



GT Vision

Eastern Region Gifted & Talented Partnership

Welcome...

Welcome to a special edition of GT Vision focusing on Able, Gifted and Talented (A,G&T) Children in Care (CiC).

Excellence East has specialised in this area since 2006 and much has been achieved in that time. We now work closely with: key personnel across the region to drive policy and practice; universities and organisations to provide enrichment opportunities for CiC; and with schools and education teams to provide opportunities for individual students, carers and teachers, such as The Climate Change Challenge which saw four CiC attend a United Nations student conference in Norway in 2008.

This newsletter is relevant to anyone involved in the care and education of Children in Care.

'Every Looked After Child is a gifted child... simply for surviving.'

How do you react when you read that statement? I work as strand leader for Excellence East promoting the education of gifted and talented Looked After Children and a common response when I explain my role to people is *'Well there won't be many of them!'*

And they are right. In March 2008, of 47,600 children aged 5-19 looked after by local authorities, only 1,555 were listed as gifted and talented (approximately 3.2 per cent), compared to about 8 per cent of primary-aged children and 13.7 per cent of secondary pupils not in care (TES March 27 2009). This suggests a massive under-representation of Looked After Children in G&T school registers. As professionals we are all too aware of the barriers to achievement for CiC: instability in care and school placements; low self-esteem; the impact of trauma; gaps in learning knowledge; a lack of understanding or inappropriate provision. As a teacher and carer, I have first hand experience of the challenges faced by looked after children and the adults around them in striving for a 'normality' to life and learning that most of us take for granted. For our looked after children, it's often not just one barrier they are up against, but many.

But does this mean that our children are not – or can't be – gifted and talented? Of course not! Research tells us that a major cause of underachievement for this group of children is actually low aspirations – on the part of the child *and* the adults who surround them. How many people see the behaviour first and the child second? Or judge a child's intelligence on whether they can read and write? Limited academic ability does not mean a child is not intelligent. Neither does difficult behaviour. But all too often this is what our children are judged on.

Education is massively important to all of us. It is no less important to children in care. Seeds that are sown now may not rise above the surface for many years, but as long as they are sown there is a chance that one day they will blossom. So believing in our children, having high aspirations for them, is as important as providing them with food, warmth and shelter.

Whether we are teachers, carers, social workers or other key professionals, we all have a hugely important role to play in the education of CiC. Individually and together we can make a difference. All children need secure and loving relationships. All children need experiences and opportunities to enrich their lives and learning. Both help the brain to wire and to make vital connections. Combine these with high aspirations for the children in our care and already we are providing powerful foundations for success.

What else can we do? For one thing we should see the child separately to the behaviour... *'You're ok, it's your behaviour that needs to change.'* We should stop asking the question *'How clever is this child?'* and start asking *'How is this child clever?'* And we should start with the assumption that the child is good at something... and search for it!

And then we need to work together to ensure each child's needs are fully met.

Consider that opening phrase for a moment... *'Every looked after child is a gifted child, simply for surviving.'* If everyone acknowledged this as true, if everyone recognised that the courage and resilience of these children in surviving what most of us never experience in our whole lives, is so amazing as to render them gifted and talented, what a fantastic starting point for improving the life chances of the children in our care. Underachievement would then be challenged, and maybe, just maybe, we would see many more Looked After Children realising their potential.

That's my goal. What's yours?

Ruth Broomhall

Ruth Broomhall is the regional co-ordinator, Excellence East and strand leader for A,G&T Children in Care. She is also a foster carer for Alliance Foster Care, Northampton, and director of *Zest Ed Ltd*, specialising in multi-agency training on matters relating to the care and education of CiC. Ruth can be contacted on 07810 261669 or at ruth.jb@btinternet.com

Able, Gifted and Talented and in Care

In April 2009 Ed Balls, the Secretary of State at the DCSF wrote to all Directors of Children's Services. In this letter he expressed the opinion that, "*Children in Care should be (seen as) the litmus test of how we are all delivering the ambitions set out in the Children's Plan to make this country the best place for every child to grow up.*" Since that time a wealth of material, legislation and statutory guidance has been put in place to attempt to ensure that all children within the care system can reach their full educational potential.

One of these strategies has been to develop the role of the Virtual School Head for children in care. In December 2009 the Commissioners for Children and Schools wrote a joint letter informing all local authorities that they must have appointed to such a post by Easter of 2010. The post should be a senior Local Authority Officer with the time, experience and seniority to influence policy and practice throughout all partnerships that make decisions about the lives of children in care. In the first Virtual School Heads newsletter published in January 2010 the DCSF states that Virtual School Heads are at the heart of the strategy to raise the attainment of children in care.

A strengthening of the corporate parenting requirements means that every adult who has anything to do with children in care should base their actions and decisions on the idea that they will only act in the way that they would like to have people act if the child concerned were their own. This means that not only will improving the educational achievements of children in care remain a major focus of everything that we all do, but also that there will be the expectation that a senior person will support and challenge schools and partners so that they are better able to support the needs of this vulnerable group of learners

In the past children in care have struggled to demonstrate the achievements made by all children. There are many reasons for this situation, but one is due to a lack of aspiration on the part of the young people themselves and those that support them. Logically, there is no reason why these children do not have the same potential as any other children to be able, gifted or talented.

However, when schools and local authorities are asked children in care rarely appear in the cohort of children who are supported as AG&T in schools.

Key elements of provision for gifted and talented children in care

For provision to be inclusive, children in care should be viewed as being potentially gifted and talented. Provision must: be inclusive, positive and collaborative; raise aspirations; improve standards; and remove potential barriers to learning. In order to counter the considerable underachievement for gifted and talented children in care provision should be directed in such a way that it is:

Holistic – As part of the holistic approach gifted and talented children in care require their academic needs to be detailed and aspirations identified whilst making connections to the social and emotional well-being of pupils. This will enable them to overcome barriers to learning and develop a positive self-image. An essential element of this holistic approach is to ensure that the voice of each of these learners provides a clear basis for all aspects of provision.

Dynamic – Many children in care have experienced multiple changes in their lives. The provision should be sensitive to these changes and yet provide a dynamic which is responsive, enabling and energetic.

Urgent – For many children in care the need for quality learning experiences is urgent and immediate. Timescales should reflect this, whilst reflecting what is practical and realistically achievable.

Practical – Any provision for gifted and talented children in care should focus on abilities and be aspirational, whilst enabling barriers to learning to be overcome.

This may involve consideration of support outside school as well as within.

Brian Roberts – Virtual School Head Teacher, Peterborough
Iain Simper – A,G&T advisor, Peterborough

Specialist Course for Designated Teachers/Education Support Teams

Sue Hains, the head teacher of the Virtual School for Cambridgeshire, has developed a course in partnership with the Faculty of Education of the University of Cambridge, entitled "*Meeting the Educational Needs of Children in Care*".

The course is for Designated Teachers in schools and teachers in Education Support Services to give them the very specialised knowledge and understanding they need to perform their roles. The course covers topics such as attachment; separation and loss; the law related to CiC; identification of gifted and talented CiC; language and literacy of CiC; the history of the research about CiC;

and the role of foster carers in the education of CiC. The sessions are being led by appropriate specialists in the field. The course is delivered over 10 weeks with one 3 hour session per week. The participants are required to undertake a 2,000 word assignment at the end of the course. The course is accredited by the University of Cambridge as a "Certificate of Further Professional Study" and can contribute to points towards further study at Advanced Diploma level.

The course is expected to run again in January 2011. If you have any queries please contact Sue Hains on 01223 712904.

Able, Gifted and Talented in Suffolk

Linda Gower of the Suffolk Looked After Children Education Support Service writes:

"Using our 'Virtual School' database we are able to identify a cohort of children who might be considered to be A,G&T. In reality this is a very crude measure and is more or less exclusively based on the 'able' to the exclusion of 'talented'. This is because our assessment is based on past performance in core subjects (SATs) and on estimates deriving from them (Fischer Family Trust)."

As Achievement Coordinator for Suffolk's LAC, I meet regularly with the county's A,G&T Coordinator and she ensures that the School Improvement Partner for each school is given a copy of our LAC A,G&T register. This means that the SIP is able to ask the school about what they are doing for any child on the list at that school. What this has shown is that there is often a difference of opinion about whether or not the child is A,G&T, i.e. the school often does not have such high expectations of the child as we do. They clearly do not build in to their thinking the fact that the child has demonstrated an extraordinary resilience in managing to achieve above the national expectation in spite of the trauma that brought them into care.

Having identified a cohort, we are then able to target them for extra opportunities, for example:

- Encouraging and facilitating attendance at subject-specific A,G&T events run by Excellence East, eg. Climate Change Challenge
- Corporate membership of NAGC for carers, and invitations to attend local Young Explorers events
- Each year 30 LAC (all abilities) are sent parcels in a scheme, now run by Bookstart, called 'The Letterbox Club' – 6 parcels containing books, maths games and stationery items sent over a 6 month period. Each child is tested before and after. For those identified as A,G&T, more challenging books are substituted for those provided by Bookstart.

However, there is still much to be done:

- Ensure that all social workers know when a child for whom they are case responsible is potentially A,G&T so that this can be raised at PEP meetings and discussion can focus on what school might be doing to enrich the curriculum, linking with the PEA (Personal Education Allowance) where appropriate.
- Survey the children themselves in terms of talents unknown to us. Link with our Participation Officers.
- Conduct a small action research project in conjunction with the county A,G&T coordinator: this will involve spending a day in the schools of a small number of identified students to find out what it is like to be an A,G&T child in care in a Suffolk school – what are the challenges for child and school?

If you would like to discuss any of the issues raised by Linda she can be reached at the following address:

Linda Gower, Looked After Children Education Support Service, 6 Cross Street, Eye, IP23 7AB. Telephone: 01379 668820

World G&T Conference, Vancouver - August 2009

Some key messages relating to the education of vulnerable children

- Assessment: focus on discrepancy between achievement and potential
- Audit writing skills: fact – most boys write 19% slower than girls, 63% write too slowly, 19% write very slowly
- Shadowing and mentoring: shadow an underachiever for a day and see school experiences from their shoes (*Diane Montgomery*)
- Encourage focus on social capital and SOFT intelligences (non-cognitive). The better ones social skills the greater chance of success in life (*Renzulli*)
- Science Nobel Laureates had at least one GREAT TEACHER: unique and exceptional teaching styles, passion, went beyond what was expected, emphasis on relationship
- Courage compulsory for success in innovation. (*Larisa Shavinina*)
- RESILIENCE – a positive quality to be nurtured
- Deep-seated need for community and sense of place
- Contemporary education suffers deeply by its eclipse of spiritual life
- Erosion of emotional intelligence (*Expanding conceptions of intelligence – Lessons learned from refugees and newcomers to Canada*)
- Education outdoors – educates body, brain and soul (*Robert Bateman*)
- Do schools foster 'interest'?
- Importance of early identification: to optimise education and prevent boredom, negativity; low income/minority background – less likely to be correctly identified later
- Invisible underachiever – potential high but all measures low, including performance at school (choosing not to do well)
- Giftedness can be a disadvantage/burden therefore DUAL disadvantage/burden if a minority or vulnerable child

Recommended Books/Resources

Light Up Your Child's Mind – Renzulli
www.renzullilearning.com – Renzulli Learning website
www.qisforquestion.com
Last Child in the Woods – Richard Louv
Five Minds for the Future – Howard Gardner
Outliers – Malcolm Gladwell
The Talent Development Planning Handbook – Trefinger/Young/Nassab

"I'm releasing the angel within the marble"
 Michelangelo

" If I have the belief that I can do it, I shall surely acquire the capacity to do it even if I may not have it at the beginning"

Gandhi



Frank Buttle Trust

The Frank Buttle Trust

The Trust provides grants for school fees, students, trainees, and child support for young people in need. The Trust has also developed a 'Quality Mark' which is awarded to higher education institutions who go that extra mile to support students who have been in public care.

These higher education providers are expected to raise aspirations and achievement, ensure that admissions procedures for care leavers are appropriate, and provide support at entry and throughout their HE career.

To date over 60 HE institutions have been awarded the Quality Mark. The list of universities can be viewed at www.buttletrust.org/quality_mark/

" Not 'how clever is my child', but how is my child clever?"

Howard Gardner

CiC and the University of Cambridge

Cambridge is enthusiastic about working with CiC through its various Widening Participation events and activities which are offered for Years 7-13. All applications from CiC will receive priority for places once any academic criteria has been fulfilled (should this be required).

In 2010 we look forward to providing a travel fund for CiC getting to and from open days, and also specific events such as the 'creative days' with drama, art and music, and scientific days to inspire young people about the latest innovations influencing the future. Events will also cover details such as the support CiC are entitled to once they leave care, and how to pick a subject to study further. For more information please visit: www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/care/

Children in Care and Care Leavers at the University of East Anglia

The University of East Anglia recognises that Children in Care and Care Leavers face a number of significant challenges on the path to higher education. The University is strongly committed to ensuring that this group is encouraged and supported in overcoming these challenges and throughout the higher education life cycle.

In August 2009 the University was awarded the Frank Buttle Trust Quality Mark for Care Leavers in Higher Education. The following highlights our commitments to the trust.

Raising Aspirations

- We proactively encourage schools to include CiC in our Outreach activities, which include: taster visits to the University campus, talks in schools and colleges, a student mentoring scheme, and summer schools.
- The University is also keen to arrange events specifically for CiC and be involved where possible in events organised by local authorities.
- The cost of travel and subsistence for aspiration raising events will be covered by the University.
- CiC are eligible for a free place on chargeable events for Gifted & Talented students organised by the University.

Encouraging Entry

- Care Leavers Bursary of £500 per year, awarded to all care leavers who register at the University, providing they are 25 years of age or under and entering higher education for the first time.
- The University also offers an additional £600 per year maximum bursary to all students who are in receipt of a Government Maintenance Grant.

Supporting Study

- The University will ensure the students have suitable accommodation for the length of their course, including summer vacations.

"University was the first time in my life where I actually felt someone believed in me and that I was good enough to do something. Accepting my MPharm place was the best decision I ever made!"

Rebecca

Care Leaver studying at the University of East Anglia



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