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Every Child Matters – Part 2

The implementation of the Every Child Matters agenda in practice: Case study – Brathay Hall Trust

by Lucy Maynard

The first of this series of articles (Horizons Issue 39) provided an overview of the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda. This included the roots of the original ECM Government green papers and Lord Laming's inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié. It then went on to detail how ECM was enshrined in law, with the 2004 Children Act. The importance of the agenda was exemplified further with ECM being the principal policy driver in the creation of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (formally DfES).

This second article of the series provides a case study of an organisation's experience of implementing the ECM agenda into their practice. This case study is of Brathay Hall Trust, a children's and young people's charitable organisation based in Cumbria. The article shows how Brathay's structures, strategic direction and practice on the ground have been informed and transformed through their engagement with the ECM agenda.

Through 'Julie's story', we also gain some insight into quite how significant the outcomes of outdoor-based youthwork can be for individual young people, especially when the work is carefully directed and includes guided reflection.

[And what better way to support reflection and evidence the value of what we do than to include the participants in evaluating the programme, taking a qualitative approach, as Lucy does here? – Ed.]

The aim here is to provide Horizons' diverse readership with a perspective that might provoke thought within personal practice.

A change in strategy

Brathay Hall Trust draws upon experiential learning, outdoor adventure and creative arts in their work with children, young people, families, and the children's workforce. Brathay realised that in order to direct their work to greatest effect, they needed to situate themselves in a wider context. In order to do this, they spent time immersing themselves in the children's services press to understand current influences – from political to environmental and from social to legal. One trainer commented:

"We were so out of touch: we must never get in this situation again".

By being on top of policy they were able to develop a refreshed strategy. This started with deciding what they contributed under each heading of the outcomes framework (see Horizons Issue 39 for an overview of the outcomes framework). This developed into a medium term plan, demonstrating that they'd thought about what they can contribute towards ECM and sending a strong signal that they were going to be a part of it.

The plan included the following:

Be healthy:

We will empower young people **to make positive choices** about their emotional, physical, mental and sexual health.

Stay Safe:

We will empower young people to manage risk and challenge unsafe behaviours.

Make a Positive Contribution:

We will enable children and young people to **develop self-confidence and successfully deal with significant life changes and challenges;**

We will enable children and young people to **engage in decision making processes and fully participate in their communities and environments;**

We will enable children and young people to engage in law abiding and positive behaviour;

We will enable children and young people to develop positive relationships and respect others;

We will enable children and young people to develop enterprising behaviour.

Enjoy and Achieve:

We will motivate and engage children and young people in learning;

We will raise aspirations and achievement.

Achieve Economic Well-Being:

We will motivate and enable young people to engage in further education, employment or training, and prepare them to live independently.

It's what we've always done

There was a collective understanding within Brathay that ECM was concerned with the same issues that they had always been involved in. Sir Francis Scott's founding mission for Brathay in 1946 mirrors ECM in his "*well-rounded education*" and wanting to work with "*moral, intellectual and physical development*". ECM's content wasn't new to Brathay - they were already doing it - but they weren't joined up in their thinking about it. This led to situating themselves in the bigger picture by staying on top of policy and articulating what they were doing in new language that people in the outside world were using. For example, the previously known Trainer Training courses were developed into work with the Children's Workforce and they now are the northern region provider for the NCSL Multi-Agency Team Development programme. In this professionalisation process, Brathay was positioning itself at the right level, enabling them to do what they do and what they know works.

Restructuring

Brathay restructured their workforce to include two Children's and Young People's Commissioners. These were set to interface with commissioners within the Children's Workforce. The five outcomes were divided up under these commissioners and each outcome headed up by a training consultant.

"It wasn't rocket science! We just looked at what was going on outside, got people involved in wanting to change it, and then changed the structure to allow us to do the things we said we wanted to do" Mike Blakey, Head of Children's and Young People's Services.

Brathay's thinking subsequently moved on and became much clearer. Most of their work falls under 'Make a Positive Contribution' and they aim to concentrate on working with vulnerable young people who have been labelled challenging or disaffected. Their focus now is on preventative work, participation and work with the Children's Workforce.



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A Case Study - Julie's Story

Julie, 14, (not her real name) attended a residential at Brathay Hall's Ambleside site as part of a longer-term programme developed jointly with a women's project based in her home town. It will become clear that, in terms of the ECM outcomes, this particular piece of partnership work fell as much, if not more, within 'Be Healthy' and 'Stay Safe' as any of the other aspects of ECM. We pick up Julie's story as she attends a multi-agency meeting, the focus of which is on her circumstances:

With Julie at her joint review board were her social worker, a youth offending team worker, a drugs team representative and someone from education. This team pieced together that Julie's lack of attendance at school, going missing overnight and risky offending behaviour had come about after she had been hanging around with a group of men older than her. Julie was 14 and the man she called her boyfriend was 25. Julie was referred to a young women's project for advice on sexual health and to work with her on not putting herself into vulnerable situations. They feared Julie was at risk of being sexually exploited by her 'boyfriend' who was known to the women's project to have groomed young women into dependency and then exploited them through prostitution. A key worker from the women's project worked closely with Julie building up a trusting relationship with her. Brathay partnered up with the women's project to run a programme for the young women to extend and enhance the work of the women's project.

Julie commented –

"...all the people there [Brathay] they don't judge you by like what you wear or what you look like, they judge you by sitting down and getting to know you...All the activities we did, not just the outside stuff, but like the workshops and everything, it's just, well it does build your confidence up and I don't think you always realise it, until, well I don't know, but you don't always realise it at first"

"What don't you realise?" [Lucy]

[Julie] "Like how you're changing, until people say. And it's like 'yeah actually I am [smiling, laughing] I've just noticed. It's like you know things are getting better, but it's like you're not always putting yourself down as much, and it's like oh f*ck it, I look like this, or I dress like this...so what!...It's like

on a chart isn't it...it's like we were at rock bottom first, like I felt like a nobody, but like getting on this course, it starts escalating a bit more and more and then it just feels like wow! I mean like this is me, this is who I am, you either like it or you don't...I just can't believe how far we've come. I mean looking back I would of thought I'd never be in a place where I am today, never. At least I thought I would still be hung up on him [boyfriend]... and then moved out of county somewhere... so ... I'd never thought I'd come this far, but we have and looking back I hate that old person, this is the new me! ...I'm more confident, I think more of myself, I'm bubbly... And everyone was like 'I told you so' and I was like, yeah, but I needed to find out for myself. And I didn't need these people telling me what's right for me and what's wrong and what I should and shouldn't do, because at the end of the day I need to find out for myself sort of thing. And learn from me own mistakes".

During her time at Brathay Julie realised that she didn't want this man in her life. She grew in confidence and saw her situation differently from on top of a mountain. She was empowered to seek the support offered from services to not rely on this man anymore, rather than fighting against what they'd been telling her was best for her. Julie returned to school and is now working towards her GCSE's. She found the courage to give evidence against the older man and he served a prison sentence.

As you reflect on the case study, consider the potential knock-on effects of this work on Julie and those around her, stretching this to the potential social and economic impacts that her varied potential life trajectories might involve.

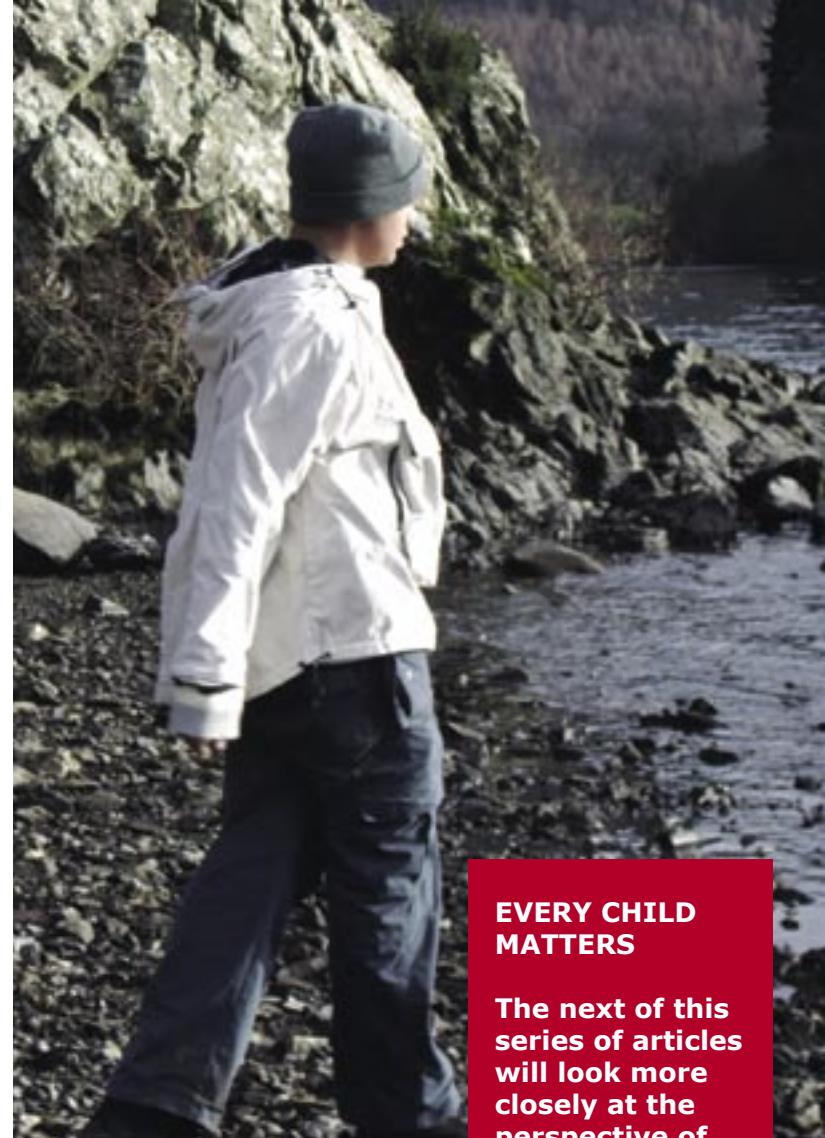
[Powerful though this example is, I'm sure that many of us have a store of similar stories. Lucy's work is helping us see how these stories are at their most powerful (in terms of evidencing the value of what we do), when they are presented as being aligned with a contemporary policy framework, which puts us in a better position to articulate the potential benefits of outdoor learning to stakeholders and gatekeepers.
– The author will be presenting on the subject of Evidencing Value at the IOL Conference in October – see www.outdoor-learning.org Ed.]

Improving the Quality of Young People's Participation

As well as the Participation Charter (published by Children Now magazine in association with Participation Works) young people's participation is threaded throughout ECM: "Children and young people will have far more say about issues that affect them" (DfES, 2004). Brathay have developed children and young people's involvement in the design, delivery and evaluation of work. For example:

One of Brathay's Commissioners worked with Cumbria Constabulary to deliver development programmes for Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's). It emerged that PCSO's have a different role to police officers and hence need different training. PCSO's are at the frontline of work with young people and are dealing with many anti-social behaviour calls. They need to develop relationships with young people they are encountering on the street, so their training needed to prioritise the development of skills for working with young people demonstrating challenging behaviour. Young people were therefore engaged to design an experiential programme to address this need. They were asked about their experiences of PCSOs and what they would want from a PCSO and were then involved in the face to face training of the PCSO's.

This had a multi-layer impact, as firstly the involvement of young people improved the training and added depth and richness. Secondly this provided an opportunity to work developmentally with young people directly (mostly youth offenders) and was empowering for young people to have their voice heard. Also, because the programmes ran locally, this was a real life opportunity to develop relationships between young people and PCSO's for the future. The programme went on to mapping a 'prevention and enforcement balance', and involved links with youth work in the local area. This project is therefore offered as an example of effective practice in terms of prevention, multi-agency working, and participation. ■



EVERY CHILD MATTERS

The next of this series of articles will look more closely at the perspective of young people, illuminating how Brathay contributed to the enhancement of their well-being.

Thought provoking...

- How could young people be more involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of your practice?
- How does your practice contribute to enhancing the well-being of young people under each of the 5 ECM outcomes?
- Are you aware of participation tools such as Hear by Right?

Author's Notes

Lucy Maynard is a doctoral student at the University of Cumbria, School of Outdoor Studies. Her PhD research explores the Every Child Matters agenda in practice with a particular focus on young people's experiences.

Useful resources:

Every Child Matters Green Paper, DfES (2004).
<http://www.participationworks.org.uk>

Photos: title photo by Brathay Hall Trust. Others by Fiona Exon.