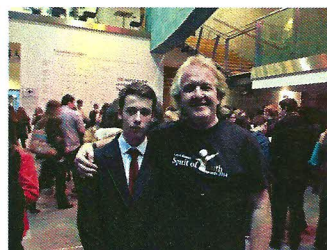


David Larion – A Case Study



I have a lot of experience with Perth & Kinross Council Youth Services, in engaging with hard-to-reach, or vulnerable young people, across the North Perth area. This is an area that has for many years regularly appeared in various national multiple-deprivation statistical charts or reports. In 2014 I invested my efforts into the new Tulloch Allotment site, in a bid to see if I could perhaps engage locally disaffected young people into this community project? Referrals came from a variety of sources such as Princes Trust, or Skills Development Scotland, but the majority were from local secondary schools.

One of these referrals came from Perth Academy in the shape of David. A seriously disaffected young man, his English was very poor, as he'd only recently moved to Scotland from Greece as a 15 year old. He had really struggled to slot into his lessons, and was beginning to attract the attention from other more consciously disruptive pupils, as he sought peer contact and acceptance.

My immediate perception of David was of him seeming a little uncomfortable meeting me – yet another English speaking figure of authority, even though as a youth worker I worked hard to allay this, with minimum formality etc? David was still low on confidence and also seemed uncomfortable outdoors in what basically was an empty plot of land, surrounded by nothing but mud. I realised in school that although conversation between us wouldn't be easy, David did seem to understand more than he could speak. So, I predominantly chatted to him about my multitude of ideas and regularly clarified when it was necessary? David was often unsure about what was needed or expected, but his punctuality and commitment was never questioned by me. I realised he was quite adept away from school and welcomed practical, hands-on, vocational experiences, and he quickly bought into my whole landscaping plans for the site as he grew to understand more.

David totally engaged with the work and soon took to working hard on the plot, and was often looking for extra work at the Tulloch site.

David was also integral to the whole design, layout and implementation of all aspects of my developing plans for the site. Other local Primary Schools were at the same time approaching me about any opportunities I may have for some of their more challenging pupils to come and work with us? I was keen to support them here, but I was becoming more and more concerned about my ratio of numbers to adequately supervise. Simultaneously, I was fostering better and better links with local builders and tradesmen, as well as other plot holders, toward acquiring the various landscaping materials I'd increasingly need. If I was to have this project in the physical shape it needed by my allotted time, I usually needed to go and carry, lift and dig these materials myself. David was involved in all of this throughout. He was amongst a small group of young men I consulted with on the designs of raised beds, and their construction, strong pathways between them and the constant shifting of heavy soil. David worked alongside two 20 year old Princes Trust trainees and listened to their and my instruction as well as supporting and contributing with lots of his own ideas. My overall hope was to create a totally accessible site for all ages and ability young people whether in a wheelchair or able bodied, so they could learn and practice horticultural skills, regardless of weather conditions? And this was achieved.

I was so impressed with David I nominated him for a prestigious Spirit of Youth regional award, where his story impressed the judging panel enough for him to make the final two, of this Oscars style re-carpet event. Alongside this, David has worked on and completed a series of other awards including his one, two & three star Dynamic Youth Awards, before completing his full Bronze Youth Achievement Award at the end of 2014. All of this, coupled with his character and commitment, has led to my taking him into local primary schools to shadow me when delivering school talks to 11 & 12 year olds.

The whole allotment project aims to give young people a positive outlet for negative energy and a clear focus. Educating young people on planting, nutrients and how to utilise such ingredients to cook healthy meals, enables them to appreciate and understand a sustainable way of living. It also teaches them through discussion and action about the benefit to their zero carbon footprint if they grow their own. The mental and social health benefits are similarly covered as well.

I know David is very grateful to be involved with the Tulloch Allotment Youth Project.

“Working with Shaun has really helped me, and I now want to either go to college to study agriculture, or get a job doing this kind of thing”

David continues

“The Allotment is brilliant at giving me more confidence in myself and my language skills have got miles better having met Shaun and all the other young and older teenagers in the community and out of school – I’ve now got loads on Facebook. I’ve really working out of school and doing something practical”

The Tulloch Youth Allotment Project has had such an impact locally we’ve had to apply for another plot in an adjoining neighbourhood. David and I have struck up such a team-relationship, that I’ll seriously miss his input once he inevitably moves on to paid work? He has come so far in this past year from a typically shy/grunting teenager, with apparent attitude, to my right hand man, and mentor to dozens of younger pupils.

I believe ours is a true example of partnership work that demonstrates particularly in David’s case, how youth work can make a difference.

