

Family Intervention, Re-Integration and Successful Transition

Henley College Coventry



Project Synopsis

The project focussed on a wide range of flexible, personalised provision with clear progression routes to engage and meet the needs of the most vulnerable young people at risk of becoming 'Not in Employment, Education and Training' (NEET). By widening perceptions and developing confidence, resilience and transferable skills within an accredited framework and lead to a smooth transition into post 16 education. The dedicated College/Home Liaison Officer, long-term work with parents/carers and supporting the progress of learners was effective in re-engaging learners. This also enabled early intervention in identifying and supporting the underlying issues which often lead to poor attendance

Project Aims

The aims were:

- To develop a Family intervention programme in order to tackle the problem of “swelling” in the NEET statistics due to drop out from the Further Education sector. The overall change was to attempt to increase retention amongst target groups of disadvantaged learners and a reduction in NEETs in Coventry over two years;
- To enable this to take place the College would look at deploying specific actions used successfully in the school sector. This change would enable sustainable integration of strategies not commonly used in FE; working in partnership with a mainstream school would assist in better understanding of, and develop processes for, identifying support needs during the transition from school to College. This would ensure earlier identification of need, earlier production of support plans and more effective support. The project would develop a joint school-College re-integration programme for learners who had ‘dropped out’ or been excluded from main-stream provision. This would therefore be the opportunity for learners (who would otherwise excluded) to positively engage in education. Hopefully through the success of the project the College would achieve recognition as a centre of excellence and to share learning from the project across the FE sector.

Project Delivery

- A multi-agency approach to the delivery of alternative curriculum programmes
- Improved retention and achievement on existing provision and reduction in those entering the ‘Not in Employment, Education and Training’ (NEET) category
- Appointment of a Home/College Liaison officer to support students with complex needs and facing significant barriers to progression
- Personal development to develop the skills of staff working with these most vulnerable learners

- Initial and ongoing learner assessment and for learners to have their own individual learning plans
- Mentoring and tutorial support for a case load of learners
- A 12 week programme involving Year 11 students from Whitley Abbey School
- Participants identified by the school, Connexions and other support agencies. They were very much those students that were disengaged, underachieving and at risk of being excluded from school
- 2 day provision per week based at the College working on a number of creative/practical activities and to also experience of a variety of vocational tasters as well as improving their literacy and numeracy skills. Learner achievement measured via Open College network unit certification.

A Family focused Intervention programme, for learners identified as at risk of dropping out was implemented at the College. The project developed and delivered a programme of transition, beginning in school year 11 and continuing through one year of College programmes. Delivery of re-integration courses for learners who have been excluded or dropped out from mainstream provision.

The changes and improvements targeted by the project were to be sustained in the partner organisation through continued activity provided the objectives and outcomes are achieved; the expected outcomes justified investment to enable the mainstreaming of the project activities. The project funded the set-up costs and pump-priming of the initiatives.

One key learning point is that practical transition work, incorporating a series of “taster” opportunities and work on preparing for cultural change, is effective in motivating young people at risk of becoming NEET. It remains a challenge requiring persistence and patience, to engage schools in identifying and releasing at risk learners. Although there have been distinct advantages in working with one specific partner school it would have been more cost-effective to make the project opportunities available to all schools.

Project Outcomes

The young people chosen to participate (three cohorts with a total of 50 learners over the duration of the project) were certainly those that were identified in the original FIRST proposal. The fact that schools were prepared to release them from timetable indicated that they were unlikely to benefit from their school curriculum. The participants had a range of additional needs and had a history of displaying challenging behaviours. The participants were mainly from deprived areas, in the North East and South East of the City or in inner-City wards.

Throughout the project all parties including the young people themselves wished to make the programme a success and were an example of effective partnership working to the benefit of all concerned. All learners were given initial interviews, diagnostic tests, induction to the project and were provided with an individual learning plan. Support to the young people included careers advice, course advice and job search and individual support throughout the programme.

The young people could recognise and articulate a range of benefits and learning outcomes from their participation and appeared, in the main, to derive considerable enjoyment from the programme. Some of their experiences managed to widen their horizons and the various trips and events enriched the lives of many to a not inconsiderable extent.

The ‘hard outcomes’ achieved are very impressive particularly the way in which they progressed on to post-16 opportunities. The participants were very much the ‘hardest to reach’ and were all likely to enter the NEET category. It is encouraging too that many participants were

subsequently able to access work-related opportunities and remain on them (15 of 20 learners re-integrated).

The success of the project would appear to be the effect that it had on the learners' self-esteem, self-awareness and self-confidence thereby changing many of their behaviours and their general 'readiness to learn'. Although attendance was an issue for some, there is evidence that it steadily improved for many and it compared very favourably with their previous attendance at school. Safeguarding issues and individual needs were quickly recognised, reported/referred and responded to due to the close working with individual students. Two of the young people were pregnant and were supported to access external agencies through referrals to the total MDT (Multi Disciplinary team). One young person was homeless, and through support and guidance from Coventry Cyrenians, Mediation service (*a registered charity and provider of services to people who are homeless or whose accommodation may be at risk*), was able to build links with family whilst accessing supported accommodation through the service. One young person made a disclosure regarding an incident at home, which was immediately acted upon through the designated persons based within the School and College.

The participants required intensive support and personalised learning programmes that are inevitably labour intensive and expensive. It is unfortunate that the school were unable to replicate the programme as the cost is prohibitive.

Particularly good practices developed are the approaches to embedding basic skills as an integral part of work-related learning provision through specific College based provision and the provision of tasters of post-16 provision designed to motivate young people to remain in learning.

There appears to have been some communication difficulties between School staff and College staff during the course of the programme particularly with regard to absenteeism and issues that may have arisen. The College had difficulty in tracking the subsequent progress of two of the participants due to lack of information.

The College/Home Liaison Officer had vast prior experience of working with the types of client group targeted under the proposal and was also familiar with the College and its partners. She was therefore able to 'hit the ground running' and has been able to have considerable influence on the College's approach to engaging its most vulnerable students across the 14-19 phase. This has led to her employment being continued at the College.

The College made every effort to engage parents/carers in the process of planning the young people's involvement in the Project. One young person's parental approval and involvement influenced the learner's attitude to the programme significantly. It was therefore recognised that a lack of parental interest was at times a significant cause of young people requiring additional support and that these parents could be extremely elusive. The multi-agency approach and the integrated support offered to learners has enabled them to tackle their many and complex barriers to participation whilst enabling tutors and lecturers to concentrate on teaching.

Sharing of Project Findings

There has been an increase in the number of referrals for pre and post 16 provisions from special schools and from "mainstream" schools for young people with support needs. The transition from school to College can be difficult for these young people, and presents the College and schools with a particular set of challenges.

- Limited human and financial resource that can be directed to the provision of well-informed hands-on support for young people presenting learning and behavioural support needs.

- The need to invest significant time and effort in liaison with referring schools and other support agencies so that holistic support plans can be initiated and tracked.
- The need to develop the capacity of staff to understand and support the needs of young people with specific learning difficulties, disabilities and behaviour management issues.

It was recognised by school and College that the role of the College/home in supporting transition was a very valuable asset to both establishments.

The '*Keeping warm*' programme of activities during the school/College holidays played a significant role in keeping young people focused and engaged. This also ensured that they considered themselves a valued part of an educational establishment, which for many had not been the case.

The Project filled a gap in available provision for the neediest young people. Given the nature of many of the participants, the progression, retention and attainment figures are encouraging, especially for the 20 young people attending the Summer Programme, 9 enrolled on to courses at Henley College, 8 progressed in to other FE, and tracked through connexions, and one became a mother and was considering applying for parenting courses. However the 'softer' outcomes, in terms of increased self-esteem and improved behaviour and motivation are extremely significant. A unique and flexible way of working had been provided and a person-centred approach with a sensitive and caring manner had been adopted. This enabled learners to express views, opinions, and behaviour in a controlled manner and often turned negatives into a positive learning experience.

The fact that the College/Home Liaison Officer post was continued by the College illustrates the perceived impact of the role and is an excellent example of how temporary external funding can be used to trial new ways of working which can later be 'mainstreamed'. The development of a model of close partnership in assessment and tracking of young people enabled more coherent progression and appropriate support. The project confirmed the need for an integrated Transition Support service and showed the positive effects of such a service.

The project identified good practice and Information sharing through working in partnership, with a number of statutory and voluntary agencies, with the shared aim of re-engaging young people. It was recognised that understanding of and applying good practice in sharing information at an early stage was a very positive part of preventative and/or early intervention work within the project.

"There is an increasing emphasis on integrated working across services with the aim of delivering more effective intervention at an earlier stage. Early intervention aims to prevent problems escalating and increase the chances of achieving positive outcomes. In some areas there is increased use of multi-agency services". Information Sharing: Guidance for Practitioners and Managers document

The production of a School/FE transition good practice guide would help to ensure that the successful practices are shared for the benefit of all parties across the sector.