

Empowering Young People – Leading Change Ourselves



Throughout 2024, a group of young people from Potential Plus UK met regularly as part of a leadership programme made possible by a generous donation from one of our supporters. Over six months, they built confidence, explored shared challenges and developed leadership skills, guided by Alex Hendra, a specialist in leadership training and co-creation. At the end of the pilot, these young people successfully applied for funding to continue their work with Potential Plus UK, co-producing projects to help address the lack of support for neurodivergent teenagers with high learning potential. In January 2025, they were thrilled to be awarded £19,905 from The National Lottery Community Fund for their project, Empowering Young People – Leading Change Ourselves. This project was made possible thanks to funding raised by National Lottery players for good causes.

One of our group, Anabel, wanted to tell you some more about their endeavours:

“The HLP Young Leaders Programme has allowed a group of HLP young people to learn about what it means to be HLP, anxiety management techniques and how to develop leadership skills. Once equipped with these skills, we split into groups to create our own leadership projects - in my case writing a book to tackle the issue of poor HLP and Neurodivergent representation in media. We hope you will enjoy some examples of our character art and a snippet of writing from this project. We would be very grateful if you could fill out a short [feedback form](#) too.”



Writing Snippet - ‘Arrival’

The archaic train chugged on through rolling hills of deserted countryside. Rain hammered unrelentingly against dark stained windows, reminding Hester of how far she really was from the pleasant August afternoon she had left behind. The city slipped further still into the distance, that piece of her quickly being drowned by the rolling hills that sped past the foggy train window. She desperately missed it, but knew there was nothing left to return to. Her parents long gone on a botany project and her girlfriend about to start her first year of boarding school. Who was left to remain for?

“Can I offer you a drink, madam?”

Behind the person dressed in a pristinely ironed black suit and clock-patterned shirt was a rickety trolley

stacked with smudged, cloudy jugs of various juices and water. A single fly buzzed despairingly across the surface of the orange juice.

“Um...no. Thank you.” She resisted the urge to walk up and correct the person’s frustratingly askew bowtie. “Any idea when we’ll arrive at the final destination?”

They looked down at the largest clock on their shirt, tilting their head before their gaze returned to Hester.

“I’d say around 20 minutes.” They smiled, showing yellowed teeth and shoved the creaking trolley out of sight. Hester watched as their shadowy figure vanished behind the walls of the cabin before she resumed staring out of the filthy window.

The rain had gotten ever more fierce, the growing wind sticking stray leaves to the sides of the train. Hester certainly regretted not bringing an umbrella, but her raincoat would keep her dry enough. The hood was torn and unusable, but she figured her frazzled hair could do with the moisture.

She pulled the dog-eared map of her new neighbourhood out of her hoodie pocket, inspecting the flamboyant annotations. She had never met the ‘relative’ she intended to stay with, but this woman had gone to incredible lengths to make her feel at home. That said, Hester could barely read half of the annotations and the map looked older than her.

The rhythmic squeaking of trolley wheels jolted her back into reality. The same well-dressed person stood in her cabin's doorway, watching her.

"Still not thirsty?"

The fly had died.

"No, thanks."

She didn't notice they had left until the empty space stared menacingly back at her. The first houses began to fly past the window, walking a tightrope between looking well loved and abandoned. Everything seemed so...old. As though, some time long ago, the town had been frozen and everything since had aged in some sort of time-bending way. Hester cringed away from the window despite a few rays of sun beginning to peek through from the approaching blue sky.

"We will be arriving shortly. Remember to collect all your bags, they probably won't survive the trip back!" An eerily cheerful voice announced over the intercom Hester could have sworn was pronounced broken when the trip began. She pulled her backpack down from the overhead rack, holding it still with her feet as the train lurched through rows and rows of decrepit houses. The brakes squealed as the train began to pull into a surprisingly crowded train station.

When the train finally halted, Hester pulled her backpack on and fought her suitcase out of the cabin. Perhaps she should have listened when her girlfriend suggested she bring two smaller ones. She dragged the case off the train and onto the platform. The feeling of eyes on her from every angle crept in as she made her way through a crowd of people who looked as though they had been jumbled together from various different years in the past. Some from the 1980s, some the 50s and some even looking as though they were straight of the 30s.

When she finally emerged onto the streets, she pulled the map out of her pocket and tried to locate where exactly she was facing.

"This would be a lot bloody easier with Google Maps." She grumbled.

"You're a city girl then?" She nearly leapt out of her skin, squawking and turning towards the person who lounged against the station wall, smoking.

"...yes?"

"Heading to the school or someone's house?" Their leather trench coat billowed out behind them as they made their way over to her, throwing their cigarette onto the ground.

"Um..." She wasn't certain they could be trusted, but she was yet to even locate the train station on her map. They leaned over and glanced at the annotations.

"Of course!" They grinned, grabbing Hester's arm and dragging her rather carelessly across the road. "Absolutely crackers, but a lovely woman."

"...Right." She didn't put too much thought into the fact that they had seemingly guessed exactly where she was going.

"You'll have a whale of a time. Might also see a whale, depending on how big her taxidermy collection is getting."

"Wonderful." Hester groaned.

She was steered through street after street of bizarrely old houses, tripping over cobblestones and certainly scratching the bottom of her suitcase. The somewhat suspicious looking person eventually slowed down on a cozy looking road, in front of a pastel-painted house with a cat-shaped keyhole. It looked far too sweet and innocent for someone who potentially owned an entire whale in their taxidermy collection.

"This is her house?"

"Yep, for sure. Absolutely." They glanced away for a moment.

"For sure? Like, this," She gestured toward the frankly adorable house, "is the woman with a taxidermy collection?"

"Mmm, yep!" They took a deep breath and turned to her, "100%."

"...Ok." She walked up and knocked once on the baby blue door. It swung open almost immediately. "Hello! I'm Hester, I'm supposed to be staying with you?"

The woman blinked once and then her face blossomed into a huge grin.

"Hester! Of course! Come right in, I'll put the kettle on. Oh, my, it's so good to see you! I'm Felicity, by the way." She waved her hand behind Hester, "Thanks for bringing her, Ryn!"

Whoever Ryn was, they were in stitches. Hester couldn't tell whether they were laughing or coughing, but the smoking made her lean towards coughing. They waved weakly at Felicity before she bundled Hester and her suitcase inside.

After being attacked by a swarm of very noisy cats, Hester eventually found herself on a sofa with a mug of rose and hibiscus tea, feeling as calm as she perhaps ever would in this bizarre town. She took a look at the map again to see if she could orient herself this time around, and one of the carefully written annotations caught her eye.

Sorry if all of this is confusing, but the town can be sometimes! Ask for help if you need it and I hope you find your way here in one piece!

Love, Rosalina

Wait...Rosalina?!

