



Working Together for Change in Schools

Lorraine Erwin and Helen Sanderson



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Introduction

Person-centred approaches are now being used in many schools for children and young people with special educational needs. Person-centred reviews and person centred planning have enabled school staff to listen more closely to the voices of children and young people and, with fresh insights, to meet pupils' individual needs and preferences more effectively.

The Working Together for Change Process takes person-centred reviews and other person-centred approaches to a new level, using the information derived from them to drive strategic change in the school. This article shows how two special schools – Ellen Tinkham School in Exeter and Abbey Hill School in Stoke-on-Trent - have successfully implemented a step-by-step approach to adopting this process, resulting in school services truly guided by the voices of children, young people and their families.

The context - personalising services in schools

The Government strongly supports the involvement of children, young people and their families in the services provided for them. There is a huge focus on 'participation' with a lot more opportunities and ways of working to involve children, young people and their families in decision making.

Every Child Matters¹ and Aiming High for Disabled Children² reinforce this approach and have a number of programmes aimed to ensure policies

and services are designed around the needs of children and young people and that they are involved in decisions at both local and national levels. When we begin to involve children, young people and their families change begins to happen. Every Child Matters highlights the benefits to children and young people: **'Better services, new skills and more of what they want'**.

It also highlights benefits to organisations: **'Better targeted services, saving money, new ideas and happy customers'**.

and the community as a whole: **'Engaged and more community-minded children and young people as well as fresher democracies'**.

Professionals need to find new ways to listen to children and young people better so they have a direct influence on the structure and delivery of services. There are some good examples across the country where this is happening and having a beneficial effect. Ellen Tinkham School ran a whole-school consultation to explore how they could improve playtimes and one local authority consulted children/young people and their families about what successful short breaks look like to them.

Commissioners of services want to listen more closely but that can prove difficult when it often involves hundreds of children, young people and their families. Another challenge facing schools and local authorities is how we best listen to children and young people who have significant needs and can't communicate easily.

To explore some of the context in relation to listening better to children and young people on a wide-scale basis, professionals need to consider some of the problems about participation on a wider scale especially when this is often not done well at an individual level. For example, transition annual reviews for young people are often where pivotal decisions are made about their lives but research has shown that: ‘the statutory processes designed to support young people are experienced as confusing and complex and that there a too few opportunities for young people leaving school’³.

A major approach being developed across the UK, America and Australia is person-centred approaches, which includes person-centred thinking skills⁴ and person-centred reviews. Research evidence⁵ shows that person-centred planning can lead to successful, direct changes in the way a person is supported that immediately improves quality of life. Person-centred reviews provide us with ways of gathering information which highlights what is important to a young person now and in the future, how they want their life to be and how they want to be supported. There is also a focus on what works and doesn’t work in the young person’s life from different people’s perspectives which leads to action to maintain what works and change what doesn’t work. All statutory requirements can be met within the process itself.

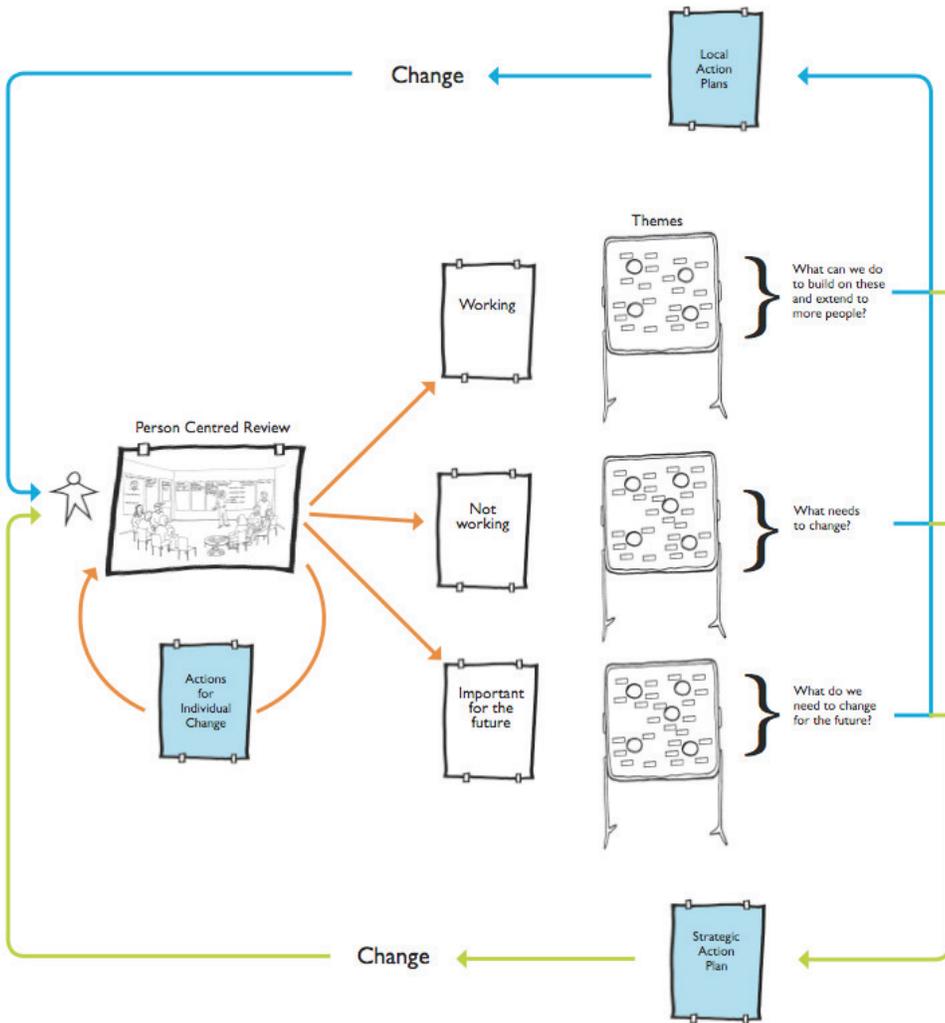
Person-centred reviews began their journey in schools a number of years ago. Some schools have been part

of the Valuing People Support Team National Person-Centred Review Programme and are seeing a lot of successful outcomes. One head teacher said: **‘This process not only meets statutory requirements it greatly exceeds it in that you are exploring the young person in a much more holistic way and listening closer to what matters to them’.**

The development of this process is now growing fast in adult services with the personalisation agenda, older people’s services, mental health services and with children who are ‘looked after’. The Department of Health recently published the guidance Personalisation through Person Centred Planning⁶ to help councils meet the obligations of the Putting People First⁷ programme and the Independent Living Strategy⁸. This includes specific advice on using person-centred approaches in schools and transition planning, where they are also emerging as a really useful tool in some mainstream schools.

As well as having a successful outcome for the young person and their family on an individual basis, person-centred reviews are proving to be a very useful tool in school development and strategic planning of services. This process is called the Working Together for Change Process. Every Child Matters outlines what ‘true participation’ with children and young people is about: **‘Asking young children and young people what works and doesn’t work and what could be better in involving them in the design, delivering and evaluation of services on an ongoing basis’.**

From Person Centred Reviews to Strategic Change



What is the Working Together for Change process?

Young people and their families shared what they think about person-centred reviews:

‘My review was fun!’ Young person

‘Excellent - very relaxed but constructive.’ Parent

‘What was really good was my daughter had a chance to say what she didn’t want and that was good.’ Parent

Working Together for Change⁹ is a simple six stage process that uses and themes person-centred information (for example from children or young people’s person-centred reviews, person-centred plans or support plans) to inform strategic change. Using the process in schools can drive the changes necessary to enable children and young people to get more of what’s working in their lives and to change what’s not working. It involves listening to what the child or the young person is saying about their lives and the services they receive at home or at school using various person-centred approaches.

Ellen Tinkham School in Exeter has been developing person-centred approaches with children and young people for some time and is the first school to use person-centred reviews for all children of all ages, from reception to school leavers.

The people who should be involved are those with the power to make and influence strategic decisions. At Ellen Tinkham School, this included the Head Teacher, Deputy Head Teacher, person-centred reviews coaches, teachers, educational psychologist, parent government and other professionals from adult and children’s services.

The process involves two or more meetings, a preparatory one and a one-day workshop for the key people outlined above. A preparatory meeting is essential to make some key decisions:

- 1 What information do we want to gather?
- 2 Whose services will we review?
What size sample?
Within a geographical area?
Young people who use a particular service?
- 3 How will we gather key information?
Will we use person-centred reviews, person-centred plans or support plans?
How will we manage the logistics of the process?
- 4 Who needs to be at the workshop?
Who needs to be able to use the information to inform strategic decisions?
Will we use our existing facilitators if we have them?
Will we use this as an opportunity to train new facilitators and coach their first plan or review?
Will we bring in independent facilitators?
Who else would find this helpful?

The Working Together for Change Process at Ellen Tinkham School - Year 1

Step 1: Gather person centred information about the group/s to be reviewed

Person centred information can be gathered from person-centred plans, support plans or person-centred reviews¹⁰. Each of these processes typically uses the heading 'What is working and not working'. Where other information is required, the person-centred review process can be adapted to provide this.

Lorraine spent a day with Ellen Tinkham School's Head Teacher, Deputy Head Teacher, person-centred review facilitators, teachers, educational psychologist, transition commissioning services, parent governor, children's services and adult services to begin to aggregate selected information from some of the pupils' person-centred reviews. The purpose of this day was to:

- 1 learn what the person-centred reviews were telling us from the voice of the children and young people
- 2 decide what we needed to do next to support pupils better in school on the basis of this information.

The person centred review facilitators were asked to choose a cross-section of 50 person-centred reviews from children of all ages and to extract information from the 'Important to in the future' and 'What's working/what's not working' headings.

Step 2: Transfer the information into a usable format

The next step is to organise the information in a format that can be clustered. The process for doing this depends on the number of people for whom person-centred information has been provided. If there are more than 30 reviews, this information is best aggregated before the workshop.

Ellen Tinkham school divided out the reviews information between the group and then posted up the school's mission statement. Working in pairs, group members chose two statements from the 'What's working' heading and two statements from the 'Important to in the future' heading that they felt took them closest to the school's mission statement. We then asked them to choose two statements from 'What's not working' that they felt took them furthest away from the school mission statement. The group then wrote these statements in the first person on cards, for example 'I really like my friends at school'. The 'What's working' statements were written on green cards, the 'What's not working' on red cards and 'Important to in the future' on blue cards.

Step 3: Cluster and name the themes

Ellen Tinkham School then gathered all the cards together in their colour sections and did a card call with the group to cluster and theme the information.

Some of the areas identified as working well for students included the out of school clubs, sensory play and swimming. Some of the students main concerns included not always being understood, needing

Person-centred information from reviews (what young people said wasn't working for them)	Theme name (what the group decided to call this cluster at the workshop)	Possible root causes	Success indicators
<p>'People are not using Makaton with me in school'</p> <p>'I find it difficult to express my feelings at home and at school'</p> <p>'Communication'</p> <p>'People don't understand when I need my own space'</p>	<p>'I feel people don't understand me'</p>	<p>There isn't enough emphasis on training staff in communication, including Makaton</p> <p>We don't record in any detailed way how young people communicate in school</p> <p>Sometimes we are short-staffed and can miss how a young person is communicating</p> <p>Sometimes supply staff don't know the children and young people well enough</p>	<p>For children and young people Everyone understands my communication</p> <p>For staff and the school as a whole Everyone has training in person-centred thinking</p> <p>All pupils have an up-to-date one-page profile and a communication chart</p> <p>Everyone is trained in using Makaton</p> <p>Parents and family members have a good understanding of the child/young person's communication</p>

child, for example if the young person is leaving school.'

'This had made me think about school induction - can we do 'what's your school heaven' and 'what's your school hell'.'

'We need to look in the face of what we don't do well for young people.'
Head Teacher

All the staff at Ellen Tinkham School had been trained in person-centred thinking skills and tools and were able to think about which tools and

skills could help them address the themes arising from the information. For example, two of the biggest themes from 'What's not working' were 'people don't always listen' and 'I'm not part of my community'. These indicate that people supporting pupils need to think more about using communication charts, decision-making agreements and presence to contribution.

'We need to get the voices of young people as effectively as possible before they leave school.'

Step 5: Make an action plan

Ellen Tinkham School wanted to continue to develop and build on a culture of person-centred thinking. Everyone involved in the process voted on priority areas that they wanted to move forward with. They then set actions to:

- maintain and develop some of the things that were working for young people
- change some of the things that weren't working
- fix another date to explore what young people were saying about 'Important to me in the future' which would be excellent for informing future commissioning of services.

One of the interesting actions that came out of this day was that every young person leaving the school will have a one-page profile, communication charts and decision-making agreement; and the home-school agreement between the young person, parents and school staff will be replaced by the doughnut – a person-centred thinking tool that shows each person's core responsibilities, and where they can use their judgement to make decisions.

Step 6: Share information

A crucial step is sharing the information - most importantly the actions that have emerged - with the people who provided information through their reviews, and with other people who need to know or would

find it useful. A simple 'Who' needs to know 'What' and 'How' action plan for sharing information should be created at this stage.

All of the learning from Ellen Tinkham School will be used to inform the school development plan in the future. This is a huge cultural shift in that the voice of each child and young person, expressed through person-centred reviews, will directly influence the culture within the school.

Areas for further development after year one

Those involved in the process at Ellen Tinkham School agreed that more work needed to be carried out with facilitators in supporting them to ask good questions and focus more on 'What's working/not working' during person-centred reviews. Thinking about involving children/young people and family members could be part of the day.

Suggestions were:

- asking the young person to choose the top three things from each heading during the review so we are getting their true voice as opposed to 'better guessing' in relation to the school mission statement;
- doing the 'Five Whys' around themes that aren't working for young people;
- when people write the statements on the cards ask for the exact wording and detail from the review - this was vague at times and occasionally open to misinterpretation.

The Working Together for Change Process at Ellen Tinkham School - Year 2

Using this process has now become an annual event for Ellen Tinkham School. They are focusing on using person-centred review information to inform everything that happens in school, for example curriculum development, working in partnership with other agencies and the school development plan.

In the second year of the process, Ellen Tinkham adopted a slightly different approach and aggregated information from a wider range of people, including children and young people from all Key Stages, family members and school staff. They gathered and collated information from the 'What's working', 'What's not working' and 'Important to in the future'.

Senior school pupils use the citizenship review process which explores 'what's possible' in your future around the six 'keys to citizenship'¹¹:

- Self-determination
- Money
- Home
- Support
- Direction
- Community life

This process is designed to develop, build on and carry forward what is learned from the 'Important to and for' review process. The key intention of the citizenship process is to support young people to identify what they really want in their future. This

excellent process helps young people who are going through transition to focus on their life beyond school.

For the purposes of the Working Together for Change Process the school focused on the 'Good things since your last review' heading, providing information about what was working well. They transferred the information onto different coloured cards for pupils, family members and school staff. This was a really time-consuming activity and they decided that next year they would ask the administration staff to prepare this work in advance.

They then themed the information, prioritised the themes from each Key Stage and summarised the information gathered. The tables below highlight the priorities for each Key Stage.

In senior school they decided to focus on the priority areas that work well to build on this and extend them to more young people.

The main themes from the aggregation of 'what wasn't working' were fed into the school development plan in an effort to address these issues at a more strategic level. They realised that the main themes fitted into three areas of the school development plan, namely:

- access
- leadership
- inclusion

This indicated that the main areas in the school development plan had originally been in line with the priorities of the children, young people, family members and school staff.

	Top 'What's working'	Top 'What's not working'	Top 'Important to in the future'
Key Stage 1	Really good access to outdoor learning, an accessible, personalised curriculum. Some children were also developing good communication, learning and independent life skills	Although some children were developing their skills in communication well, other children were struggling	More of a focus on supporting children to develop communication skills
Key Stage 2	Communication, curriculum eg what they were doing in class, developing independence skills eg responsibilities, skills for living, family eg home-life and community eg going to church, going to brownies	Health eg, problems with medication, equipment and not sleeping	More of a focus on communication eg gaining confidence, signing and socialising
Key Stage 3	Curriculum eg out of school activities - Saturday/summer club, youth club and after school club, independence skills, therapies and communication	Health, for example equipment at home, wheelchairs and epilepsy support and outdoor learning eg more opportunities to be active and playground access	More physical activity eg horse-riding, walking and swimming and friendships - maintaining existing friendships and meeting up with friends

Seniors	Top 'What's working'
	<p>Communication skills eg developing good discussions, asking more questions, building confidence, better understanding</p> <p>Independence - doing things more for yourself, has grown up, making snacks for yourself</p> <p>Curriculum eg computers, Entry Level Life Skills, English</p>

Extract from the school development plan

Key priority area	Threads/strands	Issues	Key data sources
Access	Physical access Behavioural/learning styles Sensory access Student voice/ advocacy Person-centred thinking Admissions Transition Inclusion	Access to learning and opportunity Access to resources/ areas Personalisation processes and planning Transition into adult life and the citizenship model Every Child Matters/ Keys to citizenship outcomes Student voice systems and impact Multi-agency working Staff training Parent support	Person-centred processes Quality assurance data/ evaluations Important to in the future Aggregated action plans Student voice data (includes behaviour monitoring data) Disability Discrimination Act /access audits Specialist support feedback/reports
Curriculum	Sensory Physical Academic Creative Work-related learning Every Child Matters Six keys to citizenship	Personalised learning strands/ choice Assessment and accreditation Achievement and aspiration Transition into adult life and the citizenship model Staff training Purpose/direction Enrichment (gateway/D of E) Inclusion and outreach Statutory curriculum offer	What's working/not working What's important now What's important for the future Assessment data Accreditation feedback Student voice data other than PC planning as above Staff training feedback
Leadership	Strategy and effectiveness Innovation and capacity to improve Outreach/training offer CPD and professional development HR/employment Relations/induction Finance Premises Efficiency	School improvement Management Capacity and training Hold safe pupil dreams and aspirations Pupil achievement School coherence and vision Commitment to core promise Effective multi-agency working Targeting resources	What's working/not working What's important to in the future Working/not working/ important for the future data from professional development Analysis of access and curriculum data National/international initiatives Outside checks eg Ofsted, Student voice data Monitoring data

This example highlights how the voices of pupils can directly influence development in a school, which will in turn produce more meaningful outcomes for children and young people. It also outlines how the school uses a lot of the information gathered from person-centred reviews and person-centred thinking at many different levels to inform next steps.

The school then explored ways that they could begin to address the results from the aggregation and decided that the school's 'core promise' appeared to provide the answer to changing some of the main issues for pupils, family members and staff.

The core promise is that each child and young person will have an up-to-date:

- person-centred review every year
- one-page profile
- communication chart
- decision-making agreement
- personalised home/school agreement

One-page profiles, communication charts and decision-making agreements are some of the person-centred thinking tools designed to help us listen closely to children and young people. A one-page profile outlines what we like and admire about a young person, what is important to them and how best to support them. This tool helps us keep a focus on this information about a child/young person on an everyday basis and not just at the annual review stage when a person-centred review is facilitated. Communication charts indicate how the child/young person is communicating with us and how

they prefer us to communicate with them, which is especially useful for children who have labels and negative reputations. A decision-making agreement is a tool that helps us clarify how children and young people are involved in decisions in their life and who has the final say. Decision-making agreements highlight the school's commitment to making choice and control central to the school curriculum¹².

The core promise acts as a 'Service Level Agreement' between the pupil, family members and school. It is kept alive by reviewing the information and how well everyone is implementing the actions each term for each pupil. This is predominantly carried out at parents' evenings. As part of this process the pupil's educational targets/Individual Education Plans are discussed, based on what staff are continuing to learn about the child or young person. For example if a young person said in their person-centred review or one-page profile that they were passionate about trampolining, action would be taken to organise this.

Priority areas that didn't work well for pupils, such as people not understanding their communication, could be addressed by developing communication charts and decision-making agreements in more detail. In using decision-making agreements, the school has pioneered an approach that makes the distinction between:

- What is a decision? When something that will have a big impact on your life is going to happen and the child/young person understands the consequences of the decision they are making.

- What is a choice? When the child/ young person understands what is going to happen and they are fully engaged, for example choosing what they would like to drink from three possible options.
- What is a preference? When we are really ‘tuning into’ the child/ young person’s communication to establish what they prefer, for instance ‘his eyes light up when he sees Julie is going to be supporting him today’.

Other priority areas that didn’t work well for children and young people such as maintaining and developing friendships, good support to stay healthy, and doing enjoyable physical activities such as horse-riding and swimming, could be addressed in pupils’ one-page profiles under the headings ‘What is important to you’ and ‘How best to support you’.

Developing this work with children and young people throughout the year is as valuable as the information generated at the end in creating a person-centred culture in the school.

Example - using the Working Together for Change Process at Abbey Hill School, Stoke-on-Trent

This special school has been developing person-centred approaches for a number of years. The school has a particular interest in developing person-centred reviews and person-centred thinking with children and young people in the classroom and was the first school ever to develop a person-centred team plan.

Lorraine followed the Working Together for Change Process with information from person-centred reviews for 50 young people from the upper school. The people who attended were school staff, transition and adult services, person-centred planning co-ordinators and facilitators and a member of the local authority Partnership Board.

What’s working?

The top things that were working well for these pupils were:

‘I love having class pets’

‘I love having trips out’

‘I need to feel OK’ (which related to areas such as health, self-esteem and feeling good about yourself)

‘I love performing arts’

‘I love my lessons’

This was really rich information for

the school in learning from young people what they were doing best. The group set some actions to explore how they could introduce pets to more classes in the school. More trips out and more class pets would have a direct effect on the curriculum and could be directly linked to the school development plan. Phillip Kidman, the Head Teacher, was delighted to see performing arts in the list as the school is a Performing Arts School.

What's not working?

The top areas that weren't working well for these young people were:

'I don't like playtimes'

I don't like the bullying and squabbling going on in school'

'I don't get to use computers when I want to'

'I want to meet with my friends more'

Important to me in the future

The top 'Important to's' for these young people in the future were:

'I want my own place'

'I want a paid job'

'I want to get married and have children'

'I want training and an education'

'I want a social life'

'I want to be part of my family'

The group observed that these young people's hopes and dreams for the future were very similar to those who don't have a learning disability.

Agreed actions

An immediate action was to explore the 'bullying and squabbling' issue with each class and speak to pupils about safe and unsafe places in the school.

A few group members shared the findings of the process with the pupils, school staff and adult services to prompt further thinking about how to address some of these issues. The Head Teacher planned a whole-school consultation with pupils to find out what the school needed to do to improve playtimes.

The teachers discussed some possible funding opportunities to purchase more school computers.

Other strategic actions included:

- sharing the findings of the process with commissioners from the local authority
- exploring more work opportunities for young people attending the school through adult social services
- reporting back some of the wider issues regarding paid employment, training and education, developing relationships, having a social life and having your own place to the Partnership Board (by a member of the group who was a member of a board).

Conclusion: how the process has helped to change two schools

We have outlined two schools' experiences of using the Working Together for Change Process and both schools noted change at three different levels.

1. Individual changes for the pupils, guided by their person-centred review to maintain and build on what works for them and change what doesn't work.
2. Local change in organising how we support children and young people to have an effect not only on school life but also home life.
3. Strategic change in using the person-centred information we gather from children and young people to influence school development and improvement.

Ellen Tinkham School's next steps are to embed the core promise and develop an even better understanding of it across the whole school through further training, reviewing their learning on a regular basis and continuing to explore their curriculum. Their local authority is also interested in using the core promise as a way of working with children and young people in Devon. The school commented that the process of developing this work with the children and young people throughout the year was as valuable as the information generated at the end in creating a person-centred culture.

Professionals need to continue their journey to assess how we can best engage with children, young people and families in ways that make sense to them and enable them to share with us what works and doesn't work about life and what is most important to them in their future. Both schools highlighted in this paper have experienced success in making sure that the design, delivery and evaluation of the services we provide both in school and beyond is guided by the voices of children, young people and their families.

Further reading

From Individual to Strategic Change: Driving Change with Person-Centred Information, H Sanderson and M Neil et al, Helen Sanderson Associates, 2009 www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk

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Notes

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- 8 Independent Living Strategy, Office for Disability Issues, 2007 <http://www.officefordisability.gov.uk/docs/wor/ind/ilr-executive-report.pdf>
- 9 Working Together for Change, Department of Health, Sam Bennett and Helen Sanderson 2009 <http://www.dhcarenetworks.org.uk/Personalisation/Topics/Browse/General/?parent=2734&child=5802>
- 10 For more information on aggregating person centred reviews, please visit www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk
- 11 Simon Duffy, Six keys to citizenship, 2006
- 12 For more information about any of these person-centred thinking tools visit www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk

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