



Case Study: Johnny

When Johnny first attended Circles he was very quiet and kept himself to himself. He did not like interacting with other learners, whether they were older or younger than him. However, he showed a real interest in the practical subjects, especially construction and engineering. Johnny engaged really well with the boat building project and whilst working on this I was able to get to know him better, talk to him about a wide spectrum of subjects and delve deeper into why he was so withdrawn. Johnny explained that he had been on the periphery of organised crime before coming to Circles and his attendance here had coincided with a desire to disengage with this part of his life. He found some of the conversations the other learners were having about their involvement in crime frustrating and at the same time was trying to forge a new identity for himself that was distanced from this nefarious lifestyle.

Along with other members of staff I was able to build Johnny's confidence in the group, facilitate new friendships and also difficult conversations where Johnny was able to share his lived experience in a safe space. This not only educated his peers on the negative element of drug dealing and gang life but galvanised Johnny's position as a leader and influencer in the group. He went on to use this position positively, calling out bullying and helping others that were younger or less confident than himself. His engagement in the activities also improved as did his literacy, something he had struggled with before.

When it came to nominating a student to receive a Jack Petchey award Johnny was a unanimous choice among both staff and students. I had the pleasure of telephoning his mum to let her know how well he is doing and to pass on the news that he had been awarded the Jack Petchey. She said that her relationship with Johnny had improved greatly in the last few months and she put much of this down to his attendance at the farm. She explained that when Johnny arrives home from school and she asks how his day went, she is confronted with monosyllabic grunts before he runs up to his room to play computer games. However, when he comes back from Circles, she 'can't shut him up', he is so keen to talk about what he has been doing, how his day has gone and how much he enjoys it here. I don't think there is much higher testament to the work we do here than that. Johnny has become a well-liked and well-respected part of Circles and we look forward to helping him build on such strong foundations this term.