



## SECONDARY NURTURE GROUPS: MODELS THAT WORK

In October 2018, thirty professionals from across the UK came together for a Research Conference to discuss their experience of working in Secondary school nurture groups. The aim of the one day Conference was to establish current best practice from a range of Secondary settings and thereby develop a 'model that works' for Secondary schools. This research project itself has been generously funded by the Mulberry Bush Organisation.

The first keynote presentation of the day was delivered by the Glasgow-based colleagues Jenni Kerr and Leanne Black who focused on the trailblazing Glasgow initiative 'Towards the Nurturing City'. Established in 2012, the initiative seeks to build on earlier nurture group investment in the city and place wellbeing at the very core of education. This includes whole school approaches where all staff are familiar with the six principles of nurture, attachment theory and the impact of emotional deprivation on brain development. The nurture initiative includes schools, care settings, health teams and crime prevention officers and the outcomes are impressive in the city. Indeed, the impact of this committed, funded and strategic approach over the last ten years has seen educational attainment and attendance up – with exclusions and youth crime down (by 74% and 46% respectively).

Conference delegates then broke up into four Focus Groups and the discussions that followed were recorded for research purposes. Each Focus Group had an appointed Chair who ensured that structured discussions would cover key themes in relation to best practice models. These included the 'must have's' before a nurture group opens, the whole-school staff training, CPD for nurture staff, the role of the Senior Leadership Team, staff supervision and the expected challenges of setting up a nurture group in a secondary school setting.

The second keynote of the day was delivered by Cardiff-based nurture group teacher Caroline McKinley. During this captivating and detailed presentation, the referral system that leads to nurture support in the Secondary school was interrogated along with timetabling issues, reintegration processes, parental links plus the ways in which nurture groups can evidence the impact of their intervention.

The delegates again coalesced into Focus Groups to reflect on the presentation and consider the structure of a successful nurture group in a Secondary school. This included timetabling, referral systems, curriculum content and parental links.

The recordings of each Focus Group were then transcribed and are currently being analysed by a research team from Oxford Brookes University, Reading University and the Mulberry Bush Organisation. The outcome of the research project will be a practical and current guide to setting up a model of nurture group practice that works in a Secondary setting. Initial findings suggest that:

1. The full support of the Senior Leadership Team is critical. Without this the nurture project will struggle to take root.
2. All school staff need to have training in the principles of nurture, attachment theory and the impact of neglect on brain development BEFORE a nurture group is opened.
3. Traditionally, small nurture groups have opened in schools and the influence of nurture has often been seen to impact on the whole-school ethos. Today, the opposite needs to be explored. In the secondary setting, the 'model that works' is one that develops a whole school, nurturing ethos (with training and SLT support) so that the nurture group is a *natural extension* of that philosophy for students with additional needs. Crucially, the nurture group's role with these students is fully understood by staff from inception.

*The research paper 'Secondary Nurture Groups: models that work' is due for publication in Autumn 2019.*

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