



The Risley – Aspire-Father2Father partnership story

A stone throw from Broadwater Farm in Tottenham, North London, an astute and outgoing head teacher , together with her dedicated and proactive senior leaders and staff, several of whom actually live or grew up in the area, run Risley Avenue Primary School. Risley is a larger than average primary school (3 form entry) with the majority of their children and school staff of minority ethnic origin. 61% of their children are on free school meals; less than 1 in 3 parents have full-time jobs; and two thirds of the children have English as an additional language. Key staff members remember the riots of 2011 and even of 1985. Staff who have been at the school for a long time have even taught some of the young people who became victims and perpetrators of serious crime, past and present. As Viv Ahmun aptly says, “You have the whole world of the future in a primary school.”

Broadwater Farm is probably the most notorious housing estate in Britain and one of the most disadvantaged and crime hotspot areas. The area has been the scene of the most public riots in the country, sparked by festering police-Black youth and community relations. The Tottenham “uprisings” that followed the shooting and killing of Mark Duggan in 2011, ended in the worst public rioting ever seen in England culminating in 3,000 arrests across London and 10 other cities. According to the Gifford Inquiry and Guardian reports on the riots and their reasons, the young people involved were far more likely to have had special educational needs; to have been absent, excluded or failing in school and were poorer. Viv Ahmun who was part of the Home Office consultancy team that interviewed young people, Police and other local authority figures up and down the country post 2011 , said that in essence, what Black youth called for was accessible and authentic leadership to step up and deal with them, support them and the challenges they faced.

Father2Father identified Risley School as a key school for longer term partnership work for all the reasons above and to pioneer the unique Student-Parent-Teacher systems approach that Aspire and Father2Father have developed. Summed up by Frederick Douglas’s adage that “It is **easier** to build strong children **than** to **repair broken** men , SPT systems is based on the belief that we can improve the outcomes for the most vulnerable in our communities if we drive collaboration, co-production, prevention, ethical investment and innovation in close partnership with the local communities, practitioners and the authorities. There is a real opportunity to develop a genuine community led intervention that is successful for vulnerable children and their families across home and the school. As a consequence, this would prevent the descent into violence and acute disenfranchisement that we increasingly witness playing out with young people in slow motion.

Risley school’s motto is to “respect, aspire, persevere and succeed” and they are an award winning Stephen Lawrence Ambassador school visited by Dame Doreen Lawrence; a Jamaican male music teacher runs classical music and piano lessons as part of timetabled support for vulnerable children. The children’s musical achievements have been featured in several classical publications and they have been invited to visit No 10 Downing Street. Their latest school plan prioritises raising the attainment of Black and minority ethnic children.

Aspire and Father2Fathers SPT initial intervention over 12 weeks was funded by the Mayor of London’s Violence Reduction Unit together with the Metropolitan Police. It consisted of providing expert assessment and 1-2-1 coaching and mentoring support of a caseload of 5 vulnerable young people primarily thought not exclusively from the African and Caribbean heritage community; engaging and signposting their parents to support and providing whole school capacity building through training of the school staff.

As a result of our intensive partnership working the following positive outcomes have been achieved.

1. All 90 staff were trained face to face and virtually in a highly interactive manner on building community resilience and our ethical leadership models, which focus on systemic approaches to service development and delivery. This is critical for frontline staff when working in socially challenging environments such as that which exists in and around Broadwater Farm. It also creates a safe and guided space where teachers and support staff are encouraged to come up with solutions to better support some of the most vulnerable and traumatised children in the school and their parents. This further builds on the wellbeing and empathic training interventions that frontline staff are increasingly being offered. The quote below reinforces the power of our approach

“In my twenty odd years of teaching, I have never attended a meeting like that which addressed us so personally as a staff team and acknowledged the challenging context in which we work and live. The staff were really gripped and feedback that I've had so far has been very positive with staff expressing that they feel like they can make a difference.” Deputy Head, Risley Avenue Primary School

2. School leadership team and teachers were invited to attend Aspire and Father2Father’s livestreamed roundtable on the Impact of lockdown on Black and vulnerable learners in May 2020 which included Diane Abbott MP, the Jamaican High Commissioner and educational experts and specialists from London, Birmingham, Manchester and Uganda.
3. Risley school and Haringey Education Partnership actively supported Aspire and Father2Father’s national survey of African Caribbean parents, carers, teachers and support staff on post lockdown education which gathered the views of 1120 members of the community.
4. We coached and partnered with the school to win and lead an Erasmus+ strategic programme Take It Serious across 4 countries in Europe in November 2020 to develop training and gamification resources for disaster and crisis management in schools worth 275,000 Euros. Partners include the Governorship of Istanbul in Turkey responsible for education; University of Thessaly in Greece, , INFODEF an expert research and development centre in Spain and Aspire here in the UK. The impact of a school such as Risley from an area such as Tottenham actually leading this programme in the midst of a global pandemic is such a spectacular win for the school, staff and children.