

Gateshead cluster: Building an appropriate local offer

Job coaching and peer mentoring for independent life and work skills case study



Background

This project delivered a personalised programme of transition support based on individual learner needs and transition from school to college into adult life. Gateshead Council, Dryden School, Gateshead College, Dilston College and Voiceworks (Gateshead Council's community based work experience programme) worked together to support a group of learners with learning disabilities and autism on a joint planning and delivery programme of study that supports learners and their parents and carers through the transitional period of leaving school and progressing onto college and/or training.

Learners were engaged in a person-centred curriculum at Gateshead College based on Foundation learning areas of vocational studies, personal and social development and functional skills. This was supported by a block week residential programme at Dilston College at the start of the course focusing on independent living and work skills. This was followed by a second block week residential programme at Dilston College mid way through the course that built on the learners' person centred curriculum and further developed independent living and work skills. Job coaching support was a key feature of both residential programmes and was built into the college programme, preparing learners for work experience placements arranged through Gateshead Council's Voiceworks.

This project gave learners access to local provision and gain skills and experiences relevant to independent living and learning. Building on each learner's transition plan, a scheme of transition activities was developed and delivered in the residential block weeks at Dilston College and in small blocks of community based learning activity, depending upon individual need. Feedback from learners about of this programme has been very positive.

Outcomes and impacts

Independent life and work skills

The dual support system offered within Dilston and Gateshead Colleges' person centred curriculum shows how joint planning and co-delivery improves the academic, work and social skills of learners, the latter two being of real importance when learners are moving into the wider area of job searching and independent living skills. Learners also benefit from specialist support in their local area which promotes independent travel, local community knowledge and employment opportunities, aspects learners see as invaluable when looking at progression opportunities after college.

Job coaching and work placements

As part of the person centred college programme, learners are encouraged to think about future career aspirations and take part in a work placement to support the achievement of long term goals. Job coaches work with learners and support them as they plan and apply for placements. These placements enhance and develop the learners' employability and focus on skills such as punctuality, appropriate dress and personal responsibility. Learners receive regular feedback from job coaches and this is used to support them in their applications for work. The vocational learning choices offered through the person centred college programme are supported by an extensive work placement provision that uses a wide range of local employers. These include placements for kitchen porters, cafe staff, leisure attendants, car valet, shop assistants, conservation and outdoor staff, farm hands, kennel staff, nursing home staff, nursery assistants, stable hands, laundry assistants, teaching assistants, customer service workers and office receptionists.

Peer mentoring

This project is unique in Gateshead in setting up a peer mentoring programme involving college learners as peer mentors working with current Yr11 pupils at Dryden School. The peer mentoring programme is part of the cluster's transitional planning model with peer mentors helping Yr11 pupils (and their parents) to make informed decisions about curriculum options available for September 2013. It also involves an overnight stay at Dilston College for Dryden School's Yr11 pupils with a two day programme based upon independent living skills involving peer mentors. The results of this pilot have been very positive and mirror the success of the residential independent living block weeks and work skills programme that the Gateshead College learners have already undertaken.

Key lessons learned

- There must be a robust assessment of risk and support needs for work placements
- There must be an identified mentor within the placement to provide the assessed support required for learners
- It is best to match the placement with the learner's interests
- It is crucial to ensure that visits, planning and preparation are clearly communicated to learners and their families to reduce any concerns
- Work experience, volunteering or paid work has a significant impact upon learners' confidence, speech, language and future aspirations.
- Placements develop work skills which prepare learners for a range of progression routes, including supported employment, volunteering, social enterprises and self employment.

How we are sharing the outputs from our cluster work

This project aimed to raise expectations of learners to develop independent living skills for adult life. Throughout the course, learners were given ample opportunity to complete tasks and work towards targets to improve and build on skills learned. Future planning based on positive life outcomes in housing, employment and community participation were also part of the programme.

For external stakeholders this project built on the work being completed via the Gateshead College partnership and the success of the work placement scheme was enhanced by the involvement of trained and experienced job coaching staff from Dilston College.

The benefits for learners of functioning within a real living environment during the residential block weeks is invaluable, as it enables tutors and job coaches to assess the level of need per learner in terms of support required for work placements and general life skills including independent travel. Learners gained an awareness of living outside of their family/carer home.

This model is a new model of working between Colleges of Further Education and an Independent Specialist Provider in the Gateshead region and its effectiveness will be measured by the sharing of good practice amongst the cluster and local partners and stakeholders.

What we are taking forward

- Gateshead/Dilston College will be funded in the future via 16-19 funding formula
- New partnerships have been developed with two more special schools in Gateshead and learners have been assessed for September 2013/14
- Links have been established with other mainstream colleges to offer learners a progression route into Gateshead/Dilston College
- Voiceworks will offer September 2013 learners work experience placements
- Adult Social Care have now established a Supported Employment Service and will identify suitable learners from 2012/13 and 2013/14 to help them into paid work
- Multi agency meetings have been arranged to identify learners with autism, their support needs and whether to bring an autism specialist provider into the cluster to enable young people with complex needs to also access this provision and remain in their local area.
- This model will be rolled out for future Yr11 cohorts at Dryden School with peer mentors being involved in supporting transition into college and training

What advice we would give to others

- Ensure children and adult social care services and Special Educational Needs teams are coordinated and have the ability to share budgets, ideas and identify gaps in local provision.
- Bring mainstream and local colleges on board, there is a commitment to work with Local Authorities and vice versa
- Consult and liaise with parents and carers, they are an important influence and their support is essential in the success of any project.

Further reading

- tranSEND Powerpoint slides/Agenda from April Information event
- Aaron's story
- Voiceworks Powerpoint presentation slides.
- Gateshead Council Team briefing summary from April Information event.
- Dilston College DVD: Job coaching

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