



Community Probation: With good ingredients it can be a recipe for success on many levels.

Initiative: Great Start

Theme: Community Building

Periodic Detention (PD) workers are out in our communities every Saturday working in our communities as directed by our justice system. Like most of us, what they produce is a lot about what goes into the situation that directs and encourages their work. At Great Start, a decent dollop of respect and plenty of humour meant the garden was rescued from the brink of going wild in quick time, the workers started going the extra mile and a little bit more of a community was nurtured.

This year we have noticed some really cool and inspiring things happening around the Saturday Community Probation visits to the Great Start House. We have had 'PD' here for quite some time and there are lots of stories to show how doing things differently can have very successful results. However, this year something very special and more than we dared hope for is emerging and being carefully nurtured.

Take one supervisor who 'gets what Great Start is about', add a handful of people who just may be receptive to some warmth and a second chance, blend in some giving and receiving and ladle on lashings of encouragement, appreciation and opportunities for creativity. Mix well and bake in a warm oven for a few hours on a Saturday and you have the makings of a very special dish it seems.

"I don't know what it is about this place, but there's something here that makes them (the men and women doing community service hours) want to get stuck in...." has been a comment made by our regular Community Probation Supervisor at the Great Start House on Saturdays. And, even he can't help popping in during the week to measure something up or check on something...

When the Great Start Team came back from the Christmas holidays in 2012, the garden was in much need of some TLC, to say the least! We lost Julia, our amazing garden guru last October to follow other opportunities and by January things were overgrown, the ground was hard, plots needed harvesting and re-planting. It was overwhelming. So we did the only thing we could we do, we took the next small step.

Although small parcels of help were being sent to us in the form of local people turning up and doing some watering or feeding the chooks or tackling a small job here and there, no one could quite take the bull by the horns it seemed. So, we put our trust and faith in our PD boys. It was time to really connect with them. It would require something different to get their buy in, but what?

I think it was a good omen for us that a new supervisor was starting – it meant a fresh approach could be tried and I knew when I first met him that it had a good chance of working. I started by writing a letter above the list of jobs I made for the team each weekend. I kept it really chatty and not too formal, with a bit of humour. I soon found out that the most important thing though was noticing and acknowledging all their efforts from the last weekend and giving feedback – the more I did of this, the more work they did and their own initiative and creativity emerged – a win win situation!

This feedback is done by letter and I always give them a couple copies. Apparently it's a kind of ritual they all enjoy at the start of their time here now - when they sit in their van and pass around the letter to read. I'm sure they think I'm a bit of a fruit loop but one who cares! This sharing or 'swapping' things back and forth seems to hold a key though. I always leave them something, whether it's a couple of copies of the Great Start Story book, or the offer to help themselves to some free fruit and veges we have. It's a way of respecting their efforts, regardless of how they came to be there, and an acknowledgement of the mutual benefit we are creating. I think they look forward to it.

Another secret ingredient has been food. Don't tell the doom and gloom merchants though – who would hear of it! Giving PD workers food! One week when I baked a chocolate cake, the next week one of the guys brought in some hinges and bolts from his own house to fix a gate he knew needed fixing – and I hadn't even got around to putting the broken gate on the list yet. They raved and raved so much about the moistness of the cake that I ran off some copies of the recipe for them the following week, and they snapped them up. One guy asked if he could take some of the artichokes home, as no one seemed to be using them, he told us how to cook them too. "Sure!" we said.

Variety and encouragement seem to motivate this team, they work hard but we don't make it about breaking rocks in the hot sun. So far they have been involved in making one piece of and I plan to give them another project to do entirely on their own. Their supervisor can't believe how they achieve what would normally be 6 hours work elsewhere, in 3 hours at Great Start.

One thing he shared with me is that they like being here because it's out of the public gaze. Interesting. Some people might say it's just because they like to skive off, but I don't think this is the case. It shows pride and self-respect, I feel. A member of their team once commented to one of our team, "It's for a good cause; we can see things progressing – it's more worthwhile than clearing blackberry bushes."

It's amazing what good things can come out of building trusting relationships – one young guy shared that he and his partner were expecting their first baby very soon, but had concerns because they were having trouble finding a midwife (this is common in our area and many other areas). They lived in our neighbouring community of Naenae so we encouraged him to get his partner to come in the following week so that we could hook her up with our DHB midwife. She has now been seen by the midwife and all is going well!

Memo to self:

Leave a Little Star's Welcome Baby Pack for the Saturday Morning Crew.

Intent:

Connecting with some of our 'harder to reach' families, developing a sense of reciprocity and increasing a sense of wellbeing and belonging in your community.

Key Learnings:

- Treating people with respect and offering a positive work environment generates more good will and trust by creates a spiral of positives, transforming participation.
- Going that extra step is important as the results can be life changing for our families.

Key Outcomes:

- Connecting in different ways with our community helps to ensure that as many people as possible have opportunities to find the support they need, for example a midwife.

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