



Playing the aspiration game:  
Snakes hinder aspiration – go back.  
Ladders help aspiration – go forward.

“ From today I’ve learnt that Whitley, the community, has so much potential, so many people who want to make a difference, that anything is possible. People working together, people believing in each other and themselves is what will make the greatest difference. I think that is on the way to happening. ”

Community panel participant

“ It’s not a finished article (the Aspiration report). What we really don’t want to do is have a document that just sits on the shelf – it’s something that we work with and something that we develop. ”

Mr Paul Allen, teacher at JMA

**This research was co-produced with Whitley residents. Particular thanks to:**

The Whitley Researchers: a local research community supported by Whitley Community Development Association.

The Young Researchers: a group of young people supported by JMA who formed as a group during the process of this research and who played an important role in exploring the topic with their peers and with their wider community.

These groups collaborated with a team from The University of Reading to produce this report.

The work was commissioned by Reading Borough Council and sponsored by the Decent Neighbourhoods Fund, supported by Study Higher, Affinity Housing and the University of Reading.

For more information contact Sally Lloyd-Evans at the University of Reading:

[s.lloyd-evans@reading.ac.uk](mailto:s.lloyd-evans@reading.ac.uk)

Or call in to the Community Café, 252 Northumberland Avenue (RG2 7QA) and complete an Aspiration Card.

The full aspiration report is available at: [www.aspiration-in-Whitley.whitley-cda.org](http://www.aspiration-in-Whitley.whitley-cda.org)



# WHITLEY SAYS "YES WE CAN!"

Aspiration in Whitley - a collaboration between schools, families and the wider community.



JOHN MADEJSKI  
ACADEMY



We often fill in questionnaires but rarely get to see the results. Here is an exception. Parents, teachers, young people and service providers were interviewed about youth aspirations in Whitley and these are the findings.

## YOUNG PEOPLE

A dozen Young Researchers discussed aspirations (dreams, desires, ambitions) with almost 70 teenage peers and children through a game with snakes (barriers to progress) and ladders (things that help). 38 questionnaires were also completed by young people.

Young people played a leading role in the Aspiration research project and they will continue to be at the heart of creating and shaping our future actions.

There was no shortage of aspiration among young people but they were often uncertain about future careers and wanted support and a role in shaping pathways to achieving their aspirations.

### Recommendations:

- **Place:** They want a lively community with more things to do and more places to go such as after-school and youth clubs.
- **Relationships:** Good peer friendships make a huge difference to young people. Constructive, two-way communication with the adults in their lives also affects present happiness and future outlook. Family members, teachers, club leaders and other role models all make their mark. How well adults collaborate with each other also influences the outlook of young people.
- **Pathways:** Young people need help exploring pathways to fulfilling their dreams. The expectations of children, their parents and their teachers tend to become more modest as the child grows up. Higher education is given little consideration by young people, who are more focussed on the end job. However, hearing from people with similar backgrounds who have gone on to higher education has an influence on teenage choices.
- **Being heard and being seen:** Young people have a voice. They want to be listened to and have a say in activities or provisions that directly serve their needs and interests.

## SCHOOLS

53 school staff members completed questionnaires, some having in-depth conversations with researchers.

Happy teachers make happy schools! Many secondary school teachers expressed concerns about the difficulties facing young people, including their need to prepare for the future by acquiring more life skills. Teachers are highly motivated by seeing children progress, learn and take responsibility. Managing child behaviour is one of their biggest challenges.

### Recommendations:

- Value approachable teachers, since the approachability of teachers critically affects how both parents and their children view school.
- Avoid disjointed learning - young people are happiest in school when they feel they are acquiring relevant skills, whilst they feel that supply teachers hold them back.
- Help pupils to work through their options post-school. Pathways to reaching ambitions need to be clearly mapped, but a regular, interactive approach matters too - delivering 'with' and not 'to' young people, so they can find their voice both in current and future affairs.
- Use role models who relate to the lives of young people in Whitley.
- Prepare young people in a way that is more closely tailored to their needs. This includes providing time outside of class to deal with attitudes to learning and life issues facing them (life-skills). Provide teachers with outside resources, training and support in this.
- Support pupils who need help to deal with anxiety and exam stress.

The recommendations are not isolated one from another - they will make the greatest difference when they are welded together in a common effort.

The Aspiration research was about finding things out but equally it was also about working together and sharing ideas and hopes between residents, service agencies, community groups and young people. It doesn't end there; together these component parts of the Whitley community now need to lead the next steps and shape services and activities to better realise local hopes and aspirations.



# JOIN THE MOVEMENT

The way this research was done has generated new community contact in Whitley through which change can take place and through which funding is already being channelled.

If you want to get involved by turning our recommendations into actions, contact [s.loyd-evans@reading.ac.uk](mailto:s.loyd-evans@reading.ac.uk)

## PARENTS

136 Whitley parents were interviewed for their views.

Parents have aspirations for their children but poor personal school experiences affected their participation in school events and their ambition to see their children go on to higher education. Most parents found school staff welcoming and approachable but 3 issues damage communication: (1) Parents' feeling that concerns are not being addressed, (2) Parents not understanding what is going on, and (3) Parents feeling judged. Parent-school cooperation is vital and links directly to the attitudes and aspirations of children.

### Recommendations:

- Explore measures to improve communication between parents and teachers.
- Provide short, regular updates of what is being taught in school, since these help parents to positively engage in their child's learning.
- Do more to communicate a child's successes and achievements (parental request of schools).
- Establish a community-wide parents learning group to understand how and what children are learning and to encourage greater community use of schools.
- Parents, keep engaging with schools, supporting them and working together for child progression.

## THE WIDER COMMUNITY

9 local agencies gave in-depth interviews about the local community, and 3 neighbourhood meetings were held, each involving over 40 persons. One of these meetings involved a panel of community leaders answering questions put forward by young people. Information was also gleaned from government statistics.

There are stark levels of disadvantage in Whitley compared with other areas of Reading. This links to weaknesses in the relationships between residents and local institutions and lower levels of collaboration. Many young people are not involved in out-of-school clubs. However there is also a strong community spirit and a willingness to tackle local issues together. Putting something into the lives of young people helps them to give something back.

### Recommendations:

- Coordinate efforts between Whitley residents and service providers to establish shared goals and aspirations.
- Run activities to encourage collaboration and improved relationships. For example, an 'Art of Conversation' event to explore issues of respect, communication and listening.
- Make an audit or register of local assets to encourage a more positive view of the Whitley neighbourhood.
- Work with and alongside schools to provide extra-curricular clubs that are local, free, and shaped with and around the young people. These can give young people an opportunity to gain hands-on learning experiences.

