

Blueberry Academy



Background

Blueberry Academy hails from an Information and Guidance background; they worked closely with Social Care during the reforms around the closures of day care centres and the emergence of “personal budgets”. They worked, and still work, with social care to provide the work experience, supported employment, independent living and Social Shop and Enterprise workshops elements of clients’ care packages.

Because Blueberry have a track record of getting people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities into “work” in its many guises, York Adult Education invited them to be a partner in the York Cluster for the Green Paper project. Within the supported living accommodation being built at Askham Bryan, it is planned that an Enterprise Area will be developed which will be supported by Blueberry Academy. Blueberry is also involved in the North Yorkshire Support and Aspiration Pathfinder Project.

Blueberry Academy works in partnership with FE colleges in and around Yorkshire and Humberside and has a close working relationship with York City Council. The Blueberry Academy team provides specialist support for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, developing highly innovative curriculum and services.

The Academy is at the forefront of the Skills for Work agenda and has a proven track record in working with other organisations to introduce new practice and to raise the standards of employability training

The Blueberry Academy strives to provide a quality service that meets the needs and aspirations of its learners, providers, employers and the local community. The Academy aims to respond to these groups by providing the curriculum and support necessary to enable progression and to allow individuals and providers to grow and develop.

How it works

There are many different supported work and training routes available through Blueberry Academy - one of the options being MY Eco Café - an employability training project for people with learning difficulties. MY Eco Café training experience braids skills and funding from the learning, care and employment sectors. Individualised programmes are planned with each person through the 'in control' process. . There is also a Co-operative Enterprise Centre under development which provides a range of paid work, training opportunities and individual / group enterprises. Trainees earn £20 per week and the working week comprises 4-5 hours per day, 2-3 days per week. Blueberry has found that Enterprise can provide a stepping stone to employment or provide an ongoing opportunity for work. In addition, the potential of Enterprise to provide an alternative to out-of-area training and learning is considerable.

Learning and Learner Support

One of the people who have taken up the option of starting their own small business is Ronnie.



Ronnie is in his late 50s. In his earlier years he attended an Adult Day Care Centre where he learned several craft skills including sea grass weaving. He has recently re-discovered his weaving skills and now has a small business based at the Enterprise Centre. He repairs and takes commissions for grass woven seating for chairs and stools and he loves his job! He has premises provided by the Enterprise Centre where there are staff around to support him with the practicalities of setting up and running a small business

Another example of Blueberry Academy's flexible approach to employment opportunities is David, who has "mixed" package of job possibilities.



David is 22 years old and works in the Co-operative Enterprise. He also works for 4.5 hours per week as a cleaner. He has a strong interest in birds and wild life and regularly photographs them. He is very accomplished in his photography: Some of his photos are being sold in the project shop and are generating income for him. From the three career and income strands he has, David stands a good chance of generating a sustainable employment pathway for himself in the future.

Blueberry has another strand of opportunity in its Community Shop based in Swinegate in the middle of York. This facility provides 2-3 retail training opportunities on a rolling programme. All projects are destination-focused on the progression to paid work and all trainees are supported in job search applications and receive job coaching.

Blueberry support and learning packages place the individual at the centre of the process. "Customers" can access a range of support options that are individually tailored to meet personal goals and address other activity-related barriers.

Working in Partnership

Blueberry Academy has innovative partnership-working with Social Care, Education, the Local Authority and local Schools and Colleges. Their approach to funding is based on a proportionate ratio and is typically very pragmatic – the learner comes first! Their blended funding model is best exemplified by Liam's story:

Learning and Learner Support

Liam is 19 years old and has just left Special School provision. He has been assessed by Social Care as requiring 1-to-1 support for both his personal care and for job coaching (depending on his needs and working situation). Liam is interested in IT / Admin and music. His weekly programme consists of 3 hours Functional Skills (provided by LA education); 10 hours supported work experience (provided by Blueberry) and 3 hours music technology (provided by Access to Music). The funding for Liam's programme is proportionate - Education picks up 60% and Social Care picks up the remaining 40%.

The programmes last for a maximum of 2 years and all learners are given IAG to plan their next steps. As mentioned earlier within the "Co-operative Enterprise Centre" the clients earn £20 per day, the other programmes operated by Blueberry charge a day rate of £39 per customer for development and support of work skills.

As their website states, "The (*Blueberry*) team is highly experienced in developing innovative learning tools to support people to learn skills for work, life, learning and personal development. In all aspects of learning the focus is placed on the individual, their needs and how they will learn best".