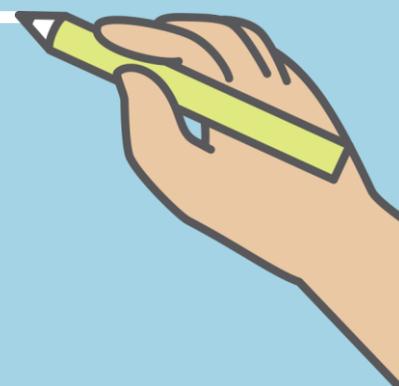


GREATER MANCHESTER MENTALLY HEALTHY COLLEGES

School to college transition

AQUINAS SIXTH FORM COLLEGE
JANUARY 2020



Aquinas College is a Roman Catholic sixth-form college situated in Stockport in south Manchester, under the trusteeship of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury.

It is one of the largest Catholic sixth-form colleges in the country.

Stockport is in Greater Manchester and has a population of 288,733 of whom 22,500 are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Stockport is one of the most diverse areas in England. Overall it is an area of prosperity, with low unemployment but there are pockets of high deprivation.

<http://www.aquinas.ac.uk/>

School to college transition

This is part of the Greater Manchester Mentally Healthy Schools and Colleges programme. Due to the concentration of student numbers in a relatively small number of education settings and the short timeframes involved we recognised that a more bespoke approach to further Education colleges would be needed.

The aim of this project was to:

- Develop the capacity of further education and sixth form colleges in Greater Manchester to collaborate in support of the mental health and wellbeing of their staff and students
- Identify good practice that can be shared across the system

There are 21 colleges in Greater Manchester (9 general further education colleges and 12 sixth form Colleges) and approximately 90% of 16 to 18yr olds in Greater Manchester are in colleges. During an academic year approximately 51,000 out of 56,000 16-18-year olds will study at these further education and sixth-form colleges.

The Association of Colleges (North) was awarded funding for 12 months in March 2019 to deliver a project to raise awareness and support development of the mental health agenda within individual colleges. Two main providers are supporting the project, Charlie Waller Memorial Trust and British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapists.

Vulnerable students face a variety of problems. We find that students fail to settle in to college for a huge variety of reasons and often start to drop off very quickly. Problems occur in certain subjects, they fail to get help, fall behind and attendance starts to suffer. This can often be avoided if the student develops good relationships; asks for help early on or is spotted by a tutor and addressed quickly. Issues range from poor mental health, personal circumstances, anxiety, social awkwardness, illness, poor relationships to following poor advice or being enrolled on inappropriate courses.

We wanted to try and improve our early identification of vulnerable students and support them with their early interactions with college. We started with Year 11 students communicating with them up to their welcome days and beyond their results to their enrolment. We wanted to put in support at different stages during their first few weeks to ensure as smooth a transition as possible.

We tried 3 new initiatives:

1. Tender loving care
2. Soft start
3. Belonging

Overall, we found that individual students have benefited from the closer attention. Attendance in this group of students is 2% above the college average; many of the students have received commendations through our pastoral system and where problems have occurred solutions have quickly resolved these situations.

TENDER LOVING CARE

The issue

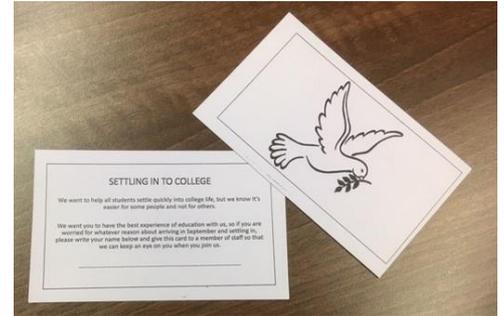
We identified through a survey that students were more likely to “settle in” if they felt a sense of belonging to the college. We know that the transition to college is more difficult for some than others. The reasons for this are many and varied.

We knew that we could identify students through our usual application form and transition work but were aware that although this picks up lots of students it doesn't identify all of them. For this project we looked at how to:

- Identify students who had potential to drop out of college early due to their vulnerability
- Ensure that all students get the individual care and attention they need in order to facilitate their learning and help prepare them for their next steps

What we did

- At open events students were presented with a card they could hand in at any point during the day.
- Cards were collated and a group/list of students were created. A note was added to their pastoral log to suggest that they would benefit from extra attention entitled Tender Loving Care – TLC
- Each student was offered an interview; one-to-one discussion with a Senior Tutor or learning mentor to discuss 'settling in'. This was followed up 4 weeks later with a progress review meeting
- 47 of the original 73 students followed this up and attended the settling in meeting
- We identified a random sample of 4 students from the 47 who attended the meeting to track in more detail



Benefits

- Of the 73 students who handed cards in only one has left the college
- On the whole, the vast majority of this TLC group have settled in well, have received commendations, have excellent attendance and are on track
- Where issues have been identified, early intervention has helped solve these

Next steps

- We feel that this process has been a resounding success and we aim to carry it out annually. We will free up the resource to do the follow-up interviews and will continue to track this cohort through college
- We aim to include an exit interview with these students to see how they felt our input helped them and how it could be improved

Case study: Student L

- **Presented with:** L is very shy, feels socially awkward and worries about everything
- **Initial Actions:** L's tutors were made aware of her anxiety issues and her proneness to worry. L was offered a counselling assessment and has taken that up
- **Outcomes:** L has 98% presence and no issues recorded on the pastoral log
- **Progress Interview Notes:** L feels really happy in her subject choice and is making good progress. She has a glowing subject review and 100% attendance to date. Discussed problems with social anxiety, L is getting support with this both externally and in college

SOFT START

The issue

- Most students have no substantial experience of college and there's a lot of information that needs to be shared in order for them to successfully transition into college life
- Previously we'd provided information through the tutorial programme which is one lesson a week. We realised that this wasn't effective due to amount of information that needed to be relayed and the limited amount of time it could be delivered in. We found that it was taking up to half term to deliver this information. This meant that some messages had little impact because students had already established their own habits and routines by this point

What we did

We decided to introduce a 1 ½ day induction known as 'soft start' for Lower 6 students. The aim of this induction period was to help the students settle into college life as quickly as possible. They spent time getting to know their fellow tutees and group tutor, heard key messages from the college's management team, and were able to familiarise themselves with the college and its facilities.

Across the 1 ½ days they participated in the following sessions:

- Icebreakers eg 'Find someone who
- Orientation - this is a treasure hunt that navigates the student around the building to find answers to questions relating to specific aspects of college life and ethos.
- Learner voice - how we collect and act on student feedback
- Initial assessment and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion data collection
- Learning support, counselling, chaplaincy and senior tutor assembly
- Ethics
- Employability
- Literacy and numeracy skills
- MyAquinas and learning centre induction

- How to Be More. Be More is our college motto which comes from a quote by Oscar Romero. “Aspire not to have more but to be more” and forms the basis of our core values and expectations around student behaviour



Students:

- Received an email with a timetable attached outlining the sessions they will attend and the rooms they will be delivered in
- Were organised into tutor groups with most led by their group tutor
- Were invited to an enrichment fair held during the lunchtime on the first day and encouraged to sign up to extra-curricular activities as a way of getting involved in college life

Benefits

- Students were able to set up their career plan online, identify how to track their own progress using college systems and checking their emails. This helped them to manage their own learning and settle in to good routines quickly
- Our consistent approach demonstrates to students that college is a stable environment, they can access support independently and know who to speak to if they require further information

BELONGING

We know that if a student feels that they belong they're more likely to engage with college and leave with positive outcomes. We wanted to check with our students and make sure that none of them were feeling isolated.

What we did

- We adopted a focus on 'belonging' to help students feel part of the college
- We have an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion group with staff and student representation as well as a group for students. They have been working on a theme of "Belonging" and discussing strategies about how to make all feel welcome and included



Equality Mission

At Aquinas College, we are committed to ensuring equality of education and opportunity for **all** students, staff, parents and carers receiving services from the college, irrespective of ethnicity, gender, disability, religion, sexuality or socio-economic background. We aim to develop a culture of inclusion and diversity in which all those connected to the college feel proud of their identity and are able to participate fully in college life. The achievement of students will be monitored by ethnicity, gender, socio-economic background and disability. We will use this data to support students, raise standards and ensure inclusive teaching.

If you experience or witness any forms of bullying or harassment at Aquinas College, please tell either the nearest member of staff or your group tutor.



- The group sent out a survey to all Lower Sixth students at the end of their first academic year (50% completion rate) asking a range of questions to gauge students' sense of belonging and identify any issues. They also asked students to leave comments about certain areas of belonging at the college

What we found

Most students agreed that they feel as though they belong at the college. There were no obvious trends with certain groups of students feeling isolated but we did notice that there were some common themes in the comments that needed addressing:

- Subject tutors tend to favour the louder students in lesson
- Consistency in the group tutor role is important to students (i.e. having the same tutor in Years 1 and 2, feeling as though there is time each week to be able to talk to the group tutor)
- Female hygiene products are too expensive

Outcomes and benefits

The results were then discussed in different forums such as departments where staff were asked to reflect on whether they could change aspects of their approach to help all feel that they belong. This has resulted in:

- Where some students may have felt that the teachers favoured louder students, now they feel more welcome
- Students feel that they have more consistency in their pastoral care

GET IN TOUCH

gmhscp.gmmhprogramme@nhs.net

0161 625 7463

<https://hub.gmhsc.org.uk/mental-health>

 @GM_HSC

 @GMHSCPartnership

 @GMHSCPartnership