

## **THEME**    **Working With Employers**

**Cheshire East Cluster**

**NORTH WEST REGION**

### **‘Bridging the Gap’ Project**

**Case study by Springfield School and Manchester Metropolitan University.**

This project is based on Project Search, an approach originally developed in America as a unique, business led, one year school-to-work programme which takes place entirely at the workplace. It involves total immersion in the workplace as a means of facilitating a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training through worksite rotations. In this country it was initially run between New Bridge School in Oldham and the Manchester metropolitan University, Didsbury Campus.

In September 2012 the programme was launched on the Crewe Campus with three students from Springfield School. The three students were selected for a number of criteria – foremost a greater than usual difficulty in finding post school placements. The students spend four days in their work place – supported as required by a teaching assistant who is based permanently on the site. The fifth day is spent undertaking a range of other work – life skills, travel training, Food Hygiene and Work Place Safety awards. The programme has been a great success, as Dave’s story clearly demonstrates:

#### **Dave**

Dave has severe to moderate learning difficulties and occasional behaviour problems usually caused by stress – fear of the unknown, inability to do or understand a task, or embarrassment. He arrived at Springfield from mainstream school in year 10 as a very angry, insecure young man with no self confidence, who frequently expressed the opinions that he was *‘stupid’*, *‘a waste of space’*, *‘a failure’* and *‘likely to end up in prison’*. He made great strides at Springfield but although his self confidence improved and his anger reduced he still had little expectation for his future. He looks and generally behaves like most adolescent young men and was determined that he did not want to go to college – he wanted to work.

Dave chose to be placed in the Facilities Management department and from day one has taken to it like a duck to water. He works with a team of men who treat him like one of the lads. He lifts and carries, has learnt to do minor repairs and often has to be ordered away from his task to have his lunch. Dave is now completely at home on the site – he knows where all the buildings are and can independently go wherever he needs to. He is also trusted to deliver messages, keys and smaller equipment around the site independently. He also enjoys playing darts with the team during their tea break. He travels to other university sights in the van to complete tasks and has now genuinely become an invaluable member of the team.



In March we held his Annual Statement Review at the university and Dave's manager attended and gave him a glowing report. Following this Dave, usually very reluctant to speak in (or even attend) meetings talked for 15 minutes about what he enjoyed and felt he had achieved on the project. He then said very clearly and without prompting that for the future he would like to continue to work at the university because he felt useful and enjoyed being an adult.

Very early in the project the team had all expressed a desire to keep him on when his year finishes. He has now been asked to continue to work throughout the school summer holiday (their busy time) and offered a voluntary placement from September. School is also looking into possible paid apprenticeships which may also be an option for his future due to his successful work placement.



Dave's parents have expressed amazement, pleasure and pride at how well he has done on the project. He still has a few anger issues at home – most adolescents do, but has never displayed any negative attitudes or behaviour at work. Dave is currently working towards travelling from Macclesfield, where he lives, to Crewe independently. He is also talking about the possibility of living in a flat by himself and has even been trying the driving theory test on line.

All three students have shown great commitment to their work and obvious enjoyment in both the activities they have completed and in their achievements. All members of the university staff have made a real effort to welcome them – they all have uniform and or name tags, personal lockers and real responsibilities. All have been made to feel valuable members of staff. The maturity that they have shown is excellent and all three have surpassed our expectations and those of their parents.

The University has confirmed that the project will continue into next year and so we have selected a further batch of students, while the university is encouraging other departments to offer similar placements. The partnership between university and school has been very successful and the students and their parents are delighted with the success – and looking forward to their formal graduation service at the end of the placement.