

Focusing Minds CIC: School Case Studies

The following case studies have been collected from school staff with pastoral responsibility for the young people supported in their setting. The studies have been sought from staff in schools/settings where Focusing Minds delivered services for at least one academic year.

Aside first names, details including surname, age and setting and have been removed to protect the identity of the young people we have supported.

Jess – (Year 10).

Jess' development has increased dramatically. When Jess started meeting with Focusing Minds, she had severe anxiety, frequent panic attacks and refused to come to school. She is more confident in her abilities and, since support began, is yet to have a severe outburst in the manner previous to before. Jess really works well having her sessions and she does look forward to these weekly. During the period of time with Focusing Minds, she has recognised behaviour she is in control of and using appropriate measures again to support her own wellbeing. She is more confident to reach out for support from trusted adults and is accessing all of her classes now, which is fantastic.

Jess recognises her own struggles and is the first to admit when she is struggling and seeking clarification or support from staff. Teachers have noticed a huge improvement in her dedication to lessons and really trying hard in her studies. Her most recent results have improved which is fantastic to see and she is quick to come down and tell me about her achievements. Jess still requires plenty of reassurance in a morning and struggles more at the beginning of the week. This is recognised by staff, and we are quick to assist when needed.

Amelia – (Year 11):

Amelia values the sessions with Focusing Minds and will regularly seek out support sessions and time with the worker. Amelia really struggles within school and often does not follow her support plan. Focusing Minds sessions with Amelia show that she is focused on her mental health and does not feel that the support is there in school for her. Aside from this, friendship relationships are not the most positive for Amelia and this is regularly discussed in sessions.

Focusing Minds show lots of support for Amelia and will always make time for her; due to ongoing issues with attendance, Amelia has missed sessions which can sometimes lead to her then seeking support out on an alternative day during break time. Many parental meetings have been held to support Amelia and wider family; the support from Focusing Minds has helped with this due to an extra level of support needed for her.

Focusing Minds take the time to speak to Amelia about her lessons and the importance of been in these subjects and supports Amelia to recognise this.

Bailey – (Year 8)

Bailey has looked forward to every single session he has had with Focusing Minds. Whether Bailey was having a really positive day at school or had been in a rut with his behaviour and the consequences given to him in lesson, Bailey couldn't wait to talk with his worker and discuss everything from his behaviour to his successes and to his weekend plans to go and watch football. Football, and sport, was used brilliantly by Focusing Minds in sessions with Bailey, giving him another chance to let some steam off in their sessions as they played sports while talking.

Early on, Focusing Minds identified that Bailey would benefit from being active in their sessions so this was put in and straight away you could see the benefits this had by allowing Bailey to move about more and leave the classroom setting for a short while. Bailey and his worker would have discussions about Bailey's behaviour either that day or in the previous few days. This benefited him a lot as it allowed him to discuss it with another adult and also look for how to make improvements to his behaviour.

It's evident to see that Bailey really appreciates Focusing Minds support and the time he spends with his worker; the positive relationship Bailey has created has done him a world of good. The breaks in lessons that come from their meetings are beneficial for Bailey to help break up his day too. Finally, Focusing Minds have helped Bailey a lot to identify where he may have got it wrong in a lesson and to understand why the teacher has given him a consequence. On top of this, his worker has also helped give Bailey tools to help work on this and how to use them.

Zarra – (Year 9)

Zarra was referred to Focusing Minds after conversations with parent. Zarra was struggling with her emotions due to family issues. Zarra was at the point where she was struggling to come into school and when she was here, she didn't seem herself at times. Once Zarra started her sessions with Focusing Minds, it was like a load of pressure had been lifted off her shoulders. Zarra would write in her journal at home but struggled to speak to her dad and to staff in school. Zarra said she liked having someone away from her family and not directly linked to school that she could talk to but also feel listened to. As the sessions went on, a more positive change in Zarra was witnessed and she would often ask if her worker was in school that day as she was looking forward to having the extra support.

Zarra's friendships at school started to strengthen in this period too, it was noticed that she was spending her breaks and dinners with a group of friends. There were no instances where Zarra was by herself that had been seen previously on occasion. Zarra also started becoming more comfortable with speaking to staff in school about how things were going at home, at school and about her hobbies.

Although Focusing Minds was initially brought in to help Zarra with her mental health during a tough time in her personal life, Zarra gained a lot more from it, including improving her confidence, helping with friendships and

trust building. Since finishing her meetings with Focusing Minds, Zarra has still been able to access support through drop-in sessions. When these have happened, she has always reacted positively to these and has been thankful for the opportunity.

Brook – (Year 11)

Brook has entered her final year with us and is increasingly likely to gain the GCSE results required to access the course she would like to study at college in September.

Brook has not been without need over the years but a significant barrier to supporting her has been the challenges she has around developing working relationships. She has a small, select group of staff she feels she can work with, however these challenges have resulted in difficulty to engage, especially with new teaching staff or temporary cover. Brook doesn't trust easily and there is little doubt that this contributes to how she presents with unfamiliar staff.

Brook's engagement with Focusing Minds however has been brilliant; she quickly struck up a relationship with her worker and despite us being dubious about how successful the support would be given the challenges she faces around trust and relationships, the support has been successful overall.

Brook has used her session time to focus on her feelings around school, her academic performance and aspirations for the future. Having Focusing Minds onboard and supporting her – and with them having a positive relationship with her – has allowed her to explore areas and circumstances in her life she may otherwise have been unwilling to share.

James - (Year 6)

The difference in James since accessing support has been clear and he has made so many positive steps forward as a result. Prior to entering support, James would present as highly anxious with no consistently obvious trigger. This impacted on how he performed in class, his work and the relationships held with his classmates. James seemed unwilling to contribute to class discussions and would often withdraw.

Despite experiencing some level of anxiety, a matter often shared by mum too, the possibility to refer him to other external services were remote. We were informed he would not likely reach threshold for support from our local services provider but it was clear he would benefit from some targeted work to help him.

James was able to develop a good relationship with his worker at Focusing Minds and the structure of his sections provided him with an ideal environment to work through the concerns he had. He was able to identify sources of his anxiety, both driven by school and external factors and developed useful strategies to help him manage better with them. Having the opportunity to discuss them was an incredibly important factor for James and no doubt made a difference.

Differences were witnessed relatively quickly in James' presentation. He

became more open to expressing his concerns to staff in school and was able to articulate more as to why he had the concerns in the first instance. He also became more involved in class discussions and began to put up his hand to offer answers – this may not seem such a big deal but to James, this represented such a step forward. He began to appear less anxious and happier within himself.

It was clear that James enjoyed his sessions and he placed a huge value on them. He even remarked that other students should access the support so it could have a similarly positive impact on them!

Harry - (Year 5)

Harry often presented as anxious around aspects of school, particularly around assessments, tests or longer pieces of written work. It was suspected that dyslexia and dyspraxia traits contributed heavily to this, however there were no suitable support tools in terms of services he could be referred to at the time as he comfortably fell below referral threshold.

Harry entered Focusing Minds support and the difference was notable. Although he struggled with some aspects of writing, he developed some strategies to help with anxiety around assessments in particular which in turn reduced the likelihood of him having an anxiety-driven episode on the day of the assessment or key piece.

It's possible that Harry may also have a PDA profile and this is something Focusing Minds staff took on board when considering his sessions. The low-demand nature of the sessions, utilising their person-centered approach, saw him engage well and provided him an opportunity to undertake practical activities away from the classroom which aided him on his return to class.

Briar – (Year 5)

Briar has accessed several external interventions in the past and despite accessing and being signed off from these services, she needed some level of support. Focusing Minds quickly engaged Briar using her love of being creative and this set the tone for a strong and positive working relationship between her and her worker.

Over the previous eighteen months, Briar's attendance had been of particular concern. In Year 4, her attendance was as low as 48%. Notwithstanding the concerns around her mental health, it proved challenging to gain an understanding of why this was the case. With Focusing Minds support, Briar's attendance increased to 87% and by the end of the academic year, this could reach 92% – a significant turnaround.

Briar most certainly made use of her sessions to discuss the concerns she had and the work undertaken provided us with some key insights into why she may have sought to avoid school. Her perceived ability in maths and numeracy skills seemed a huge factor for her, along with concerns regarding friendships/relationships with her peers. The insights we were able to gain from Focusing Minds helped us shape academic interventions for Briar and she received some useful guidance on how she could manage social concerns to positively improve her overall wellbeing.

George – (Year 3)

George was referred to Focusing Minds following a meeting with mum who reported concerns for his general wellbeing. Family circumstances had an enduring impact on George, particularly his relationship with his dad and the inconsistent time spent with him. This sadly led to George's engagement in school deteriorating, sometimes lacking focus in class and occasionally having to be reminded of behaviour expectations.

George instantly struck up a positive relationship with his Focusing Minds worker and engaged from the very start. It was clear that he used his sessions to openly discuss his feelings around his home circumstances and how he felt because of them. Being able to talk through these concerns, to someone unconnected to home or school, was essential in allowing him to open up on his feelings. To keep George engaged, introducing elements of drawing and crafting were a masterstroke and only helped him to open up further.

Over time, George's engagement in class began to show improvements. He appeared less distracted, more focused on his work and behaviour incidents decreased. The support Focusing Minds provided proved to be beneficial in George being more settled emotionally and he often commented on not only how beneficial his sessions were but equally how much he enjoyed and valued the time spent with his worker.