore, must give them as much information as possible, in a controlled environment, to help them to make informed decisions for themselves.

Likewise, smoking, due to the above, coupled with restricting life opportunity elements and the fact that children with fire lighting materials can lead to tragedy of untold proportions.



Visiting amusement arcades

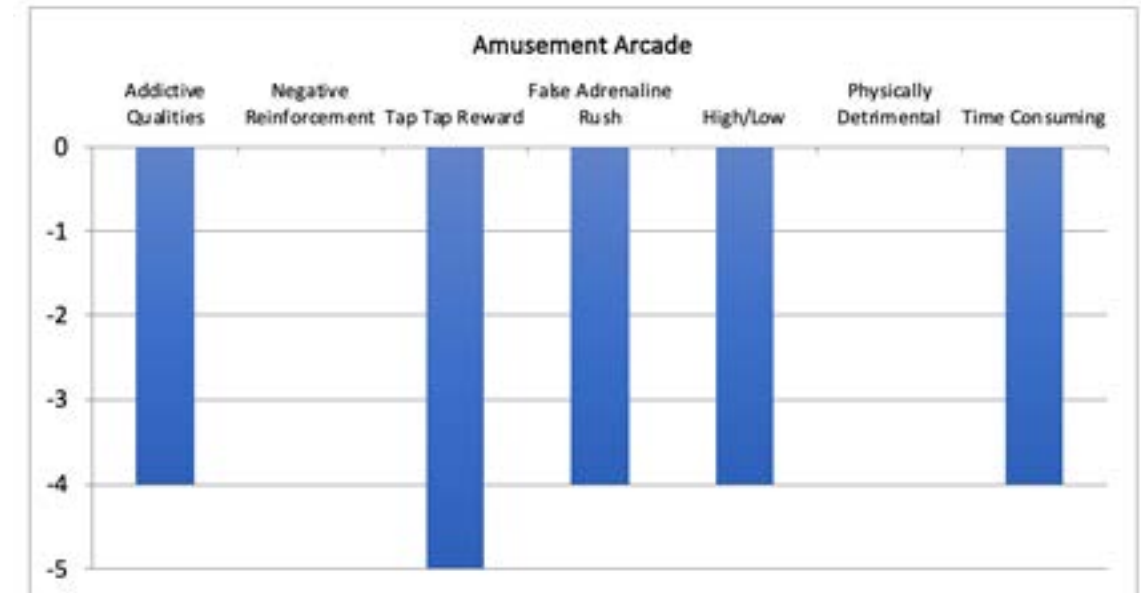
I have had an interesting life and met people from all over the world, in my experience there are only really two kinds of people, negative and dysfunctional or positive and functional.

The work above on positive activities, demonstrates how you can break activities down and value their elements individually. These activities bring something to the party, in terms of preparing young people to engage with and function in a positive adult world. There is, however, a correlation between having skills, positive mental attitude, and economic wellbeing! That's just an obvious fact that people don't want to say.

Likewise, overindulging in negative activities and negative thinking can lead to social, emotional, and economic difficulties. It's not rocket science, is it?

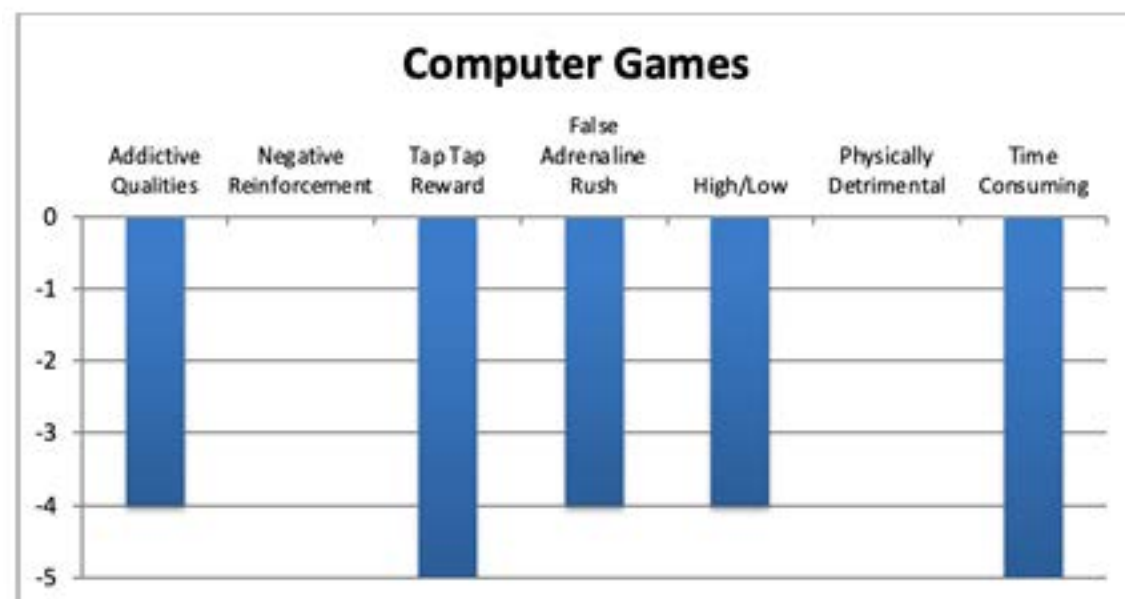
In all my time of visiting children in care, listening to how professionals who are paid to look after and prepare young people for the next stage of their lives, allow young people to consistently have their unopposed say over activities and regularly allow them to overindulge in amusement arcades or similar places often with either money provided by the local authority or by ill-gotten means astounds me. Looking at our graphs, it has nothing positive to bring to the party, but plenty of negatives to consider.

Whilst I am not saying never to go into these places, as there will be occasions when it is cruel to walk past without having a look and young people need to be exposed to all kinds of risks and threats in this world. You must be able to put immediate boundaries in place i.e., time and cost, and you must be able to impose these boundaries without question. If not, don't go near the arcades in the first place!



Computer Games

As with visiting arcades, it has several attributes that need to be managed and the use of structured boundaries that can be enforced. In this case, as there is no cost, other than the purchase price, it is about time and avoiding these games taking up too much time when you could be doing something far better instead. Time management and boundaries.



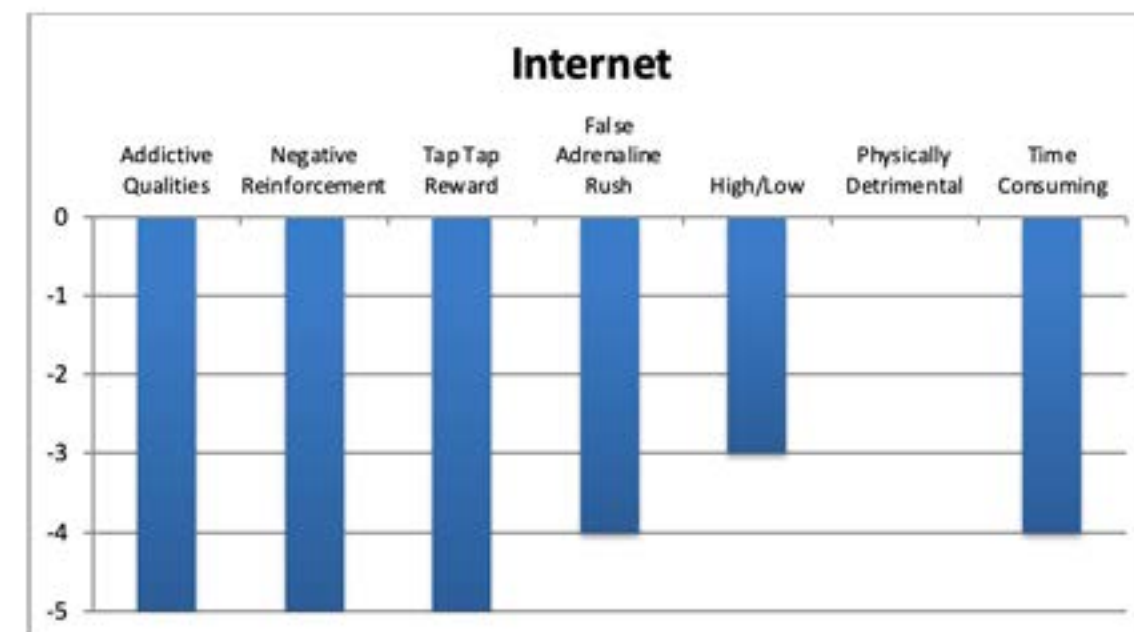
We must then consider the effects of ‘negative reinforcement’. If a damaged impressionable young person is allowed to spend significant periods of time in a virtual world killing virtual people? (In Ruby Wax’s book, A Sane New World, she talks about how the brain can be and is moulded through environments and events, ‘Neuroplasticity’). If constantly exposed to negative thoughts the brain becomes wired in that way. The conclusion must be that we take responsibility for ensuring our damaged impressionable young minds are not over exposed to inappropriate negative reinforcement in whichever form it manifests itself. If they live in a virtual world of violence and this has become habitual, surely it is no surprise if they are violent in the real world also.

It should also be remembered that those who have more than two hours a day screen time are proportionately more likely to experience depression and suicidal thoughts. Although it is still unclear if screen time is the causation or the fact that people with depression and suicidal thoughts spend more time looking at a screen when they could be doing other more positive things and socialising. (Source; The Coddling of the American Mind).

Social Media.

Whilst it must also be recognised that if used correctly social media can and is a huge asset to many. However as discussed earlier the development of smart phones coinciding with the development of social media may have resulted in a societal shift impacting on the fragility of young people. So, what could be going on in terms of negative attributes?

The graph below sets out very clearly what we see young people experiencing with the use of social media. The graph of physically detrimental has also been drawn but left hollow as to many this may not be relevant but to some social media has had a direct role to play in their suicide which for those concerned could not be more detrimental.

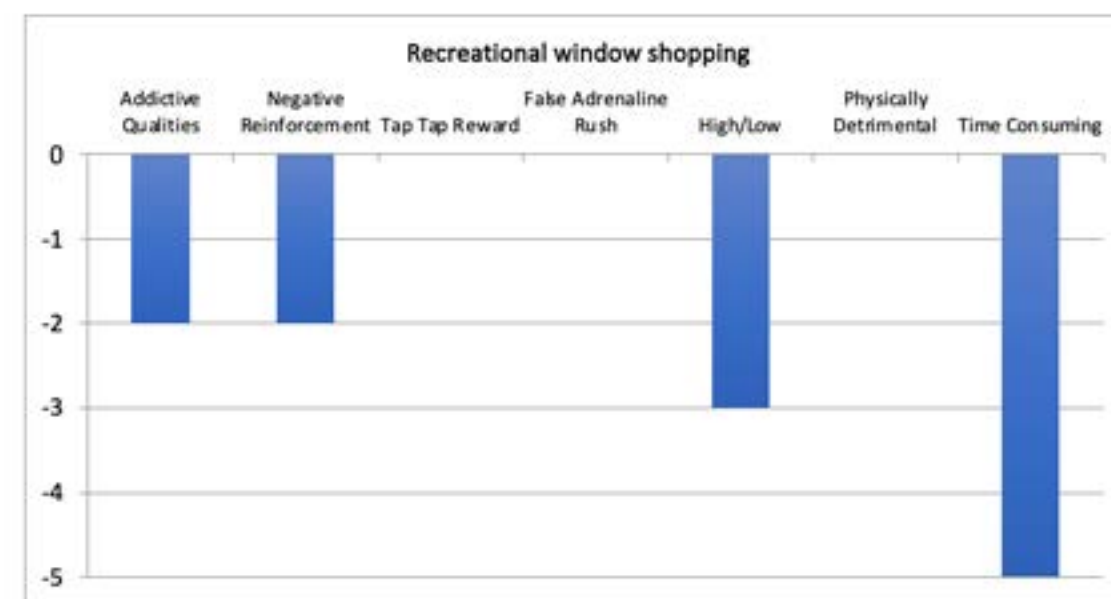


Shopping!

Now this will get an argument going!

Taking young people to town with funds to buy items needed can be a most positive experience. It can be educational, therapeutic, improve money skills and be relationship building. However, wandering aimlessly around town with no money, looking at things which you cannot afford to buy and because of wasting time, not doing anything to improve your chances of economic wellbeing in the future, doing what I would call ‘recreational window shopping’ brings nothing to the party and I think has negative attributes.

This is due to the fact, that for some people it can be addictive, leading to negative reinforcement, looking at all the material items which you cannot buy because of your situation. A high followed by a low, as you leave with very little if anything, for your time, and you've used a lot of time with no positive outcome.



The documentary film ‘I AM’ explores the issues of consumerism and its impact on us all. Thom Hartman author of ‘The Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight’ explains that the search for happiness is often misunderstood.

If you are naked in a forest, cold and wet and it’s raining, you are not surprisingly ‘unhappy’.

If you come across a log cabin and are welcomed in by its owner and given a blanket, a seat by the fire and some soup to eat, you become instantly ‘happy’.

Your happiness has been brought about because of being given material items that are really needed and make an immediate difference. The mistake is thinking that if we had ten times as much stuff it would make us ten times happier. It doesn’t work that way.

However, we are driven to acquire more and more stuff in the belief it will make us happier. The biochemical feelings created by buying things is short lived and we then seek more stuff to recreate those feelings. These feelings can become addictive.

It is a fascinating fact that in Aboriginal and First Nation American culture, to take more than you need is a sign of mental illness.

This is not far away from other cultures in that greed and gluttony were once recognised as a ‘vice’ which is a negative aspect of someone’s personality.

Learning values through activities.

In this book I encourage the reader to consider the marriage value of this way of thinking and look at the opportunity providing activities create for children to experience and learn values.

Earlier I explained how we considered values and chose five to be our corporate values these being.

- Courage
- Integrity
- Responsibility
- Respect
- Kindness.

I put forward the idea that activities could be measured by considering what attributes were present and what elements were present within each attribute that added value and made it measurable.

Using this method, it is possible to look at individual activities and consider to what degree our corporate values are present whilst undertaking these activities? How do these activities give us the opportunity to demonstrate and expose children to how we live by them and how they can experience them and then also begin to live by them? – If we can focus on being good people the right actions will follow, effortlessly – Aristotle.

Throughout my years of working in care and education I have visited many children experiencing difficulties because of neglect, violence and abuse including sexual abuse which are a direct result of parents perhaps for generations having poor values, limited exposure to adult role models and poor education, perpetuating poverty. As a result, restricted life opportunities resulting in lives which have such a limited scope of reference.

Children placed in mainstream ‘residential care with or without education’ often does little to increase the child’s scope of reference and an equation is played out whereby professionals often teach children about a subject in the classroom or key workers office but limited opportunity to experience and live by what is taught.

I can recall debating in the 1990s that it was regularly discussed how important it was to teach children about the importance of having good self-esteem but little recognition that this was not enough.

As parents and carers, teachers, or instructors, we need to put strategies in place that raise a child’s self-esteem in a very pragmatic way. In short, it’s no good just talking about it, we need to make it happen for real.

In a similar way teaching children, the language of values in isolation may increase their cognitive understanding of values. However, unless they can experience these first hand by having this demonstrated by adult role models and put in situations where they experience what it is like to live by them and have them established and embedded as a new normal, we may be hitting the target but missing the point.

The methodology used above to evaluate what different activities offer in terms of learning opportunities and experiences can also be applied to learning about values. In this demonstration I have used our

corporate values and explored what they would each need to demonstrate this value was present. For example,

Courage - activities that promote courage must have the opportunity to:

- Demonstrate resilience.
- Be out of their comfort zone.
- Be challenged.
- Experience negative consequences if unsuccessful.

Integrity - activities that promote integrity must include the opportunity to demonstrate:

- Honesty.
- Reliability.
- Know right from wrong.
- Trustworthy.

Respect- activities that promote respect must include:

- Consideration for others.
- Humility.
- Positive interaction with others.
- Set a positive example.

Responsibility - activities that promote responsibility must include:

- Being reliable.
- Make decisions.
- Act independently.
- Ability to meet targets.

Kindness - activities that demonstrate kindness must have the following qualities.

- Show care and consideration for others.
- Insightful on behalf of others.
- Without exception.
- Not for reward.

The formula above demonstrates a very straight forward thinking process.

- 1/ Decide on your organisation’s values.
- 2/ Consider very carefully what elements must be present to make up/define a value.
- 3/ Put this thinking in a framework to measure the very extensive activities we undertake against this formula we have determined.



By adding the values together, you arrive at a total, which to conclude the value of the attributes, fits into a range as follows.

0 - 4 = 1
5 - 9 = 2
10 -14 = 3
15- 19 = 4
20 = 5

It must be remembered we are not assessing the level of learning a child has experienced because of completing an activity but the ‘potential’ an activity has to expose a child to these learning opportunities. It is the activities that are being assessed as part of understanding the quality of our work and to appreciate what we should value.

In terms of assessing a child’s progress with learning and improving their values, our other systems which consider this over time, a worthwhile period and not just the time of a particular activity, give greater depth to consider.

The following are an assessment of many of the activities we provide and it is clear from the onset not all are a given to be present. As I started to consider this subject, I was genuinely of the view that our activities would all be of similar significance in terms of giving us the opportunity to help children learn values. This is clearly not the case and whilst we can make an argument that for example whilst undertaking a game of football, we may have a situation that develops which allows the adult role model leaders to demonstrate kindness, this is not part of the assessment. Good leaders will always demonstrate good values as good leaders do. The point of this exercise is to consider what is on the agenda of the activity to be demonstrated. In the case of football, being kind may not be a stipulated requirement, but good sportsmanship should be.

Therefore, I am of the view that we need to be proportionate in our evaluation. We must not get stuck in the thinking that activities are only worthwhile if they give us the opportunity to teach all values. We must recognise that if an activity gives us the opportunity to demonstrate and help a child learn one value that this is hugely significant. The following gives us much to consider.

If we start with the example above ‘A structured game of football’. Here we can see the following.

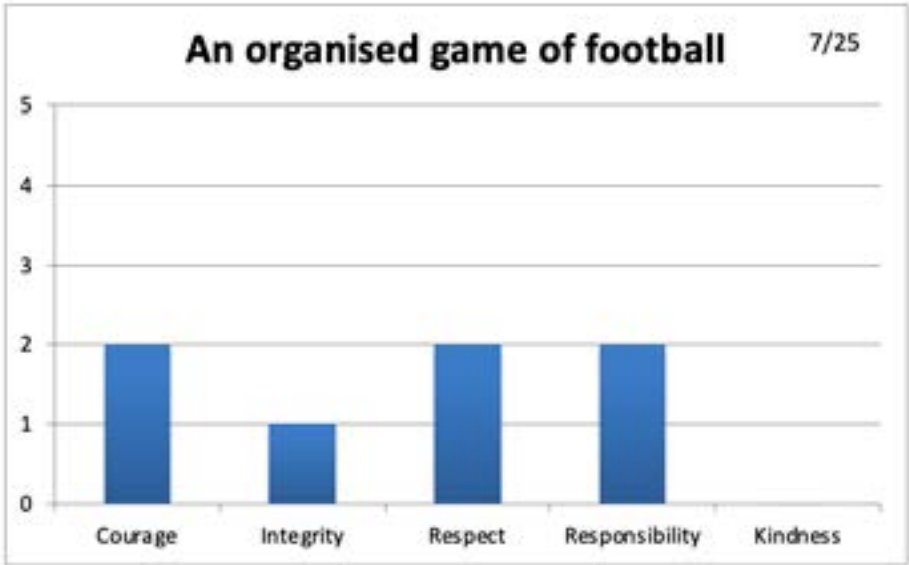
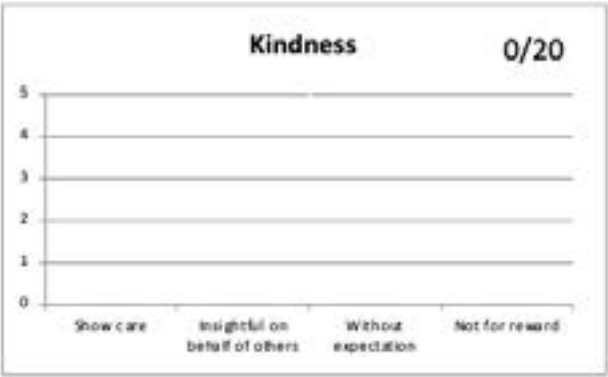
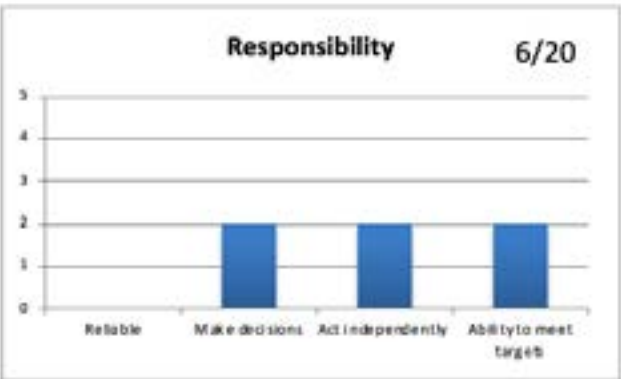
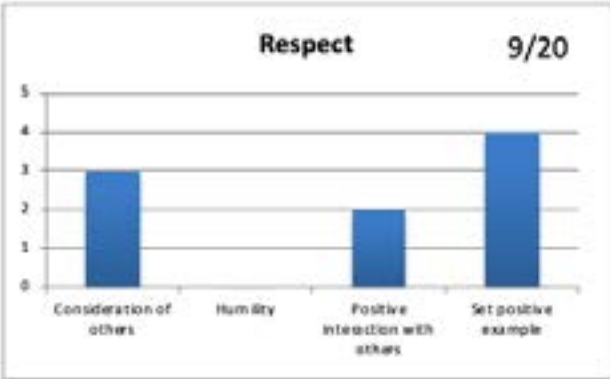
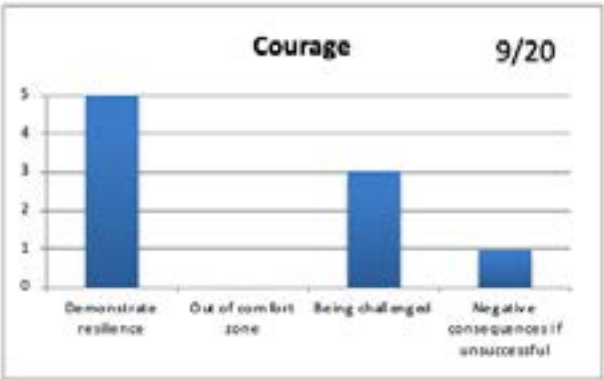
Courage - The game of football does require a high level of resilience however most children have had a game of football with or without structure so it is not out of their comfort zone. Negative consequences are restricted to a slight degree of ridicule if you miss a goal or flunk a pass but that should be the limit. Being challenged is present in a moderate way also.

Integrity - Remembering that this assessment is not about how it may be delivered which is variable depending on who’s leading the game but what’s on the agenda, therefore being honest isn’t relevant, being reliable to your teammates is, knowing right from wrong not really a prerequisite, being trustworthy in the same way that reliable is helpful to live up to teammates expectations.

Respect - Consideration of others is present but limited to not wanting to let your team mates down and trying to predict their next move. Humility is not a prerequisite. It is hoped there is positive interaction with others but this is dependent on helping your team to win. In a similar way setting a good example may be present but not a requirement.

Responsibility - Is evident as successful teammates will need to be reliable and trustworthy in completing the moves, kicks and passes but restricted to this level. The need to act independently is limited to small decisions on the football pitch and ability to meet targets is at a micro level such as getting the ball, passing, or scoring.

Kindness - May be presented by individuals at any time due to good leadership and opportunity but it’s not on the agenda. What’s on the agenda is to play well and win.



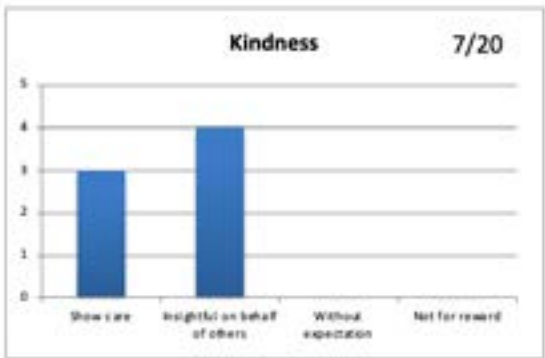
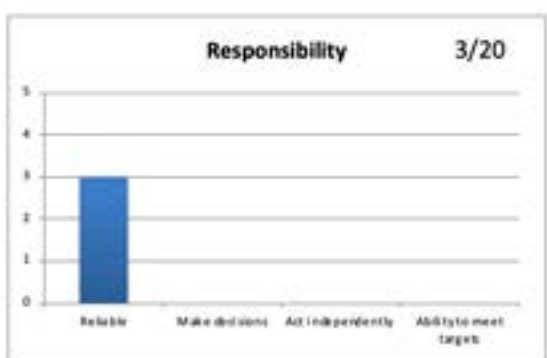
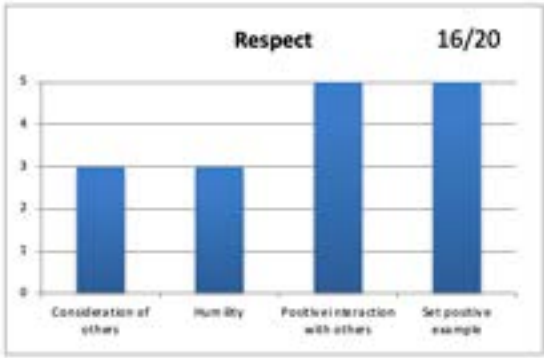
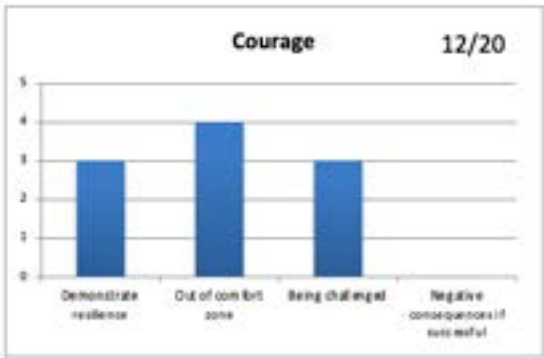
School Sports Day

This is the day the whole school comes together for a most worthwhile experience during the summer term and is full of positive interactions. It is our own mini Olympics and one where a variety of different sports are played out over the course of the day with a home cooked picnic lunch in the middle.

The fact that athletic sport is the focus means there is a degree of resilience required. We are taking children out of their comfort zone. They are being challenged with this experience which means courage is relevant.

There are elements of needing to be honest and reliable and trustworthy to teammates in team sports so integrity is evident but not in a big way.

Respect is clearly evident as there is a lot of positive encouragement and humility promoting good sportsmanship and how to lose with dignity. As said, positive interactions with others and setting a good example. Responsibility and Kindness less so.



‘Role Model Leadership’, control the space, control the environment, manage the atmosphere.

My argument from the beginning is that small factors are important. However, the biggest issue is how people function in that environment and how professionals manage the workspace wherever it is, to control the atmosphere and mood of the people who are being looked after, managed, and educated.

This is all about our mental health, whether it is due to looking after hormonal teenagers or genuinely distressed children as a result of trauma, in our case usually both. It is difficult remaining positive when others are not. However, it is much easier remaining positive and buoyant if your working environment is of a high standard compared to when it isn't.

Low mood, and mild depression are common factors, not just among the children but from time to time it may be relevant for staff also. 'The Woe Is Me Syndrome' and its impact, if not recognised, can affect an entire household. Dr Bruce Perry spoke of his concern that modern technology, Facebook, and similar social media applications have added to an already prevalent problem in that people are becoming more self-obsessed. The technology adding to the tools available to be constantly uploading and updating images of oneself.

The fact is that depression can lead to selfishness and it's the job of the professional, carer, or in some cases the line manager to recognise what's happening and make concerted efforts to take control of the environment and control the atmosphere. This can be done in the way problems are tackled but in a positive way, the way your sentences are structured focusing on what to do and not on what not to do and being conscious of your tone of voice and body gestures. Strong but sympathetic approaches focusing on the way forward.

Whenever I must deal with difficult situations, like debriefing a child following a restraint, or disruptive behaviour. A lesson from the classroom teachers is 'control the space'. Take the subject of concern from their current location to a location of your choice. 'Step into my office' is a good simple example but it needn't be your office, another room will do, but by relocating you are already testing out responsiveness and letting the subject know you are in control. From that point the task whatever it is, is easier. A word of warning here, ensure the place you relocate to is in no way perceived by the child or others watching as a reward. The room next door will suffice if in any doubt. Positive contact with the leader must only be on the back of positive behaviour and attitude.

The importance of language

A positive environment needs positive language. Using positive language tends to reduce conflict, improve communication, reduce defensiveness in others and helps portray the speaker as credible and respectable.

Negative & Positive Language

Negative phrasing and language often have the following characteristics:

- tells the child what cannot be done.
- has a subtle tone of blame.
- includes words like can't, won't, unable to.
- does not stress positive actions that would be appropriate, or positive consequences.

Positive phrasing and language have the following qualities:

- tells the child what can be done.
- suggests alternatives and choices available to the recipient.
- sounds helpful and encouraging rather than bureaucratic.
- stresses positive actions and positive consequences that can be anticipated.

Keep sentences short and simple. Focus on what to do rather than what not to do.

- Try saying, "Slow down and walk" instead of "Stop running."
- Try saying, "Keep your feet on the floor" instead of "Don't climb on the table."
- Try saying, "Use a quiet voice inside" instead of "Stop shouting."

Catch children being good. All children want attention. It is better to give them positive attention for good behaviour than negative attention for misbehaviour. Comment on something positive about each child, each day. Better yet, strive for several times a day. And share the good news. When children have done something positive, mention it to other children and to staff.

This use of language is important to create a harmonious atmosphere within a positive environment.

Summary.

- Appreciate the importance of playing.
- How to break down activities into attributes and elements and measure their influence.
- Appreciate the power of exaggerated reward.
- Appreciate how some activities can be harmful.
- Appreciate how some activities encourage the learning of values.
- The importance of a therapeutic language.

Achieving happiness and harmony.

Running any organisation successfully should result in the constant monitoring of the people's lives within. Have we got the staff rotas balanced? Have we got the school timetable balanced? Is our work life balanced? Failure to do so results in all kinds of problems, often unseen at first that can build to serious consequences if ignored. A wise uncle once said to me "The most important factor in life is balance. If you have balance all will be well, if your life is not balanced you will have problems."

As I've been researching and writing this book, I have been amazed at how it has developed a life of its own. It has taken me into areas I was not aware of and did not expect. Particularly in the area of our biochemistry and its relevance to our lives. For example, how colours can impact on our heart rate and anxiety, how walking in the woods can have a measurable impact on our biochemical health.

Perhaps we are all trying to achieve harmony and as a result happiness.

How do we achieve happiness?

It has always surprised me that working with children does not come with a need to know more about the animal "Homo sapiens"!

The grooms who look after the horses, the farm staff that look after the farm animals, all must know about their animals inside and out, as a prerequisite to working with them. Not just their physical requirements but also their biology and psychology.

I have always encouraged our staff to increase their knowledge of the animal homo sapiens. 'The Naked Ape' by Desmond Morris. This book moulded my early understanding of human beings when I first read it in the 1990's and has guided me ever since.

In 2022 I came across the work of Professor Yuval Noah Harari, in his remarkable books 'Homo Sapiens' and 'Homo Deus', which as you may guess, gives us important information about ourselves and what makes us tick, where we have come from and where we may be heading respectively.

The following is taken from his work, mixing my understanding of his details, with my own and our corporate experience.

Theory knitting is a passion of mine. Finding information from a variety of perspectives and pulling together the salient points that I feel are important for our staff team to know and understand. In my quest to ensure we are the best we can be, I have identified and drawn parallels with the animal world as I have always had a good understanding that we are just complicated animals.

In Yuval Noah, I have found not just a kindred spirit but vindication for doing so. He explains that in the 1950's a social scientist called Harry Harlow conducted experiments with monkeys. He produced two structures that resembled adult monkeys. One made of wire the other of soft materials. The wire one had a food source to feed the orphan monkeys, the soft cuddly one, however, did not. They expected the orphan monkeys to cling to the wire model because it provided food.

To their surprise (why it was a surprise I don't know), they clung to the soft cuddly one and went without food. Their need for emotional comfort was so overwhelming it was more important than basic food available elsewhere.

Follow up research discovered that these orphan monkeys, deprived of emotional support, grew up traumatised, manifesting itself in great anxiety and anger.

I don't think it is any coincidence that throughout years of looking after emotionally deprived children, I have warned that the most underestimated element of their well-being was anxiety. Most issues can be traced back to an overlooked anxiety. While it often manifests itself in challenging behaviour, the need to release their anger can also be overwhelming.

If we change the subject to positive thinking - how can we achieve happiness and harmony?

To answer this question perhaps the first question should be what is it?

To consider the quest for happiness we must also consider what makes us unhappy.

Here we can consider some important facts. How do our lives compare now to our lives 500 years ago, which by modern standards of health care, is only five lifetimes ago? The following is striking and yet also leaves as many questions to ask, as it answers.

- Child mortality down from 30% to 1% worldwide.
- Violent death is down from 15% to 1%.
- More people die from suicide than from violence, including terrorism and world wars.
- More people die each year from obesity than from famine.
- Sugar is more dangerous than gun powder.

So, the world has never been safer yet, what we enjoy can also cause us harm.

The answer to what makes us happy is not winning the lottery or finding a new partner. What makes us happy or unhappy is biochemistry!

"Happiness and unhappiness are determined by a complex system of nerves, neurones, synapses and various biochemical substances such as serotonin, dopamine and oxytocin".

(Professor Yuval Noah Harari)

Once you can understand that there is a disconnection between stimulation and experience and that the experience felt within is purely chemical, the world looks very different.

We are an evolving species. Evolution has created many systems to ensure our survival. To do this it has created the ability to be influenced by our nervous system.

"Evolution controls us with a broad range of pleasures. Sometimes it seduces us with sensations of bliss and tranquillity, while on other occasions it goads us forward with thrilling sensations of elation and excitement".

(Professor Yuval Noah Harari)

As Professor Harari explains a squirrel needs to find nuts to live. These are its main diet. When it finds a nut, it experiences joy in the form of chemicals which flood its brain.

Joy when he finds it and well-being when he eats it. But these feelings don't last for long. It is important they don't last for long, if they did, he wouldn't try to find any more nuts and would simply starve to death.

In the same process the businessman is continually seeking the next deal, not because it will change his life but the sensation achieved from the last deal doesn't last long. If it did, he would not grow his business.

It is also believed that if the joy of sex was not experienced with an orgasm, we would have died out years ago, as this is the only reason the male Homo sapiens would contemplate having children. Likewise, the pain of childbirth is quickly forgotten by the female but the overwhelming sensation of the joy of parenting is remembered.

It is also important to understand that negative sensations keep us from harm and danger. As the organiser of what many would consider high risk activities for children, I have long believed in the saying "break a bone and save a life!"

This means that by allowing children to experience danger and the pain that goes with making mistakes, the children learn how to risk manage their lives.

From my experiences of encountering the First Nation American culture in my own childhood, their children were never stopped from climbing trees or anything they wanted to do as young children because they believed in this concept.

This is in stark contrast with the health and safety culture of modern Britain, which seeks to reduce all risks, without understanding the damage this can do to childhood development.

Whilst the business of taking risks to learn from, may be a deliberate strategy from those that understand these concepts, the acknowledgment of negative stimulation keeping us from danger, is slipping from our understanding.

In the quest to remove negative consequences, we risk bypassing nature's way of keeping us safe.

The consequences are that many children in the care system grow up without a correct understanding of dangers or managing risks.

Self-harm behaviours strive to create and usually result in the stimulus for others to provide care and concern, further promoting the self-harm behaviour, as the subject takes much positive stimuli from those that provide care and concern.

One of the reasons why suicide rates may get higher in the modern world, may well be the disconnect between modern society as people are shielded from the realities of death. Those that undertake attention seeking behaviour may 'sail too close to the wind'. As they don't really understand the risks they take or the consequences of their adventures, their behaviour can unintentionally be fatal. Hence the term 'misadventure'.

Encounters with dangers are also often hidden and experienced in the presumed safety of their bedroom. In one experiment rats were given good sensations when they pressed a pedal. Although food was available, they ignored the food and kept pressing the pedal to the point of starvation. This as Yuval describes, is the same as the children who play computer games and don't come down for their meals.

The issue with computer games, as with too much fantasy television, is that it gives false stimulation. It is imperative that any good parent controls false stimulation and ensures worthwhile experiences, from which children can learn and develop.

The other aspect is that children can become familiar with these false stimulations through artificial experiences and struggle to create or find any kind of similar experience in real life. Also, managing the difference between fantasy and reality can be confusing where the child's reactions in the real world, are rehearsed in the fantasy world and these don't then match the real life situation. Outbursts of violence, anger, and aggression, acceptable in 'virtual reality', are neither appropriate nor acceptable in the real world 'reality'. As children learn to live as adults through play and mirroring role models, for some the ability to differentiate between fantasy and reality, is simply too difficult. This may manifest itself in extreme behaviours ranging from difficult to manage challenging behaviour, to school shootings, now common place in the USA.

In my view, technology, and societies desire to embrace it, has gone faster than our understanding of ourselves and what makes us grow and develop as well balanced rounded human beings.

"The key to happiness is finding the right doses of excitement and tranquillity."
(Professor Yuval Noah Harari)

Managing biochemistry in education.

"Whilst in my view, there is a complete lack of understanding around biochemistry and stimulating the correct responses and balances at the right times. In some areas there is the desire to bypass our parental and teacher responsibilities and artificially manage children's behaviour with medication. In Britain in 1997, there were 92,000 children taking Ritalin. This rose to 786,000 in 2012". (Professor Yuval Noah Harari, Homo Deus)

In our experience, many children arrive in our care with high levels of medication and we have a good track record of having this reduced, if not stopped altogether. Living in an environment where the stimulation is managed appropriately, goes a long way to achieving these goals. Likewise, on the rare occasions that children have genuinely needed help, this is rarely available when they need it, if at all.

As Yuval explained, one thing most people are agreed on, is instead of having an education system that has further and further expectations, perhaps it would be better to change the education system. He then explains, this debate has gone on for thousands of years in different societies, which means we all need to manage our expectations.

In terms of managing our expectations, Yuval explains that most people's ability to be happy, is regulated by our biochemistry, within a range of possibilities, but limited by that range. One individual may have a range of 1 to 10, functioning between 6 and 8. When good things happen, they are at 8 and when bad things happen, they drop to 6, but always function within that range, as that's the range their bodies biochemistry functions at. Others may function between 4 and 6. Even if they won the lottery, they wouldn't be as happy as the other guy on a bad day because they simply aren't predisposed to being so. Therefore, in our setting, managing our own expectations for children, is as important as helping them manage their own.

There will of course be many young people who professionals and foster carers are asked to care for, for whom you may think aspirations and expectations is not possible. Their behaviour is so challenging that your prognosis for the future in terms of quality of life is bleak. The fear is that this behaviour is so entrenched that making any meaningful change is thought to be unlikely. It is at this point in our discussion that you need to know about an important fact that took myself over twenty years to discover and it took

an out of work comedian to make known to the world. Ruby Wax in her first book following her graduating from Oxford University having studied MA in Mindfulness based cognitive therapy was to my knowledge the first academic to communicate in a simple way such an important discovery, Neuroplasticity. (www.mindfulnessinschools.org) (www.bemindful.org)

This is the process the brain goes through as a child grows and experiences their world around them as it is. We are as many have always thought a product of our environment and experience, as each event good or bad goes to shape not only the physical makeup of the brain but the way it works and processes information also. Whilst the significance and importance of early years development cannot be understated, it is important to know that this doesn't stop happening. So, the child or young person who is in your care is an evolving being, they are not the fixed finished product and you are now part of the developmental process with all the responsibilities that goes with that. The more difficult and challenging the behaviour the more profound and clear the learning experience must be to help correct previously held negative beliefs.

Ruby describes the brain as a muscle, a muscle that needs exercise in certain ways to develop. Educationalists are familiar helping children stimulate their brain and encourage higher-level thinking. Likewise, we need to exercise the brain in other ways as well. Before Ruby released her brilliant book 'A Sane New World' intuitively many of us valued the belief that all children should enjoy their childhood and have positive experiences to look back on. Now this is backed up with neuroscience. Children adapt to and are responsive to the world around them soaking up information all the time. As Ruby explains even as adults whenever we see something new for the first time this grows neurones. If we experience negative experiences this grows negative muscle, whenever we experience positive experiences, this grows positive muscle. In times of difficulty if someone has positive experiences to remember they can recall these memories to continue to grow positive thinking muscle. So positive stimulating environments with good experiences really do have a long lasting effect. I used to use the term 'compensatory experiences'; this implies something given as compensation for the wrong doings of others. With this new information we must think of positive experiences being required to remodel damage others have done as part of a rehabilitation process. For many years a commonly used the expression was 'the child is at an impressionable age' the fact is this is scientifically proven to be so and we continue to be mouldable (to lesser degrees) the older we get.

So why is the above so important? It is because we may have discussion around the degree of impact we may have with children and young people. The debate about nature via nurture is still important to consider, but the issue of neuroplasticity gives scientific credence to our optimism regarding potential capacity for worthwhile meaningful change. This is why every social worker and teacher in the country goes to work.

What should we be doing?

Buddha claimed the way to attain real happiness was to slow down the pursuit of pleasant sensations and importantly, not accelerate it. This methodology from the past is in correlation with current science around the biochemical view.

In my opinion, the first important step is to understand what's going on in our bodies and design effective strategies accordingly.

Quite often the children in the care system often have had excessive stimulation. Their bodies have been flooded with biochemical influences, much more than is considered normal and in all the wrong ways. Fear, anxiety, adrenaline, just to start with.

It’s worth remembering, people don’t analyse their environment deeply before they act. They depend on familiar, habitual routine actions, which they execute automatically in response to internal or environmental factors. Negative memories fade in time whilst positive memories endure. That’s why old people look on the past in a more positive light.

Daniel Kahneman, Noble Prize winner describes how the brain works in two parts, system 1, this is automatic pilot. Think quickly but poorly. Avoid predation, big picture broad brush strokes, often botch things. Often it works, sometimes it doesn’t. System 2, powerful and precise, subtle, but lazy and is rarely deployed. (The psychology of stupidity).

So having a controlled environment where safe and positive routines can be established and become the new normal is so important. This allows system 1 to reset itself. Then slowly introduce times that require focus and concentration to help to grow system 2 through use.

The first step to recovery is to experience a therapeutic environment where these stimuli have been considered and are controlled. Let things calm down, not a little but a lot!

Move forward with therapeutic activities that provide alternative stimuli in a positive controlled way. For example, going for a walk, working on the farms, and riding horses are all designed to provide that calming stimulus. At the same time, stimulate the brain to grow by simply being involved in new experiences or seeing new places.

So again, the issue is the right kind of excitement and not living in a state of constant anxiety and unacceptable stress that has a negative impact on the body chemistry and long-term damage.

Stress in the form of anxiety continues to be the most relevant but underestimated issue in situations with many of our young people today.

Dr. Bruce Perry explained that different kinds of stress have different effects on the body in that -

Unpredictable	Predictable
Severe	Moderate
Prolonged stress	Controlled
=	=
Vulnerability	Resilience.

It is easy to see how living in an abusive environment where you don't know when you’re going to be beaten or abused can result in a child growing up with increased vulnerability leading to a further downward spiral of negative events and interactions. (Toxic Stress, Garner et al, 2012/Lieberman 2012)

Whereas a child brought up in a stable positive environment exposed to stress in the form of education, sport and activities grows stronger, building in confidence on the back of successfully dealing with the challenges they face.

Therefore, protect children from ongoing negative stimuli such as excessive use of video games, social media etc or at least restrict and manage it.

After a period and again in a controlled way, we can re expose them to the negative stimuli as they need to learn to manage these themselves. But give them a chance to recover and yourself time to appreciate where you are and what’s going on around you.

Be aware of the importance of positive relationships. Consider the power of a hand on a shoulder or a

supporting hug in resetting appropriate stimuli. Be aware of how this changes your body chemistry and makes your feelings change from frustrating to worthwhile.

Modern life is complex and confusing, full of stimuli. In order to calm everything down we need to look at the needs of our basic animal requirements and connect with our natural selves. As basic animals we are pre-programmed to get satisfaction from the things we need in life and from those we live with. For example, food, shelter, emotional warmth. We are social beings.

A brief account of human history

70,000 years ago, the ape that is ‘us’ went through what scientist call the ‘cognitive revolution’. This is when we came down out of the trees in the Savannahs of Africa. (Savannah hypothesis)

Their brains began to expand, possibly because of an expanding diet. At this stage we were all hunter gatherers, in small self-contained tribal units, though not to be more than a hundred in each group. (The size of a small company or village. This is still considered to be the optimum size for effective communication in any kind of organisation).

We walked the country, learned where all the animals lived. We fished from the rivers and the sea and caught bigger animals wherever we could. We worked together to achieve this. (Not dissimilar to how the wolf pack hunts today.)

It is thought our brains at this point in time, were bigger than they are now as there was no one to think for us and no one to compensate for our mistakes. If we got it wrong, it was likely we wouldn’t survive. We had to get it right.

The hunter gatherers new their country inside out and focused on detail. The weather, the seasons, the migrating wildlife. What time of year to pick berries, what time of day to go fishing. Where to collect honey.

It is thought life at this time was good. People lead satisfying rewarding lives.

About 10,000 years ago, we underwent the agricultural revolution. We began to capture certain animals and instead of hunting them, we kept them in pens to remain fresh until we wanted to eat them. We began to grow crops and learned which we could improve the productivity of by collecting seeds and growing these closer to where we wanted to build shelters. Instead of always being on the move following the herds of animals, we built shelters and kept everything closer to us. We learned that if we put the slow moving birds in an enclosure, they bred even more slowly moving birds. We could collect their eggs and eat a few as and when we wanted as they were always available. We also began the process of creating new variations of breeds by selecting specific animals to breed from, thus creating domesticated breeds. This gave us more leisure time and more food which meant we could breed more easily ourselves and we had the food to feed the many offspring. Our population began to grow.

Then about 280 years ago the industrial revolution started. Social scientists divided this into two parts as initially it was confined to Britain. Then nearly 200 years ago in a Northeast town called Shildon in County Durham, George Stephenson put Locomotion 1 on the tracks for the first time. It was as a direct result of this invention that the industrial revolution was transported to the rest of the world.

We are currently going through the Digital Revolution, where the transportation of information through the global network, the internet, is transforming our lives again.

Why is this relevant at this point in our discussion?

In our very complex lives, what do many of us want to do when we get time off work and want to relax?

Those that can go to the beach or to a river go fishing, others walk up mountains. Many millions of people try to reconnect with the landscape and their ancestors and return to old behaviours that connect us to nature. Those that lay by the swimming pool are basking by the waterhole just as our ancestors did thousands of years ago.



In this photograph we see a manufactured savanna scene with a modern-day watering hole that still attracts the attention of local wildlife.

In our setting, the outdoor instructors are the hunters roaming the countryside getting to know it in as much detail as they can. Their time is enhanced if they pick berries on the way. They, also collect the honey and manage the beehives.

The garden instructors are the gatherers, picking fruits and beginning farming by growing vegetables and plants to eat, closer to the homestead. Often feeding the pigs and chickens in the kitchen garden.

The Farm instructors are the farmers working with the animals in hen houses, small enclosures, and large fields. Gathering the harvest, whatever that may be, in terms of meat, grass and corn and potatoes.

The cooks in the different kitchens convert this to satisfying food.

The wood workshop and forge are the beginnings of our limited industrial activities.

The teachers help students learn how to read and write and the IT people make the most of the digital revolution.

Focusing on our early history, we are pre-programmed to take satisfaction from our own survival skills and to do this we perform the activities listed above. By doing so, we are stimulating the children's senses with gentle rewarding stimuli, instead of harsh high stimuli like adrenaline.

These activities are of course excellent educational activities, stimulating the brain to want to learn more. With that comes the very things that make us different from other less complicated animals, reading, writing and arithmetic.

As we evolved, we learned to communicate in larger and larger groups. To facilitate that, we developed writing skills that could be read and understood by many people in many locations. These skills also required us to communicate in numbers. Today any human being is going to struggle fitting into society if they can't read, write, and understand basic maths, because this means they cannot communicate as effectively as the rest of us require.

Our school in the environment we have created reflects the development of humanity and in doing so allows our population to reconnect with the very essence of what makes us happy and healthy. These factors also encourage motivation for learning and the combined effect is a therapeutic approach. In my view, this helps to reset the child's biochemistry, stimulates learning, and increases skills to aid recovery, sustain development and enable them to function in the modern world.

This is not a new idea. In 1961, 1/3 of all secondary modern schools had their own livestock. They commented that "it's remarkable how having a farm added value to all lessons".

(Source – BBC – Back in time for school)

How do these activities and experiences stimulate learning?

Yuval sets out his view that:

Knowledge = Experiences x Sensitivity. To have knowledge we must go through an experience. If that experience does not include sensitivity or the ability to process the experience there is no increase in knowledge.

Therefore, a child must be sensitive to the world around them to allow the experience to be worthwhile and increase knowledge.

Traumatized children are often desensitized to the world around them. This equation makes clear the importance of allowing a process of recovery to take place, to enable the child to allow their senses to be reset. Imparting knowledge without this process being successful, is simply ticking boxes on the part of the teacher, as there are learning experiences being offered but these don't get the opportunity to be turned into knowledge.

For years I have described the brain of a traumatized child to be like a snow globe. Constantly shaken by the events of their lives. We need the kind of experiences described earlier, to allow their brains to settle. Only

then can the experiences we offer, combined with increased sensitivity, be converted to knowledge. This is how all the therapeutic activities increase learning in all lessons, not just the ones they appear at first hand to address.

Whilst many thought they were just going for a walk or digging soil for exercise, they were in fact increasing their sensitivity which allows them to convert their experiences in all areas to knowledge.

Summary.

- Recognise the value of achieving harmony.
- Understand how our biochemistry influences our lives.
- How we can influence the biochemistry of our students.
- Value the significance of increased sensitivity being able to convert experiences to knowledge.
- Understand neuroplasticity and how children are mouldable beings able to respond to our environment and convert our experiences into knowledge.

Designing a Curriculum - Perspectives and Spectrums.

“Society that scorns excellence in plumbing as a humble activity and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is exalted as an activity will have neither good plumbing or good philosophy. Neither its pipes or its theories will hold water”.

John W Gardiner former president of The Carnegie Corporation

In Autumn 2021 as teachers and carers were coming to terms with the effects of 18 months of chaos created by the worldwide pandemic, I was somewhat surprised to read a letter from the head of Ofsted setting out that the percentage of children in the looked after system, (children in local authority care) that attend university was below that of the national average. She was setting out her quest to increase this and by doing so increase children's life chances and opportunities. Whilst I respect the need for always increasing our aspirations for young people in care. In my view this was wrong on so many levels.

Whilst at the time those of us front line workers who had been dealing with the impacts of Covid 19 were aware we were not out of the woods and much disruption was to come, never mind trying to recover from the trauma of the experiences to date and keeping everyone together and functioning in the right direction. As such I therefore thought the timing of the message was questionable.

However, this was a minor emotional response compared to the fact that if we were to measure the attendance rate at universities of looked after children against the national average, there may well be a gap in the statistics. If we are to compare the statistics against those from the same socio-economic groups children in care usually originate from, the gap would undoubtedly be much much smaller.

As was acknowledged, if we consider the trauma children in the looked after system go through because of needing to be looked after, in my view it is remarkable that any looked after child gets to university at all, and I am left in sheer amazement of their academic achievements. It is perhaps a reminder that the spectrum of difficulties encountered by the looked after population varies so considerably and the impact of their experiences varies so significantly.

However, once again this is not my main point. My main point is why is the attendance at university such an important measure of success? The answer must be because this is the career path familiar to high ranking educationalists and they fail to have enough respect for alternative routes to success or have a good enough understanding as to what success is and how it can be measured.

They are measuring success by their own experiences and their perception is based on what they are familiar with. In doing so they are failing to acknowledge that human beings by their very nature are diverse. (We learn in different ways and at different stages). It is this diversity including cognitive diversity that is our collective strength as a society. It is to be relished and cherished not overcome.

Whilst academic achievements are an indicator to success and life opportunities and should always be strived for, they are by no means the only indicators available. The academic world does not have the monopoly on success let alone happiness. Most of the world's self-made millionaires did not have a university education. We all want our students to be the best they can be, but it is not the case that the only measure of their success is by GCSE's, A levels or University Degrees. The discussion should be about their effective

contribution to society by being good people and not their ability to retain facts and pass tests.

‘So how can we add value to existing systems?’

The famous American Phycologist Dr Bruce Perry once discussed the importance of recognising small steps to progress. As an example, he explained that it is often the caretaker or maintenance man that can get the most out of the more damaged children and described one incident where there was a child placed on a school with a farm. The farm hand had to milk the cow each morning and noticed the child watching from a distance. To demonstrate his openness to the child’s presence everyday he brought a second milk stool and placed it next to him as he milked the cow. Each day the child got a bit closer, eventually after many weeks the child was able to sit next to the farm hand. Regulators became concerned at the lack of progress until the farm hand produced a graph showing the distance from the child to the milk stool and their progress over time.

This is an extreme example but one that articulates the importance of recognising small steps to progress.

A very good friend of mine from a privileged background once stated to me that in his view the three essential social skills to be learned in life were ‘Horse riding, Skiing, and Tennis’. Having spent my life dedicated to residential care and special education, in my view the spectrum of important life skills starts with the ability to clean oneself after using the toilet because of effective potty training. This demonstrates the vast difference in perspectives of normal behaviour and understanding of the needs of certain sections of our population.

My friend was not too far away from the Chinese Philosopher Confucius (551-479 BC) who was perhaps one of the first to design a curriculum for young people to enhance themselves as individuals. His curriculum for personal development was:

- Rights, the modern equivalent could be rules, and the law.
- Music, both of which bring harmony.

Followed by what he considered ‘Essential Skills’ these being:

- Calligraphy, which today could be called writing and the use of English Language.
- Mathematics.

Followed by:

- Charioteering. The modern equivalent could be passing ones driving test.
- Archery. Again, the modern equivalent could be the ability to protect oneself and/or sustain oneself in food. This is expressed in the modern world through sport.

This curriculum from two and a half thousand years ago has the essence of much of the needs of young people today. I break down activities into three categories.

- Harmful - anything that is emotionally or physically harmful including any activity that has addictive qualities.
- Essential - Educational activities including music, arts, and sport.
- Therapeutic - Activities that help a person heal from past traumas.

All educationalists are aware that it is indeed experiences usually arranged by adults that prepare young people for the world they are to encounter as they get older. The argument about what those experiences should be clearly goes back to the time of Confucius if not many years earlier as he felt the need to articulate a plan to enhance the lives of those around him at the time.

Below is perhaps my most favourite speech made by an Indian Chief in North America as he tried to explain that the curriculum being offered by the European Educational establishment at the time to his young people was not fit for the purpose of preparing them for the life they were to lead. It also explained how in his view his curriculum was by far superior.

UNNAMED (Iroquois)

“If the gentlemen of Virginia will send us a dozen of their sons, we will take great care of their education” (1744)

Benjamin Franklin tells the story of the speech that follows, how at a council between them and the government of Virginia, the Iroquois were offered a college education for some of their young men.

"We know that you highly esteem the kind of learning taught in those colleges, and that the maintenance of our young men, while with you, would be very expensive to you. We are convinced, therefore, that you mean to do us good by your proposal, and we thank you heartily. But you who are wise must know that different nations have different conceptions of things; and you will therefore not take it amiss if our ideas of this kind of education happen not to be the same with yours. We have had some experience of it: several of our young people were formerly brought up at the colleges of the northern provinces; they were instructed in all your sciences; but when they came back to us, they were bad runners; ignorant of every means of living in the woods; unable to bear either cold or hunger; knew neither how to build a cabin, take a deer, or kill an enemy; spoke our language imperfectly; were therefore neither fit for hunters, warriors, or counsellors; they were totally good for nothing. We are, however, not the less obliged by your kind offer, though we decline in accepting it: and to show our grateful sense of it, if the gentlemen of Virginia will send us a dozen of their sons, we will take great care of their education, instruct them in all we know, and make men of them."

The above speech demonstrates how we prepare young people for the world they are to encounter and how we measure their success is an age-old argument and one that requires a breadth of perspectives and respect for cognitive diversity and all skill sets.

Following the success of the ‘New Labour’ campaign and election victory in 1997 the Blair government set out their mantra of Education Education Education. In doing so they did much to increase the attendance at universities, raising the percentage from 16% to over 50% as hoped for.

In my view, university should feed directly into employment and not used as a delay to enter the workplace by which time the ability to establish work ethics and workplace skills do not have the opportunity to be embedded as strongly.

Many years on we have discovered that we don’t have enough people to undertake all the tasks required to keep our country going and have been relying on foreign labour for years. Whilst at the same time a section of society has been left behind because it is considered too difficult to train to make any worthwhile contribution. A shocking situation far from the aspirations of any credible government, socialist or not.

The issues around that of increasing young people’s employability and subsequent life chances are complex and come down to competencies on many different levels.

Whilst the academically successful young people in the looked after system should be commended for their achievements, what structures are in place to help them be successful human beings? What are their abilities in social skills and sustaining relationships? The issues that need to be in place to make the most of their academic success. In other words what do the foundations look like?

Passing tests is one thing, applying knowledge in practice and interacting with other human beings as part of that process is another thing altogether.

However, as the educational establishment have designed systems that fulfil their expectations the result is we value what we measure and all energies are directed to that goal. The absence of alternative systems means the system goes unchallenged.

What if we could measure what we value as an alternative to valuing what we measure?

What do we want for our children and young people?

Within this remarkable and truly wise book (The Coddling of the American Mind) I came across a speech I really wish I had written and delivered myself. It was made in 2017 by John Roberts the chief justice of the United States at his Sons graduation.

John Roberts clearly understands the value in life experiences and its impact on individuals’ ability to learn values. As such he clearly values the learning of values and the importance of developing resilience.

“From time to time in the years to come, I hope you will be treated unfairly, so you will come to know the value of justice. I hope you will suffer betrayal because that will teach you the importance of loyalty. Sorry to say, but I hope you will be lonely from time to time so that you don’t take friends for granted. I wish you bad luck, again from time to time so that you will be conscious of the role of chance in life and understand that your success is not completely deserved, and that the failure of others is not completely deserved

either. And when you lose as you will from time to time, I hope now and then your opponent will gloat over your failure. It is a way for you to understand the importance of sportsmanship. I hope you will be ignored so you will learn the importance of listening to others, and I hope you will have just enough pain to learn compassion. Whether I wish these things or not, they’re going to happen. And whether you benefit or not will depend on your ability to see the message in your misfortune.”

All parents, carers and professionals must have a clear idea of what they hope their children and young people will learn and the type of adults they will grow into depending on the context of the relationship. Individual aspirations will vary, for some it may be to graduate from university and achieve a well-paid rewarding career.

In my organisation we hope they grow up into young adults free of services like social services and the benefit system. Ultimately to become good parents themselves is high on the list of priorities and will be for most, the ultimate measure of success.

The Values based education trust list these aspirations as being:

- Competent and confident in self.
- Act with integrity and spirit.
- Be ready to take responsibility, to support and nurture others.
- Fascinated by the natural world.
- Intrigued by our attempts to manipulate the world.
- Recognise human achievements and failings.
- Enjoy the creative, sporting, cultural and innovative.
- Appreciate cultures, sensitivities, and orientations.
- Qualified to take on the next stage of their learning.
- Fuelled with a desire to learn.

This is perhaps a higher level of aspiration than most would think of and articulates an intelligent and considered approach to the subject.

Christine Sketchley is an Educational Psychologist working in the Northeast of England. Her work focuses on the need to stop writing reports that no one reads or have very little result and to engage the child and their support team including parents directly in helping children make progress in one of the most deprived areas of Europe.

She has embraced the join up model described earlier and found this to be significantly helpful particularly with parents who were difficult to engage.

Her work has led her to promote a simple model that also focuses on the result in terms of aspirations for young people’s futures. This being:

DANCE.

- Dream
- Achieve
- Nourish
- Connect
- Energise

These are also daily targets.

To dream is to have time to think and plan hopes for the future.

Achieve is to make progress and recognise these achievements no matter how small.

Nourish in the form of emotional and physical nourishment. The result - to be energised to want to do more of what helps us move forward in our lives. Also, the importance of diet as many of the young people she works with have ‘food aversion’ with a diet consisting of a single food substance such as only noodles or only chicken nuggets as an example.

Connect is to have relationships with those around us and those that are important to us.

Energise is to be motivated to be fully engaged in your own life. Many of the young people she works with in some cases are confined to their bedrooms undertaking no exercise whatsoever. Being involved in some form of exercise or physical activity is really important.

Whilst I spent my early years in a council house, I have been able to mix with people from all walks of life. The United Kingdom has been known historically to be influenced by an established class system. It would be accurate to say I have enjoyed the company of people from every conceivable class, background, and experience. What is very clear to me is that there are two types of people in all sectors of society, these being:

- Negative and dysfunctional
- Positive and functioning

Money can’t make you happy, being happy is a state of mind, however positive functioning people always seem to be much happier than those that aren’t.

Perhaps what we want for our young people is simple, it is to be positive functioning and happy. But what overrides everything that has been said on this subject, we want them to be good people.

“Dear Teacher,
I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness. Gas chambers built by LEARNED engineers, children poisoned by EDUCATED physicians; infants killed by TRAINED nurses, women and babies shot and burned by HIGH SCHOOL and COLLEGE graduates.

So, I am suspicious of education. My request is: help your students become human. Your efforts must never produce monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmann’s.
Reading, writing and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more humane.”

Haim Ginott

Whilst some educationalist may be of the view that to prepare our children for careers in the future they need more computer skills. Currently we are seeing much more screen time and interaction with technology. As explained in “The Connected Species” areas that will require more labour in the future are likely to be in the care and service sector. Therefore, the most important skills to have are (and have always been) soft

skills, these being - Good communication, collaboration, negotiation, leadership and empathy. These are not learnt by increased screen time. They are learnt by increased interactions with other human beings.

Personal Holistic Competence.

From the start of my career, I have been convinced of the positive impact our environment has on the ability to help people recover. However, I have also always been aware we can't live on fresh air alone.

Once a person is stabilised, the next question is how do we help them move forward? It is my long held view that the way to help people of any client group, whatever their specific problems, is to give them the tools to improve their competence in as many skills as possible. Collectively these skills all add up to their 'personal holistic competence'.

For over thirty years we did this. First, our system was to record what we had done and how they had progressed. This developed into an assessment system that automatically produced an action plan.

In or around 2017, I read another significantly influential book "Black Box Thinking" by Matthew Syed. Matthew sets out two important and for me, life changing hypotheses. He makes the case for something so obvious yet often ignored.

- 1/ To learn from our mistakes and change negative experiences into learning opportunities.
- 2/ To break things down into small steps to achieve progress. A process called Marginal Gains.

This marginal gains process was well established in elite sport but not in social care!

When I read this, I was stopped in my tracks, awakening to the fact that this is what we had been doing. We just didn't realise its significance or that it was called marginal gains.

During a working lunch with psychologist Dr Jack Kennedy, he discussed his regret that there hadn't been a way of recording and measuring small steps in progress over several years. "I have" I explained. We left our lunch and headed straight back to our office. The result was a research paper written by Dr Jack Kennedy, entitled "Small changes matter, a marginal gains approach as a methodology to evaluating outcomes in a Looked After Child Population".

This ten year study of our looked after population, concluded that the use of this system resulted in a significant physiological change in the young people it considered.

https://cpd.peartreeprojects.co.uk/documents/Marginal_Gains.pdf

This system does two important things.

- 1/ It breaks down key skills and importantly soft skills, into 170 questions with a yes or no answer.
- 2/ It considers a persons' values and how they can each be measured on a spectrum.

Both systems collect measurable data and by doing so, produce a task list giving small targets.

The power of the system is not in a list of things that need improvement but a list of targets achievable by small steps, resulting in measurable progress. The power of this is real and has transformed many lives.



Use this link to access the system for your students.

This document explains what it is all about.

Use this link to read the research paper.

Watch this video to learn how to use the system.

This system has been made available to schools all over the world with the help of "The International Values in Education Trust.

Download free at the App Store!

Having now spent a number of years visiting schools and care homes giving training on the PHC system, I was on one occasion to hear the kind of feedback that caused me to stop and rethink our strategy. The feedback was –

- The subject of values and how they impact on children's lives was not a concept familiar to this particular group. The language was unfamiliar and they struggled with knowing the level of detail required.
- They were concerned that if they didn't do anything with their children and didn't make any progress that this would be highlighted also. Which it would.
- They hadn't made the correlation that adults have a responsibility to prepare young people for employment. To engage with our economic society.

I also had to ask ourselves why wasn't this "free system" that can do so much to help children grow, develop and overcome problems, not taken up by more professionals more quickly?

One of the reasons within schools is that everyone is too busy doing what they have to do without doing new

things also. That the registration process takes time and there is an element of necessary friction between thinking about it and doing it.

It was at this point I realised all of these problems could be overcome if we put the responsibility of completing this questionnaire in the hands of young people themselves in a way they are familiar with and motivated to do. An APP.

As a result of this we turned the system around. Stripped it right back to 100 questions that are relevant to a specific question. We made the advice much more detailed and specific to young people. This has resulted in two apps being created.

- Preparation for Employment. - This tool can be used to give young people the knowledge to help to prepare them for the working world, giving a percentage score to indicate their employability. It also gives a document that can support their CV in an application for employment.
- Emotional Wellbeing Indicator. Which assesses to see if a young person has the tools in place to look after their emotional wellbeing and giving specific advice on how to improve this.

These apps will be available to download for free in The App Store.
Launch date, Summer 2025.

Selecting people to be part of your community.

One thing I am not going to do is list all the requirements for employing people to work with children or the required procedures. That is well documented elsewhere, what is worth discussing is how we use the knowledge gained to make good choices.

Indeed, the definition of maturity is not the number of years passed but the use of available knowledge. I would hope to demonstrate good use of available knowledge.

Providing a wonderful natural and therapeutic environment is one thing but it doesn't work if you haven't got the right people who share your ambition and hold similar values. Whilst there is a need for cognitive diversity, there isn't room for values in conflict with your mission. Recruiting and retaining good people who live up to the values they claim to promote, is the most important issue, above that of creating the kind of environment I have described.

Dr Neil Hawkes makes an important observation. He states how important it is to recruit people with big eyes and who use their eyes to smile. He noted that some people interact in a genuine thoughtful and attentive way whilst others interact as if they are selling bus tickets. Going through the motions but not genuinely interested.

In the many challenges the children we look after present, their reaction is dependent on the right responses of the proposed leader, I say proposed as at the start of any relationship that is how it is as the leader is tested through incidents and situations.

One Harvard psychologist Amy Cuddy in her book 'Presence' explained that when first meeting someone there are only two important questions to ask 1) Can I trust you? 2) Are you competent? The most important is number 1 as she makes clear and a similar observation to Ruby Wax that in caveman days it was no good accepting someone who is competent at hunting if they were going to murder you in your sleep. It is these two questions unknowingly we had embedded into our recruitment procedures. Can we trust them with our children and then if we can, can they cope with the required tasks? It is indeed this assessment that the children also make on each and every member of staff with an already perverse view on how to trust and an ever elaborate way of testing out your competence.

One thing is certain, in special education (probably other settings also) you need a team of diverse skills and abilities. One of my early observations which led to designing systems to improve performance, was to encourage people to find their role and be happy within that role.

My observation was that I thought people fell into three roles. Not dissimilar to the motivational model of autonomy, control, and relationships. Where you could have elements of all three, my observations were that people could be all, one or two of the following -

- Carers
- Doers
- Administrators.

Over time we all had to be good administrators, the carers became the residential staff and the doers became the education staff.

Whilst this observation has merit it was soon to be superseded by a much more detailed and complicated marginal gains appraisal system.

Recently I came across the work of Thomas Erickson in his powerful book called surprisingly enough ‘Surrounded by Idiots’.

His observations are that people are driven by their personality types. These types he listed by giving a colour to aid discussion and articulate his methodology. Below is a very basic summary of the salient points.

- Red - Straight forward pragmatic bold leaders. Big picture planners.
- Yellow - Creative leadership. Not risk adverse.
- Green - Caring steady, risk adverse.
- Blue - Detailed people who thrive in the small details but often get bogged down and regularly struggle to fully deliver. As in closing the deal or getting a project across the finishing line.

This is not dissimilar to my initial observations.

- Red and Yellow are doers.
- Green are carers.
- Blue are administrators

Erikson’s method stated that you can have elements of up to three of the four in different measures but never all four.

Understanding people’s strengths and weaknesses, their aptitude and how to get the most out of their contribution is the art that is management. One thing I learned early in my career was to ensure you never asked people to do something that was beyond their ability or required them to work against their personality type. Square pegs in round holes never ends well. Understanding this and finding creative ways of making the hole/role fit is perhaps the single most important thing to do as a manager of people.

However, it needs to be recognised that to help vulnerable people, you need warm empathic people with skills to offer, and there isn’t a qualification that covers those elements. There is no correlation between good interpersonal skills, empathy and understanding, hands on competence and qualifications. These bits require understanding, empathy, and good interpersonal skills on the part of the interviewer. Along with good sound judgement.

Dr Bruce Perry once explained that in his experience it is often the caretaker or the maintenance man that is the one to make the most progress with the most damaged individuals. There isn’t a hierarchical struggle for dominance and neither pose a real or perceived risk to the other. The caretaker has nothing to prove and the individual nothing to lose.

There is in my view a simple analysis that can help you determine your basic personality type. This is just for the fun of it but I bet it’s not far out.

- If you’ve been given a copy of this book and haven’t read it because you know where you’re going and nothing is going to change your view = RED.
- If you’ve been inspired by some of the creativity and are thinking how you would have changed this book to meet your own narrative = YELLOW.
- If you didn’t like some of the issues raised but want to come and pet the animals = GREEN.

- If you think this book is too wish-washy and lacks scientific data = Blue.

As you can see the chances of pleasing everyone are simply non-existent.

The ability to assess people’s varying personality types and allocate them to the right position in a working environment is important. The above goes to demonstrate the importance of having a variety of people with different personality types to make an organisation work. Another valuable area to consider in a similar way, is that of cognitive diversity.

‘Rebel Ideas’ also by Mathew Syed discusses cognitive diversity in detail.

The first point I recognised when reading this book is that the organisation I grew and the whole concept of creating a therapeutic environment was a rebel idea. It was not part of the normal expected framework. The kind of thinking I am discussing is not common and therefore unlikely to be immediately accepted.

Mathew explains that diversity is not just about ethnicity, cognitive diversity is about experiences, backgrounds and the way people think. If you have an organisation that is full of graduates from a particular university. They will have shared the same lecturers, experienced the same environmental factors and it therefore should not be a surprise if they share the same views and attitudes. If you don’t come from that mould, it is likely they will have less respect or value of your contribution. You might even think differently!

One of our most highly thought of supporters in the world of education, was once stopped from bringing other professionals to visit our environment by her superiors who stated, “we don’t want that, it might make our people think differently”. You may imagine where I view their position on the intelligence spectrum.

Mathew explains that to have cognitive diversity and to add value to the potential scope of reference to an organisation, you need people from different backgrounds, environments, and educational experiences. In my experience this is still very much an ideal to strive towards as those that are perceived as having different ideas are viewed with some scepticism. Partly as a defence mechanism to protect against erosion or risk. Anything that is unfamiliar is a potential risk.

In my experience the fledging organisation I was to grow, relied on people from varying backgrounds and employment histories to provide the breadth of experiences I wanted our children to have. Providing care was simply not good enough. What kind of lifestyle and experiences were they going to have in our care without recognising that it was the quality of experiences that was going to prepare them for their future as adult human beings? At the time I just didn’t know it was called cognitive diversity.

Summary.

- Appreciate the importance of values in your organisation and how they are promoted.
- Why we should respect people’s personalities and how they may be influential within an organisation.
- The value of cognitive diversity.

Justice.

Surviving a Pandemic/Ofsted inspection.

In January 2020, I saw late night news articles about a virus in China that was beginning to claim lives on a worrying scale. There is a hypothesis that there is no such thing as genuine altruism, and we are only really interested in things that may impact on ourselves. As a rural person that lived through and experienced the foot and mouth crisis of 2001 this news story began to ping my corporate radar. The second week of January I held our first crisis management meeting regarding how we would cope in such a crisis.

In February during a skiing holiday in France just over the hill to Italy, as I heard of the first recorded death in Italy I sent the message home. Activate the plan! That was to mean call an emergency manager's meeting and buy the technology I knew we would need to purchase to facilitate classroom-based education and working from home. The manager's meeting was needed to implement a strategy to keep people committed to their work in a time of crisis.

The Covid19 crisis was to present so many challenges I considered it likely to be our nemesis. It was very obvious to me that the characteristics of the virus meant it was not going to be long before we would all be impacted. The issues for us were not just how to manage the virus but the emotional responses it would generate. If we couldn't give reassurances people were safe to come to work, they may not show up and we would have a staffing crisis as well. Along with that how do you keep children with behaviour problems locked in. The reality of course was we were to be locked down not locked in.

In March I held a meeting with all staff and children to explain what was happening and what we were going to do about it. We went into lockdown with the full support of everyone a week prior to the national lockdown and the established bubble procedure before anyone had even thought of bubbles.

What was to follow I think was remarkable. Members of staff went to huge lengths to maintain the integrity of their household bubbles, often making sacrifices that impacted on their own families. An air of calm came over me as I knew we had done all we could and the realisation that we were on our own, there would be no one telling us what to do. Ofsted had suspended inspections which came as a relief, at that point I realised, I was more worried about Ofsted and its implications than a deadly virus.

We quickly forget the feelings of horror and terror that descended at this time, however this was when people were scared of surface spreading and we had huge anxiety over simple things like how to open the farm gate. As it was, we were in a position to maintain that each household bubble whilst attending the farms had their own inside and outside space, kitchen and toilet.

Our staff and children were to spend lockdown on the farms in a way that I could have only dreamed of. There were no outside influences or alternative choices and a day at the river, or our other locations became extremely valuable. Likewise, there were to be no inspectors calling and no social workers, therapists or parents either. The children were to relax in a way I had never seen before, and the behavioural issues disappeared.

To summarise, we stripped everything back to the basic necessities and this removed much stress from situations we hadn't realised had created so much stress. It was a time to reevaluate our lives both personal and professional.

Throughout the pandemic we were to avoid much of the heartache we could see elsewhere. We didn't lose any of our community. Then in August tragedy struck. I received the kind of early morning phone call no one wants to hear. One of our children, a fourteen year old girl with health conditions had died in her sleep.

The impact of this on our community was devastating and I realised for the first time that many of our team were impacted in a way that demonstrated the emotional value I didn't think was appropriate before. Love.

For myself having a child die in my care was the worst thing that could happen to me professionally and personally it took a huge toll also.

The versatility of the farm came into its own at this time. We turned our grain shed into a church and live streamed the funeral from the actual church to a barn full of people many miles away.

As time moved on, we all became familiar with the issues of managing Covid and life began to return to what we knew as normal. This also meant the return of Ofsted inspections.

From a school perspective, we had only ever had a positive experience of the inspection process. All inspectors were exactly as you would hope them to be along with being thoroughly knowledgeable helpful people. However, what they all had in common was an air of anxiety of their own colleagues. "I get it David, but the next inspector might not". Was the mantra I became familiar with.

Although we had a 100% record of Outstanding school inspections, as the inspection process began to get going nationally the feedback was concerning to say the least. One of our education consultants explained that the kind of recently recruited inspectors with limited experience would unlikely 'get' our methodology.

Our experience with social care inspectors, however, was not the same historically and at the same time other social care consultants were making it clear that inspectors were operating in a way that to enhance their reputations and careers they were needed to be seen to be hard on organisations.

I was not about to have the reputation of my life's work become the medium of a political football for aspiring inspectors.

At this point in time, I took the decision to move our school from the regulatory process inspected by Ofsted to The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) which we were eligible to do. However, our residential homes had to remain under Ofsted and an unbelievable aspect became apparent.

Whilst I cannot say this with certainty or fact, what I can say is this is my perception as a result of my experience. In schools Head Teachers may experience an inspection every three or more years, often more. This is the frequency I am familiar with except in a pandemic. However, residential homes are inspected every year and at one point they were inspected every six months. As a family firm with six residential homes over a twenty five year period (the time from when inspections for small homes started), I have significantly more experience of supporting house managers through this process than most.

Coming through a pandemic in residential care and education was a traumatic experience for all, with the focus in many different ways on that all important of issues "safeguarding!"

As an industry we expected our efforts and, in many cases, significant sacrifices to be recognised and form

part of any inspection process. As inspections started to happen it was quite clear that this was not going to be the case. Inspectors made it quite clear they did not want to know anything about our Covid experience, this was not on the agenda. This was particularly relevant for ourselves, as we had had such a remarkable time. They were clearly not interested in good news stories and my hypothesis became clear - If they were to encounter good news stories of resilience in the face of adversity and standards of care were maintained, what was their role?

Their role was to keep everything improving. If they weren't needed for two years, were they needed at all? It's my belief that this resulted in the realisation that to maintain the integrity of their corporate body they must demonstrate how much deterioration there had been in their absence.

As a result, many in the care and education sector who as human beings needed a metaphorical pat on the back, got a right good kicking. This was to be our experience and I cannot express enough my contempt for such actions at this time.

As one of my managers put it, "The inspection process was the worst two days of my life, and then they tell me I was Outstanding! If I was Outstanding, why did it have to be the worst two days of my life?"

Why does this impact on us so much?

The authors of "The Coddling of The American Mind" Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt explain how justice is an innate belief in all of us and injustice causes significant responses in our emotional biochemistry as we feel betrayed and let down becoming in some cases aggressively defensive against injustice. They set out two types of justice most relevant in people's everyday lives and defiantly relevant at this point in our discussion.

- Distributive Justice. The way tasks are distributed against reward for completing these.
- Procedural Justice. The procedure undertaken to ensure a fair outcome.

Distributive justice is evident in our everyday lives in terms of whose responsibility it is to complete which tasks. What is the reward for such tasks? This impacts on children and adults from who's done the most housework to how many case files are the responsibility of which key workers. If the balance between the distribution of tasks against the reward in terms of recognition and monetary gain is not in balance or harmony, literally all hell can break loose.

Likewise, if people who have devoted their professional lives in a way that often means sacrifices to their personal lives are scrutinised by a process that is not believed to be fairly undertaken, the feelings created are magnified disproportionately to the actuality of the situation. If this is done in a bullying or intimidating manner this can be deeply scaring. By contrast if it is seen to be fair and reasonable, we buy into the process even if we are at fault and penalised by the outcome. (There have been occasions I thought I could see the impact of 'Stockholm Syndrome' as managers praised the inspectors for finding the mistakes they found after such an intense process.).

I have personal experience of this. In Spring 2000, we were in the process of opening a residential home and undertaking the registration process. Our inspector had told me she had everything she needed to complete the process and we had met all the requirements. All she had left to do was to forward me the certificate of registration to be attached to the office noticeboard. This was a huge relief as we were under pressure to open as some desperately vulnerable children needed our service and this was known to the inspector.

Unfortunately, straight after this phone call the inspector who only worked three days a week anyway went on long term sick. Several weeks later she phoned me to see how we were getting on and to arrange to send me the certificate of registration. I informed her things were going well and the new children were settling in nicely. "Oh" she said "can I make an appointment to see you?" Which we agreed for the following day.

At the agreed time the doorbell rang, and I opened it to see our inspector stood on the doorstep with a police officer behind her. They were invited inside. At this point I heard those terrible words being spoken that I never want to hear again. "David Bartlett, you have the right to remain silent, anything you say will be taken down and used in evidence" as I was formally read my rights.

This was for opening a children's residential home without displaying the required certificate of registration. I remained quiet until asked for an explanation. Why had I done such a thing? My answer "Because you had failed in the simple admin task of sending our certificate!" "Did you really think some of the most vulnerable children's lives could be put on hold while 'you' a part-time worker goes on sick leave?" The police officer who I was later informed was brought along for her protection in case I lost my temper looked extremely embarrassed and the meeting turned to an explanation that this was the procedure required in these circumstances and I had to be cautioned as part of the procedure until they received an explanation. Now that I had explained, and they were happy with my explanation we could all go about our business. Many years later, I was to hear from a credible source that she had returned to the office bouncing with excitement that they had been able to get one on that Mr Bartlett and that I must have been guilty, or I would have used their complaints procedure. (Note to self, always use the complaints procedure.)

From my perspective, I don't mind working with people, even if they try to make a fool out of me as in doing so, they make a fool out of themselves, as long as we make progress against my personal and professional targets. The home was opened, and we needed to remain focused on the task in hand and not some spurious interpretation of an admin procedure.

The above demonstrates a lack of procedural justice. The law is that it is illegal to open a children's home without registration and to prove this a certificate of registration must be displayed on a noticeboard within the home. That makes complete sense. The fact they interpreted the regulations to mean that I had committed a criminal offence because they had failed to send me the said certificate says more about them than it does me.

I agree with the process and the need for regulation. Through the regulatory process, I have grown and developed the practice of my organisation in ways I would never have been able to without the regulations and an inspection process.

The procedures in both education and social care are sophisticated and built on experience and knowledge. They work! The issue is how they are interpreted and how that interpretation is implemented. Dare I say, often by people who in many cases (not all) are not that knowledgeable and lack the experience and sophistication to do so with humanity.

We are at a time where the role of Ofsted is under huge scrutiny as a result of the suicide of a Head Teacher, Ruth Perry following an Ofsted inspection where her school had been downgraded from Outstanding to Inadequate. As such, I have heard all kinds of explanations being given in the media as to what the issues are. However, I've never heard it being articulated correctly.

The fear amongst professionals working in these fields of operation, education and social care are that there

is no acknowledgment for being human or that your staff are only human. In that one identified small admin error can have a huge impact on the outcome of the inspection and the subsequent final grading of which has significant consequences for the professionals involved. In short, there is a lack of procedural justice. As Greg and Jonathan make clear, if professionals had confidence in the system, it would be well supported. The profile of the issue identified above also hits their description of the behavioural characteristics of what is termed “A witch hunt!”

These being listed as:

- They arrive quickly, (24 hours or no notice at all)
- They identify crimes against the collective (a failure of regulation or the interpretation of regulation)
- Charges are often trivial or fabricated (whilst I don’t believe they are ever fabricated it is the element of identifying an issue and that the consequences are blown out of all proportion which causes the most perpetual anxiety. As one care inspector was heard saying through the office door - “Yes I’ve got him, I’ve found something!” This something being a small admin error.)
- There is a fear of defending the accused.

This analysis of what is known as a “witch hunt” was never designed to be applied to our circumstances but it’s too close for comfort and explains the distress caused to so many good people.

However, the consequences aren’t just for those being inspected. The house manager I mentioned above who had the two worst days of her life before being awarded ‘Outstanding’ was the following year also downgraded to ‘requires improvement’. She also received a metaphorical good kicking.

As a result, a new admission was stopped, and the child had to stay in his unregulated placement. This means the home operated by a local authority didn’t meet the required regulatory requirements to even be registered, this is also illegal and certainly doesn’t come with a certificate. The following week the inspector called to say she had got it wrong, and it was in fact graded ‘Good’ which meant the child could now be admitted.

At the same time, as this inspection was taking place another manager was at a conference with a presentation by Ofsted where they explained the days of bad inspections were over. They also explained that in this particular area they had registered 100 new homes, however 60 of them yet to find a manager. They have yet to make the correlation between their own actions and the consequences of their behaviour which results in people making their own decisions and moving on.

None of this of course helps the children that need placements or schools that need more teachers.

Our homes have been relatively consistent in terms of overall grading for many years. Four out of six have been rated Outstanding in some cases for several years, others rated Good. Only once has the grading slipped into requires improvement for a short while after a car crash of an inspection. All homes work to the same process and standards.

When we try to analyse the difference between ‘Good’ and ‘Outstanding’ it is very minimal, usually the sales pitch of the manager on the day and minor admin details. It is only areas that have theoretical impact and absolutely no practical impact on the children we look after. This is an overview of over one hundred inspections.

If you were to advise a person in a relationship with someone who was constantly inconsistent. Who kept

changing the goal posts, appeared to be on a power trip of changing expectations and was sometimes horrendously difficult and on others absolutely charming. You would call this an ‘emotionally abusive relationship’ at best! This is the toxic relationship all those in education and social care have with Ofsted.

As we know even when things are going well, the fear of the unknown and returning to things not being well is the kind of perpetual pressure found in an abusive relationship as the emotional rollercoaster impacts on your mental health. Until they can find the ground of ‘fair and reasonable’ and maintain this position, it is unlikely to get better. But it doesn’t have to be that way. There is an alternative for which there is a precedent.

I mentioned earlier I moved our school from Ofsted to the ISI who has an advisory body in the form of Independent Schools Authority ISA, whose purpose is to help. I believe we are the only school with an outstanding record to do so, in the belief they held the ground of fair and responsible. Here we were to find two organisations with a positive mindset. Our experience has been entirely that of a ‘positive functioning’ relationship as opposed to the ‘negative and dysfunctional’ relationship of our Ofsted experience. If it was possible for all schools to transfer, I’m sure there would be none left in the Ofsted corner.

Earlier we talked about how personality types impact on people’s performance. In my view looking at Ericsson’s work it is clear most inspectors are ‘blue’ personality types whilst most teachers and leaders will be ‘yellow,’ with many carers ‘green’. It is easy to see the personality clashes as the blue personalities can’t understand why everyone else doesn’t love spending time on admin details.

In my view Ofsted have lost the confidence of the industry and are unlikely to recover this. If they change the name of the agency but employ the same people, as Shakespeare said “A rose by any other name will smell just as sweet.” There will be no change other than the name.

Therefore, the only sensible road open to them is to change the system, strip it right back to the following.

- What does the school/home do well?
- Does it meet all regulatory requirements? If not list
- What does it need to do to improve?

Only then will the industry begin to build its self-confidence and start to be as creative and life enhancing as it should be.

In the event of no change, the challenge for anyone running a values-based environment will be how to continue to support staff in the inspection process and finding enough people with the resilience to cope with the pressure which they all feel every day.

Summary.

- Be aware of the powerful impact of feeling unjustly treated.
- Be aware of the different types of justice.
- Understand the characteristics of the behaviour known as a ‘Witch Hunt’.
- Understand the dynamics of an emotionally abusive relationship.
- Always make full use of the complaint’s procedure.

Summary and conclusion.

The formulae I have adopted to help children throughout my career has been a simple one:

- Environment
- Values
- Activities

Create the right environment and everyone and everything you look after should thrive.

Get the right people involved who hold the right values and promote them to others. This influences how people live within the environment you have created.

Stop ‘harmful’ experiences and undertake essential and therapeutic experiences.

There is however, in these simple formulae, a professional judgment about the order in which you prioritise your intervention. Let’s not avoid doing valuable work because things don’t work out the way we feel they normally should. It may not always be possible to stop harmful behaviours. Likewise, as is the case in most of my experience, a child’s ability to focus on essential education is often inhibited by a long list of issues.

These children often need the therapeutic input I have described to overcome or remove some of the barriers to worthwhile education. Just going through the motions and attending isn’t getting it right. It may be hitting the target but it also, may well be missing the point.

The use of the kind of therapeutic experiences I’ve described not only brings about the huge physical, physiological, and emotional benefits but also, may well be the building blocks to inspiring children and young people to want to learn more. Subsequently any essential experiences are more likely to be of greater value and the process more successful.

The mantra I encourage staff in all designations to adopt is simple.

- Protect.
- Engage.
- Occupy.
- Relate.
- Influence

If we protect from harm or harmful activities, we may be able to engage.

If we provide engaging experiences we can relate to and connect with the children in a way that can develop worthwhile relationships.

If we have worthwhile relationships we can influence.

From an educational perspective, we needed to move the focus from passing tests and exams to that of employability. In our history, we have many children who disengaged from mainstream education and were only able to re-engage because they were inspired by the direct link to employment. Therefore, the mantra for education became:

- Inspire.
- Motivate.
- Educate.
- Train.
- Employ.

If we can offer inspiring experiences, we may be able to motivate children to engage in their education. If we can do that, we can train them to become employable. Many young people who were never going to pass GCSEs (used as the only assessment of intelligence because that’s what people are familiar with) were heading for a life of benefits and custody, were inspired by working on the farm. They were able to be trained to drive very expensive and powerful tractors and able to make those tractors work to professional standards. They then used this as a direct stepping stone to employment.

Whilst driving tractors is a good extreme example, the potential working experiences this kind of environment offers leads to many transferable skills in many ways.

I hope this book has given you inspiration to change or value your environment and understand how it is intrinsically linked to our emotional and physical wellbeing.

I also hope it has demonstrated our connection to the natural world in ways we are perhaps just beginning to appreciate. In my view many societal problems are created by a disconnection with the natural world which can be overcome by simply reconnecting. Furthermore, I have over thirty years’ experience of seeing children’s lives transformed because of working in a more natural environment. My experience has been enhanced by many observations, for example when a dog licked the face of a child and demonstrated meaningful affection in a way the child hadn’t expected. Thereby providing a further step on the road to recovery and future relationship building with people.

Creating the environment is one thing but the difference between recovery happening by chance and it being a planned therapeutic process, is the deeper understanding of the whole recovery and healing process.

I hope this book can provide that underpinning knowledge for you to move forward and improve lives in a meaningful way, however you use it.

David Bartlett MBE
September 2024

Reading list

- Sane New World - Ruby Wax (page 12)
- The Connected Species by Mark A Williams (page 26)
- The Biophilia Effect - Clemens G Avray, Victoria Goodrich, Graham and Marc Bekoff (page 32)
- Sapiens – Yuval Noah Harari (page 87)
- Homo Deus - Yuval Noah Harari (page 48)
- The Psychology of Stupidity explained by some of the worlds smartest people
- -Jean-Francois Marmion (page 48)
- Horse Sense for People - Monty Roberts (page 64)
- The Coddling of the American Mind (page 79)
- Desmond Morris, Urban Zoo (page 97)
- The personal MBA by Josh Kaufman (page 114)
- From My Heart: Transforming Lives Through Values - Dr Neil Hawkes (page 126)
- Leadership’ by Rudy Giuliani (page 130)
- Ordinary magic for the digital age: by Racheal Rosen for Parent zone January 2017 (page 132)
- The Human Mind - Robert Winston (page 136)
- 50 things to do before you’re 11 ¾ - <https://www.50things.org.uk/> (page 146)
- The Naked Ape, Desmond Morris (page 176)
- Black Box Thinking – Matthew Syed (page 214)
- Presence – Amy Cuddy (page 217)
- Surrounded by Idiots: The Four Types of Human Behaviour and How to Effectively Communicate with Each in Business (and in Life) – Thomas Erikson (page 218)
- Rebel Ideas The Power of Diverse Thinking- Matthew Syed (page 219)

Research watch and study list

- How colours affect us – The great courses Amazon Prime (page 12)
- The Biophilia Hypothesis - Edward O Wilson 1984 (page 13)
- The savannah hypothesis – Google (page 12)
- What is the love hormone called? – Google (page 56)
- I Am – Amazon Prime (page 59)
- Britain’s strictest headteacher ITVX (page 73)
- The Celtic Word – The great courses Amazon Prime (page 95)
- Google Search – No Rules School (page 147)