



Ambition
Community Trust



Relational Inclusion Newsletter

April 2026

www.ambitioncommunity.uk



What's been Happening?

It's been a busy start to my new role as Director of Relational Inclusion across the trust. It has been great to be able to attend some of the RIC training and meet the staff driving changes within schools.

Rich from Motional attended the RI network session, he talked about the neuroscience behind his work and it felt really positive to see how it aligns with our values and principles as a trust. Rich put on some training for Heads, Deputies, learning mentor and SENCos looking at how Motional supports staff and children to make positive changes within the school and classrooms and how we can track progress for children.

He remains committed to supporting the trust in using his programme and is happy to provide a 30 mins teams session for staff on how to input children and use the data to support them within the classrooms. Dr Cliff Lansley who has previously attended our RI network has continued to build his partnership with the trust and we are excited that he will be doing some training with our RICs on Emotional Intelligence to further enhance our understanding and support children.

A Warm Welcome

The trust are pleased to announce the appointment of Donna Whiteley our newest member of the Therapeutic team, Donna works at Greswell 3 days and week and for the Trust on a Thursday and Friday.

We are always looking to share expertise across the trust, if you would like to provide training, online or in person let me know:

n.cartledge@ambitioncommunity.uk

I am currently reading

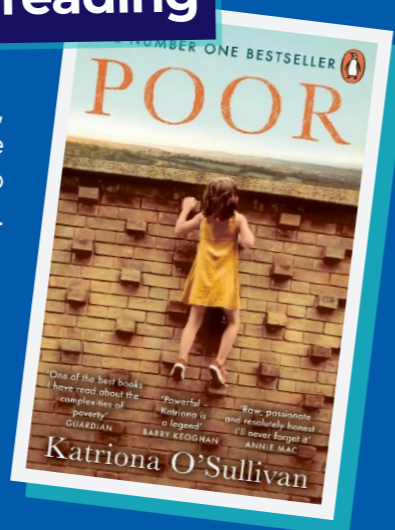
Poor by Katriona O'Sullivan, the book explores how simple acts of kindness helped to shape and change her life.



I want to go and see

Besel Van Der Kolk is on at the Lowry Sunday 1st November 2026

If you have read anything inspirational lately let me know.



Are we doing enough?

The mansphere documentary left me feeling deeply sad. What struck me most was how shallow and empty these personalities felt beneath the performance. They present a façade that speaks directly to the reward system of a young person's brain: money, cars, women, fame, status. On the surface it looks powerful. Underneath, it feels hollow.

The work here is education. The work is also commitment – a genuine, sustained commitment to our younger generation. We are all accountable.

There is also a conversation to be had about girls, their ideals, and self-esteem, because that plays a role too. But that is another discussion.

What troubles me most is not that these men exist. There have always been figures like this in one form or another, and there probably always will be. What is happening now, to my horror, is that vulnerable, impressionable young people are elevating them, giving them power, believing their rhetoric, and mistaking manipulation for wisdom.

I can agree with one small part of their message: work hard, grow, be better. But that should belong to everyone. Being "better" is not about dominance, wealth, or image. It is personal. For one person it may mean becoming a CEO; for another it may mean being a cleaner, a parent, a carer, a teacher, or simply someone living a life that aligns with their values. It is all relative. What matters is whether it brings dignity, meaning, and happiness.

We all have the power to create the conditions for our own growth, but those conditions will look different for each of us. The key to happiness, contentment, and security is not money. Money may create options, and at times it may create comfort, but it is not the same as fulfilment. Real wealth is found in loving relationships, meaningful work, a sense of belonging, and feeling connected – to ourselves and to others.

So what do we do?

It starts with role modelling. It starts with parenting. It starts with the adults around children taking this seriously. One of the most urgent issues here is that the internet has become the mentor that is missing from many young people's lives. Sometimes that influence can be positive.

Sometimes it can be dangerous. Sometimes it can prey upon insecurity, confusion, loneliness, and pain.

This is new territory for many parents, and I think many of us are struggling to respond to it. But that does not remove our responsibility. If anything, it deepens it.

We all carry a moral and social responsibility here, especially those of us working in education.

These men may believe they are at the top of the food chain. I do not see strength when I look at them. I see performance. I see manipulation. I see harm dressed up as confidence. I see people preying on vulnerability in plain sight, while calling it success.

And yet, paradoxically, I still feel compassion for them.

Because when the performance is stripped away, what I see are frightened boys hiding inside men's bodies – boys with wounds so deep that they have built identities around power, control, and deception. We are watching pain defences, not strength. We are watching unresolved pain disguised as status. The greater the wound, often the greater the behaviour.

That is not leadership. That is not charisma. That is not manhood.

Love, congruence, and connection are the real foundations of a meaningful life. Happiness is not found in domination or display. It is found in belonging, in truth, in tenderness, in purpose, and in the courage to know yourself honestly.

Perhaps these men, too, will only find peace when they are able to meet their younger selves with compassion rather than contempt.

So please – talk about this in schools. Talk about it at home. Talk about it in communities. Do something positive, however small it may seem. Every conversation matters. Every adult who chooses to model integrity, respect, reflection, and care makes a difference.

A society grows great when men and women plant trees in whose shade they know they shall never sit.

Thank you for taking the time to read my thoughts on what is a very concerning topic.

By Sonja Evason



How Wide Is the Gap?

Exploring the Space Between Leadership Intent and Everyday Practice.

I often find myself wondering about the gap between how senior leaders believe a school is being managed and what is actually happening day to day on the ground. How wide is that gap in your school? How is it measured? And, perhaps most importantly, how do we begin to reduce it?

This question continues to stay with me because the conversations I have with staff in training are sometimes very different from the reality I later observe in schools. That difference is important. It invites us to reflect honestly. Is this about honesty? Is it a training issue? A generational issue? Or is it sometimes a deeper gap between a person's core values and the relational approach a school says it is committed to?

Whenever I deliver training, I am realistic. I hope that perhaps 30% of what is shared will genuinely land with participants. Of that, I hope maybe 15% (probably much less) will truly transfer into daily practice. Even when training is well received, its impact can fade within weeks, and people often return to what feels most familiar, most instinctive, or most effective in the moment.

For some adults, that default can still sound like: the adult is right, the adult knows best, do as I say. It can show up through power, physical presence, tone of voice, or control. These approaches may secure quick compliance or a momentary win, but at what cost? And what are they teaching children over time?

When I visit a school, I am always curious not just about what I see, but about what I feel. What is my body picking up? What is my nervous system noticing? Does this feel like positive peace – calm, connection, emotional safety – or does it feel like a system shaped by fear, punishment, pressure and power?

Recently, I was sitting in the reception area of a high school, quietly observing an interaction between an Attendance Officer and a child who had arrived late.

The exchange went something like this:

Attendance Officer

"You're late."

Child

"I know."

Attendance Officer

"Right, tuck your shirt in, get yourself ready for learning."

Child

Puts their head down.

Attendance Officer

"Are you listening? You're already late. Sort yourself out. You're in Year 10 – this isn't good enough."

Child

Keeps their head down.

Attendance Officer

"Give me your bag whilst you tuck your shirt in. Come on, hurry up. I'm trying to help you here."

Child

The child doesn't move.

Attendance Officer

"Right, I'm too busy for your games. Let's go."

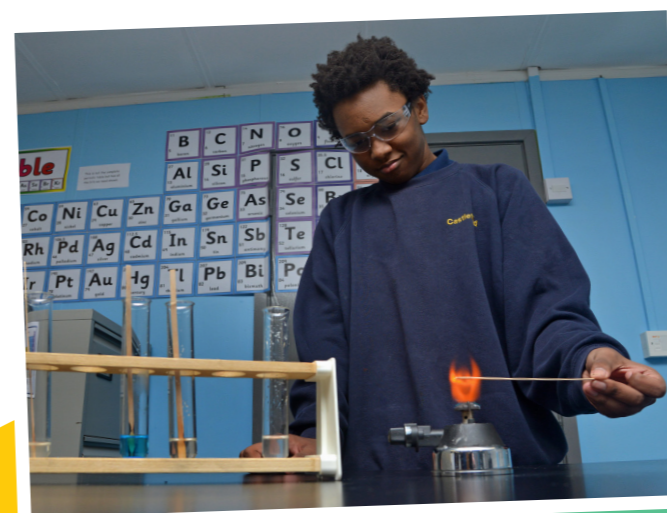
Child

The child then followed them out of reception.

"Witnessing this left me feeling sad."

The child passively complied. They followed. They did as they were told. But what was happening underneath that behaviour? Would the nature of this dialogue make the child feel like they belonged or mattered? What was being communicated through the lowered head, the stillness, the lack of response? And this, for me, is where the gap lives.

I could sense that the Attendance Officer was busy. Their tolerance felt low. I could also feel that the child's needs had become invisible in that moment. The task was clear: get the child sorted, get them moving, get them into class, get the job done. Bums on seats, ready for learning. This is where jobs can feel hopeless and lead to burnout (that's another conversation though!)



And yet there was more going on. I also sensed the pressure the adult may have been feeling, particularly with other adults nearby, myself included, watching. We all have an ego. We all want to feel competent. We all want to appear effective. But perhaps one of the most important conversations in education is this: what does success actually look like when we are managing behaviour?

Through my eyes, success is not simply compliance. Success is developing strong relationships. It is modelling regulation and respect. It is repairing rupture. It is using shame-free language. It is having the courage to put ego to one side. It is working with children to grow autonomy, rather than creating a passive cohort of young people who learn to follow, fear and freeze.

So how do we begin to close this gap?

We close it by talking honestly. We close it by creating relational solution circles. We close it by listening properly to staff and understanding the pressures they are under. We close it by building safe enough environments where adults can tap out of a situation, ask for support, and speak openly about getting it wrong. We close it by training all staff, not just in theory, but in embodied, relational practice. We close it by helping adults bring their character and authenticity, while also strengthening their relational skill.

Most of all, we close it through trust, congruence and honesty.

Because schools do not become relational simply because the language appears in policies, training slides or improvement plans. They become relational when the lived experience of children matches the stated values of the adults leading them.

And that is the question worth holding onto: how wide is the gap in your school between what you hope is happening and what children actually experience each day?

By Sonja Evason

Staff profiles

Laura Clayton



About me

My Name is Laura Clayton and I am a caring and passionate Therapeutic Play Practitioner supporting children to explore their feelings, build confidence and develop the tools they need to manage their emotions. My approach is trauma-informed and child-centred, keeping in mind that every child's story is different adapting my practice to meet their individual needs.

As a person, I am warm, approachable and always looking to grow and learn. I'm committed to developing my practice, using my experience to make a wider impact. I am currently gaining valuable experience working across Primary settings and specialist High School provisions, which is giving me a broader understanding of different needs and approaches. I feel this insight would be really beneficial to share and build on across the trust

Experience

I provide tailored one-to-one and group support, helping children develop social and communication skills, manage emotions and work through challenging experiences through play-based approaches. This includes mediums such as sand, Lego, small world, music, art and clay.

I have experience supporting children who have faced trauma, always approaching my work with care, empathy, and sensitivity. I also work closely with parents and carers, offering guidance and support. I have a strong understanding of how challenging behaviour can impact the classroom as a whole and I recognise how demanding this can be for staff. Over time, I hope to help support the sharing and development of effective practice, helping both children and the professionals around them to feel supported.

I am currently completing an additional qualification in Trauma Therapy to further develop my specialism in trauma and strengthen my therapeutic approach.

Qualifications

- Therapeutic Play Practitioner
- Sand Story Skills Practitioner
- Level 3 Counselling
- Lego Therapy
- Big Empathy Drawing
- 1st Class BA Hons Childhood Studies
- Bereavement Training



Victoria Harrison

About me

My name is Vicky, and I have been working as a counsellor for the past six years. Even now, every day still feels like a learning experience. Each person I work with brings new insight and reflection, which continues to shape and develop my practice.

Experience

I began my career working in primary schools with Place2Be, alongside supporting ex-military men in a homeless centre. These roles were very different, yet both grounded me in the person-centred approach, built on the core conditions of unconditional positive regard, empathy, and congruence principles that remain central to my work today. Each placement provided a strong foundation for where I am now.

I have also facilitated training for Level 3 counselling students, supporting them in developing their listening skills, understanding course criteria, and building confidence through role play.

I later worked within an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), initially as a wellbeing counsellor using Solution-Focused Brief Therapy. This approach focuses on an individual's strengths, future goals, and small, achievable steps forward. I then progressed into a Lead Therapist role, where I supported a team of therapists, contributed to training, and helped develop new learning resources.

Currently, I work one day a week in a private SEMH school as the on-site counsellor. My work there includes walk-and-talk therapy, talking therapy, and play-based interventions, depending on the needs of the young person.

Alongside this, I run a successful private practice, working with young people, adults, and couples. My key areas of interest are neurodiversity which I have both lived and professional experience in and trauma, which often overlaps with co-occurring needs.

In my personal time, I prioritise self-care, including attending my own therapy, having massages, and spending time in nature often walking or riding my ponies. I also have a strong interest in neuroscience and continue to develop my knowledge in this area.

Within the trust, I aim to support each child holistically by working closely with senior leadership teams, caregivers, and teaching staff. I particularly enjoy observing, reflecting, and testing hypotheses around interventions to promote inclusion across the school environment.

I am also experienced in contributing to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and have worked collaboratively with SENCO teams and educational psychologists.

In sessions, I consider sensory profiles and offer a range of interventions. I aim to provide a balance of consistency and familiarity, alongside introducing new creative activities to support engagement. While I work within clear boundaries to ensure safety, I also prioritise offering young people autonomy in how they use their time.

Overall, I adapt my approach to each individual, integrating psychoeducation, play, talking therapies, somatic work, and tapping techniques to best support their needs.

My aim is always to help young people feel seen, understood, and supported to thrive both emotionally and within their learning environment.

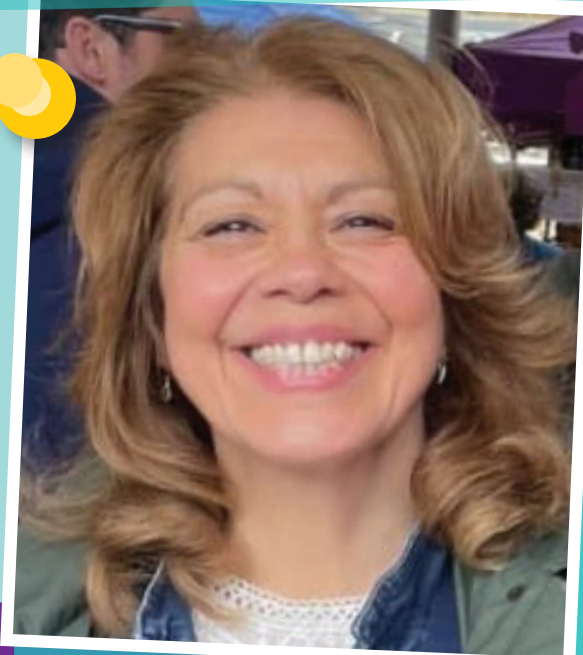
Donna Whiteley

Hi, I'm Donna. I've worked with children for 26 years, spending most of my career as a class teacher and later as an Assistant Head in a primary school.

Over that time, I've developed a strong understanding of children's development, learning, and emotional needs. I've recently started a new role with Ambition Community Trust, where I work two days a week in a therapeutic capacity, supporting children in a more focused and holistic way. Alongside this, I'm coming to the end of my Level 3 Counselling Skills qualification and am hoping to continue on to Level 4 in September.



Karen McLaren



My name is Karen. I am a school counsellor. I work with and support young people, helping them to understand their feelings and help them feel safe.

Together we may:

- Play games
- Talk
- Use pictures and art to express different feelings
- Listen to music
- Paint or draw
- Learn calming techniques
- We may look at other ways that can help us deal with emotions

My background is in Secondary schools, where I worked with young people for over twenty years. After qualifying a therapist, I later specialised in Bereavement therapy. I have two grown up children and a little grandson. I love dogs, being outside, walking, reading and being with people.

How to find out more?

If you would like more information or to have a further discussion about what Ambition Community Trust offers, please contact:

Anthony Benedict (CEO) **07710 437 473**

or email via the website:

Ambitioncommunity.uk