

SkillsFit Focus

**Newsletter - Issue 3:
14th January 2026**



SkillsFit: What We Do

Industry-setting Alternative Provision for 14-19 year olds

Targeted on-site support for attendance, SEMH, behaviour and progress

NEET Engagement projects for young people and neighbourhoods in need

Enrichment and wellbeing sessions for those accessing alternative education

FOCUS FEATURE

**Schools and Colleges:
What is Needed Right
Now?**

The January Reset - The importance of re-establishing routines, expectations and momentum.

FOCUS INSIGHT

**What I Have Learned
About Trauma.**

**'Trauma in a person,
decontextualised over time,
looks like personality'**
- Resmaa Menakem

FOCUS HEADLINE

SkillsFit CIC & Salford CVS

**A Partnership Rooted in
Community** - SkillsFit CIC's Salford CVS membership strengthens collaboration, good practice and community-led support for young people in Salford.

FOCUS FEATURE - Schools & Colleges: What Is Needed Right Now?

The January Reset

For schools and colleges, the return from Christmas is rarely a fresh start. January is less about new beginnings and more about **re-establishing routines, expectations and stability** after a period of disruption.

There is familiar pressure to regain momentum quickly, while responding to the realities young people bring back with them. For many, challenges like anxiety and low confidence that were present before Christmas have not disappeared, and in some cases **feel more pronounced**.

At the same time, settings are balancing Spring Term ambition with the complexity of need already present in classrooms and pastoral systems. There is a palpable desire to move forward alongside an understanding that not everyone is ready to do so at the same pace. As such, January is often about holding steady rather than rushing change; maintaining consistency, reinforcing what works, and **giving young people the space they need to re-settle before expecting progress to accelerate**.

What This Looks Like for Young People

For many young people, **the return to education in January brings a renewed sense of pressure** rather than reassurance. Expectations reset quickly, routines tighten, and the emotional load of “getting back into it” can feel heavy.



In practice, this doesn't always present as outright refusal or disengagement. More often, schools see:

- heightened anxiety around structure and expectations
- reduced tolerance for busy, high-stimulus environments
- emotional fatigue following a period of disrupted routine
- behaviour that communicates overwhelm, not defiance

For these learners, January isn't about motivation, it's about readiness. They need predictability, consistency and relational safety before they are able to fully re-engage with daily routines.

Stability Before Strategy

Right now, what many settings need most is stability. New initiatives or rapid change can wait; **consistent routines, clear expectations and trusted relationships** will help young people feel safe enough to re-engage.

Capacity is the Challenge

Alongside this sits the **reality of capacity**. Staff are balancing curriculum delivery, safeguarding, behaviour and SEMH support, often without the time or headspace to hold the relational work that underpins many of these challenges.

Listening to Schools

The role of SkillsFit in January is to listen. By listening carefully to what schools and colleges are experiencing on the ground, we adapt our support to respond to real pressure points; offering **flexible, targeted provision that strengthens capacity without adding demand**.

Holding the Line

In January, progress doesn't always look like acceleration. Sometimes it looks like holding the line; protecting consistency, supporting staff capacity, and **giving young people the time and space they need to steady themselves before moving forward**.

FOCUS INSIGHT - What I have Learned About Trauma

'Trauma in a person, decontextualised over time, looks like personality.'

— Resmaa Menakem

This quote stayed with me throughout recent trauma-informed practice training, because it captures something schools and services see every day: behaviours that appear fixed, oppositional or ingrained often have a deeper story rooted in safety, adaptation and survival.

Understanding Trauma

My understanding of what trauma is; it is not the event itself, but **the impact of an experience on an individual's nervous system and their sense of safety**. Trauma shapes how someone perceives threat, connection and control, often long after the original experience has passed.

In education and youth settings, this matters because there is no such thing as a "typical" experience. Young people arrive carrying histories we may never fully know, and assumptions about what *should* feel safe or motivating can miss the mark.

What the Research Tells Us

The **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Study**, led by Dr. Felitti and colleagues in the 90's, highlighted the long-term impact of early adversity on health, wellbeing and life outcomes. The findings showed that higher ACE scores are linked to increased likelihood of health-harming behaviours, poorer mental wellbeing, and reduced education and employment outcomes.

For SkillsFit, this reinforces an important point: **health, fitness, wellbeing and progression are not separate from trauma; they are often shaped by it.**

Trauma, Adaptation and Behaviour

Trauma responses are not choices; they are **adaptations**. Common responses are often described as the four F's
Fight, Flight, Freeze and Fawn are each ways of protecting ourselves when our safety feels compromised.:

FIGHT	FLIGHT
Explosive	Anxiety
Reactive	Panic
Defensive	Overthinking
Confrontational	Defensive
FREEZE	FAWN
Numb	People Pleaser
Isolated	No Boundaries
Indecisive	Lack of Identity
Overwhelmed	Co-dependent

These adaptations present through characteristics that as professionals we can be receptive to, and should respond appropriately to.

We see behaviours; **Hypervigilance**, for example, can mean a young person reacts strongly to situations that appear minor to others. **Social Thinning**; the loss of connections due to trauma response, may reflect lost trust rather than disinterest. **Shame** can sit beneath behaviour, with some young people expecting judgement or failure before it happens; shaping risky or avoidant choices. Understanding this reframes behaviour as **communication rather than as defiance**.

Taking a Trauma-Informed Approach in Practice

A trauma-aware approach doesn't involve trying to find a fix, **it starts with how we show up** when supporting a young person through trauma.

Key principles include:

- Not invalidating lived experience
- Relating without overtaking
- Being present, calm and regulated
- Setting and modelling clear boundaries
- Responding with compassion over reaction
- Understanding that safety comes through connection

What This Means for SkillsFit

SkillsFit are invested in **creating environments where connection, consistency and safety come before challenge**. This means recognising behaviour as information, allowing young people to regulate before expecting progress, and supporting them to access their own coping strategies rather than imposing ours.

When we understand trauma in context, personality becomes less fixed and behaviour becomes more lucid; and **a space to rebuild readiness, trust and direction emerges**.

FOCUS HEADLINE - SKILLSFIT CIC & SALFORD CVS



A Partnership Rooted in Community

Salford CVS plays a key role in supporting voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations across the city. Its work helps strengthen local services, improve collaboration, and ensure that organisations working with communities are well-governed, connected and sustainable.

For those supporting children and young people, Salford CVS provides trusted infrastructure; bringing together partners, sharing insight, and supporting good practice across Salford's VCSE landscape.

Why This Matters for SkillsFit CIC

Becoming a Salford CVS member is a **positive and deliberate step for SkillsFit CIC**. It reflects our commitment to working transparently, collaboratively and in alignment with the wider system that supports young people in Salford. The relationship **strengthens our ability to engage with local partners**, align projects with identified community need, and develop funded programmes that are robust, sustainable and well-governed.

It also supports strong operational practice through access to training and development opportunities, including safeguarding training at Level 3.

This helps ensure **clear procedures, confident DSL practice, and safeguarding that is embedded in day-to-day delivery** rather than treated as a tick-box requirement; another existing sign of compliance for SkillsFit!

For schools, commissioners and partners, this provides additional assurance that SkillsFit CIC operates within clear, consistent and well-understood safeguarding frameworks.

Working Together In Practice

In practical terms, the connection between SkillsFit CIC and Salford CVS opens up opportunities to collaborate on funded projects, connect with services and VCSE partners, and contribute and respond to the **focus on NEET engagement, wellbeing and early intervention**.

For commissioners and partners, this means working with a delivery organisation that is both **locally embedded and operationally sound**. For young people, it means support that is joined-up, relevant and rooted in the communities they live in.

Looking Ahead

As SkillsFit CIC continues to develop its community-facing work, this relationship with Salford CVS supports our ambition to work alongside others; strengthening practice, building capacity, and **ensuring young people can access the right support**, at the right time, in the right place.

Getting in Touch with SkillsFit

If you would like to talk about anything in Issue 3, or or find out more about SkillsFit:

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