

Bolton Community College

Skills for Independent Living

Department Becoming a Volunteer Case Study



Our organisation

Skills for Independent Living is a department within Bolton College which offers both part time and full time provision for any LDD learner working within the pre entry and entry level framework. It has 100 learners aged 16-19 and 156 aged 19 plus enrolled on its courses. The class size ranges from 6-12 learners. All courses are supported by at least one tutor and one learning support worker.

Our approach

The new curriculum model is based upon robust advice and guidance based on an assessment of each individual learner's needs and barriers as well as their strengths and their abilities. Underpinning this is the belief that every individual has strengths, and that everyone has something to offer his/her community. Personalised learning plans capture this and build upon aspiration as well as areas for development through a process of turning negatives into positives via SMART target setting techniques. Our curriculum delivery recognises that many of our learners learn best outside the classroom and in practical environments. Programmes have therefore been established which enable this whilst at the same time benefiting the local community through the completion of many offsite volunteering projects. Our aim is to bring people from the local community together to share their skills, talents, gifts and resources. Students are taught valuable skills and an appreciation of what makes a good volunteer, both through hands on experience, and through taught sessions in safeguarding, cultural awareness and empathy building.

Practicalities and implementing resources

The department works jointly with a wide variety of partner organisations and local employers to offer work preparation experience, which has, for many of our learners secured meaningful employment post college. In 2011, **22% of our Preparation for Work learners moved into paid work**, which compares very favourably with the National average of 6% for learners with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities.

In many ways, the recession has helped mould the new curriculum, in that pressures on resources have meant that employers have been forced to seek alternative ways of meeting needs previously met by their own labour force. This has created an opportunity for learners to contribute in a range of areas, fulfilling a role which is genuinely valued by those they support,

as illustrated in this case study. Students first started volunteering by helping to re build a garden, as the care home, “Wilfred Geere” could no longer afford to pay a gardener. Although they are volunteers, the care home, as beneficiary of their labours, has contributed substantial resources which have been crucial in facilitating the project.

An example of the outcome and impact of the work

Case study: Becoming a volunteer at the care home

Initially, work at the care home was focussed entirely on overhauling the garden, a very successful project which was marked by an end of year celebration attended by the Mayor. During this time, there was some occasional and indirect contact between learners and residents, but following the completion of the garden project, students began to integrate with the elderly residents on a more regular basis. They began to contribute within the home, for example by making cups of tea and undertaking some simple general tasks. This too was very successful. The residents looked forward to the students visits and friendships began to forge between everyone concerned. It was decided to formalise this by the creation of a visiting service. For residents, a number of whom did not receive many visitors, this was a great boost. It was also a wonderful opportunity of our young people to meet and learn from the experience of the older generation. The project has been effective as a vehicle for celebrating the diversity of community and also in developing amongst the wider community an appreciation of students with learning and physical disabilities and the positive contribution they can make to their community.

The new approach to curriculum delivery, through volunteering has enabled students to take ownership and control. The positive nature of the experience has been very empowering, raising their expectations, and improving self-esteem and self-worth. Most notably, it has substantially enhanced their progression opportunities including those onto paid work, to self-employment and onto further volunteer roles.

Taking part in this piece of work has enabled students to become valued citizens within their own communities. They have completed meaningful practical work, and this has helped them not only to grow in confidence but to develop the employability skills which increase their future life chance and potential to gain employment. It has also had a significant and positive impact on student behaviour with a marked reduction in anti-social behaviour for many.



The contribution made by students is clearly valued by those they have worked alongside, as these quotes demonstrate.

“The wonderful work completed by these students has improved and fulfilled the elderly peoples’ lives.”

Rob Crowe, Care Home Manager 2011

“I look forward to Mondays when you all come. You have transformed this place.”

Resident, Care Home, Anon 2011

“It’s so refreshing to see good things like this”.

Resident’s wife, Tina Taylor, Care Home 2011



Next steps and future plans

The care home has just received confirmation that it has been granted community and voluntary sector funding to continue the project. The department has made the strategic decision to expand its volunteer network, and students now also volunteer by making soup and snacks which are distributed at a local homeless shelter.

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