

Case Study: Lenzie Academy Community Engagement The Power of Volunteering



Partnership working can be a crucial mechanism for improving the volunteering infrastructure within schools. Being able to link in with local youth work services is one such example of this. Youth work brings a person-centred approach of meeting young people where they are, and coupled with the existing community ties and connections youth workers have, there is a huge benefit to schools working alongside their local youth work services. Lenzie Academy Community Engagement is a powerful showcase of this type of partnership working.

"We do not discriminate one way or another. We don't make volunteering and going out in the community something that special groups do. Anybody that wants to do it., we will find a way that you can do it.."

-Teacher



About The Programme

Lenzie Academy Community Engagement (LACE) was created in 2017, firstly as an #iwill pledge before developing further. Using the motto “with others, for others”, LACE encourages pupils to work with other people, but also to work for other people. It supports pupils to get involved with volunteering in their local community as well as within their school community, and creates a school-wide understanding for pupils that there is somewhere they can go to do this.

LACE create volunteering opportunities for pupils in S3 and above, and have a clear mantra that these should be open to all pupils, not just select groups. Volunteering opportunities for senior pupils include lesson mentors, paired readers and sports coaching. They create many pupil led events in which all roles, whether front and centre or behind the scenes, are filled by pupils who want to be involved. The flexibility of these roles allow pupils to engage and find something that reflects their skills, and meets their own personal needs.

S3 in Lenzie Academy is the year group where most pupils are introduced to volunteering through school, as that is the year group that takes part in Youth and Philanthropy Initiative (YPI), as well as when they’re able to start Duke of Edinburgh and sports coaching. Through YPI, pupils think about issues and causes close to their heart and that’s when they’re fully supported by LACE to get involved in volunteering, building on their experience of YPI.

LACE is a strong example of great partnership working by schools and youth work services. The teacher who leads on wider achievement in the school works closely with a youth development officer for East Dunbartonshire Council, partly based in the school. Each bringing their own specialist knowledge and skillset, this partnership complements each other and allows for a remarkable, well-rounded volunteering infrastructure within the school.

“I’ve got all the knowledge of how schools work and how timetables work and how the school year works. The youth worker has got the local knowledge that I don’t have, and that a lot of teachers don’t have. They have the local knowledge and so working together, then we can actually help as many pupils as possible”

- Teacher



Partnership Work in Action: Why This Approach Works

LACE achieves great success in creating a culture of volunteering within their school infrastructure.

Some of the key work and approaches which contribute to this success are:

Being Visible

LACE ensure they are present and visible at events such as parents' evenings and Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) events, ensuring they are part of the wider school infrastructure for both pupils and parents. The youth worker was present at all S2 citizenship classes, ensuring the students knew there was someone they could approach about volunteering when the time was right for them.

Making Volunteering Inclusive

There are a wide range of volunteering opportunities available and many of these are created and led by the pupils themselves, allowing them to do a volunteering role that they are comfortable with. These roles can be a big or small time commitment, whatever works for that pupil. Two pupils were disappointed not to be successful with their YPI project and wanted to still be involved so were asked if they wanted to be hosts of the ceremony, and have now done it every year since. LACE have made volunteering feel inclusive of every pupil in the school, not something only a select few get the chance to do

"We don't make it so it's one particular group that does volunteering and I think that's really important because sometimes they're pigeonholed. And I think when volunteering is pigeonholed, people feel they can't do it because they're not in that group. But we don't do that because we have such a variety of ways in which people can volunteer. When we have a group going to come and sing, it isn't a group of people from any background. It's not about SIMD. It's not about ability. It's not about where they come from. It's just about the fact they want to do it."

- Teacher



Linking with the Community

LACE do great work linking in with other organisations in their local community to widen the volunteering offer available to pupils. One example of this is the intergenerational work they do at Lenzie Parish Church, for both a dementia friendly singing group which S5 and S6 pupils can volunteer with during their study or PE periods, as well as a games group. LACE also do regular work with EDVA, East Dunbartonshire's TSI, and that established relationship creates strong volunteering links between pupils and other local opportunities. Having a dedicated youth development officer has also resulted in many more local and national volunteering opportunities being offered to pupils in the school, such as Young Scot volunteering programmes.

Measuring Impact

Pupils are encouraged to undertake accreditation and awards to be recognised for all the amazing work they do. However, at its core, LACE doesn't want volunteering to be driven singularly by CV building and what will help pupils with their next steps. Whilst this is very important, LACE also strongly value the development of young people through their volunteering experiences, whether that be soft skills or new friendships for example. LACE feel the partnership work between school and youth work allow them to really maximise the range of benefits and impact volunteering can have on each pupil:

"If you've got somebody in the school that's focused on the wider achievement ideas and then you've got a youth worker that they're working alongside, then you get the best of both worlds for the right reasons, not just about CVs and applications. No, it's about the people. It's about developing young people, which is really what it's all supposed to be about"



- Teacher



Building Relationships

LACE found a lot of young people were already engaged in some form of volunteering but they didn't know or acknowledge it. Building relationships with pupils and understanding more about them has allowed pupils to embrace the volunteering they were doing and/or be linked in to volunteering that matches to their interests. These relationships can be formed at a time when pupils aren't ready to engage with volunteering but when they reach that point, they know who they can approach.

Celebrating Success

Every August a Celebration of Character ceremony is held where all pupils are celebrated for their volunteering. The event is entirely pupil led and a great way to showcase and celebrate all the volunteering that is done by pupils at the school. A guest presenter at last year's event commented how much he loved it because it was organised and run by the very people who were receiving awards and recognition. This event creates a sense of unity and collectiveness amongst pupils of different ages. All pupils are celebrated, not just those who are high achieving academically, but it reflects the true range of volunteering that pupils carry out. The event also allows pupils and parents to be inspired by the work of other young people, and often acts as a springboard for their own ambition for the years to come within the school.

The partnership working between teachers and youth work is a crucial reason why LACE has thrived and volunteering is so widespread and meaningful across the school and in the wider community.

Conclusion

LACE is a powerful example of how partnership working can really embed volunteering with the school infrastructure. The workload on teachers alone can often be too much when capacity is already stretched, but linking in with youth work services can have a hugely positive impact.

Youth workers bring with them specific knowledge and approaches to both the local volunteering infrastructure and building supportive relationships with young people. LACE is able to use dedicated school staff working closely with youth work services to offer pupils an incredible volunteering landscape in their school and wider community.