Community Development Case Study - John Taylor Hospice’s schools engagement project

**Introduction**

In April 2018, John Taylor Hospice began a school engagement project. The intention of the project was to contact local schools and colleges in north-east Birmingham to establish and develop long-term, reciprocal partnerships to support the work of the schools and the hospice.

**Methodology**

To help with the project, two student interns from the University of Birmingham joined the team to help contact the 84 schools in the north-east Birmingham area. The interns were taken on as part of the university’s work placement programme which aims to help students develop workplace skills to benefit them in their future careers.

Following initial telephone contact, we arranged to meet with the schools to discuss how we could work together. This enabled us to identify the assets within each school (e.g. careers and community leads) and foster an interest in working with the hospice - to open up hospice care to young people and empower our local communities to become compassionate communities. Most importantly, we wanted to work with schools to design how this partnership would work and ensure arrangements were reciprocal and beneficial to both parties.

**Outcomes**

Schools often challenged our assumptions as to how they wished to work with us. We had expected primary schools to be interested in short-term ‘off-the-shelf’ projects and for secondary schools to be largely interested in work experience opportunities and workshops/talks linked into their curriculum.

In reality almost the reverse was true for primary schools – they were often looking to form longer-term partnerships with more contact opportunities for their students within the hospice. Many schools preferred that the project would be led by their pupils. Secondary schools, whilst primarily motivated by work experience and careers support, often had a wider range of interests including support around well-being activities and citizenship.

As a result of this project we have contacted 52 schools and have developed partnerships with 13. We have already supported a local secondary school with their mock interview days (interviewing students with an interest in healthcare careers) and through a Compassion Workshop where we worked with Year 8 students to develop their compassionate communication skills through an interactive workshop.

**Next Steps**

We are in the process of planning a series of visits from local primary schools to our Living Well Centre. This will enable students from Key Stage 2 to spend time with our patients, staff and volunteers in a series of intergenerational projects including arts and crafts, befriending and curricular support for schools including supporting students with their confidence to read in front of others.

*Head of Community Engagement and Volunteer Resource Mark Jones - March 2019*