

Homefield College Case Study- Buddying



Buddying at Homefield College

[Homefield College](#) is a small, residential Independent Specialist College that provides for young people with severe and moderate learning difficulties. The majority of students are on the autism spectrum, and many have communication and behavioural problems. The college currently has 41 YPLA students and employs a total of 141 staff across the college provision.

Formal programmes run 5 days a week, 9 am -3 pm. Sessions consist of small groups of approximately 6 students run by a session leader and supporting staff as required. Extended curriculum programmes take place in the evenings and at the weekends. These include sporting and leisure activities, such as swimming and cinema, as well as structured support to develop practical independence skills such as cooking, laundry and shopping.

The session leader holds a teaching qualification and the support staff have all received internal training to support their role on areas such as effective session delivery, Makaton, and working effectively with young people with autism. As the college is residential, and therefore registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) all support staff complete an NVQ level 2 in care and some also hold additional learner support qualifications.

The majority of learning takes place out in the community and includes vocational learning delivered through a range of enterprises, some of which are based in the community and open to the public. These include animal care, woodwork, horticulture, [Sip & Surf/EBay assisted seller and internet café in Loughborough](#) and [Barrow of Treats café and sweet shop](#). Independence and daily living skills are important areas of learning for all students at the college and additional skills are embedded within programmes, such as literacy, numeracy, communication and personal development.

The LSIS resources we used:

- [Buddying Guidance](#)
- [Mentoring Guidance and associated documents](#) (mentoring presentation, mentoring agreement, mentoring log and mentoring development plan)
- [Learn & Share Guidance](#)

Buddying

- The buddying system was introduced into the induction process for new learning support staff in September 2011.
- 15 new learning support staff took part.
- In a questionnaire designed to identify impact, all those involved reported positively on the experience and felt it had been of benefit.
- The person with responsibility for buddying feels that adopting a more structured approach to supporting new staff has provided an effective framework for identifying and addressing issues and concerns quickly and professionally.
- It has helped to remove barriers and provided greater clarity for new staff about what is expected and how to access support.

The buddy also reports that she has found the experience professionally rewarding, commenting,

“I feel it is good for the people to know there is someone who is detached from their regular work, who can be easily contacted whether that is to seek advice and information or simply to off load to. Often they just need reassurance - to hear they are doing ok.”

The most significant impact has however been on retention - for the first time in a number of years **none** of the newly employed learning support staff have left.

The introduction of buddying, coupled with the changes to induction have clearly improved the experience of new staff and contributed positively to retention. As one new staff member, who initially struggled to settle into his new role commented:

“Thank you for giving me time when I was upset and I’m glad I didn’t quit my job.”

This staff member is now fully inducted and is a valuable member of the team, who is himself keen to act as buddy for future new recruits.

Critical success factors to support the effective implementation of “Buddying”

- Using the buddying guidance to help the buddy understand his/her role and to support staff to identify how the buddy would be of benefit to them.
- Giving a key person responsibility for managing the introduction and implementation of buddying and also acting as buddy
- Setting up regular meetings for new staff, both to meet together as a group and also individually with the buddy, as part of the induction process.
- Reviewing and re-writing the induction process using some key aspects of the buddying guidance document.
- Ensuring those working as buddies have core skills of empathy, a sense of humour, and the ability to share experience and develop trust so that those being supported feel able to talk openly and share confidences

Now buddying has been successfully implemented, the inducted staff are looking forward to acting as buddies to new staff.

Summary

Taking part in this project has proven highly beneficial for all the staff that took part, and for the organisation as a whole. The most evident positive outcome for the college has been the improved retention in staff, especially attributable to the buddying system. Despite the challenges facilitating time for staff to meet, the process has been very worthwhile and the college intends to continue with all three alternative approaches to CPD beyond the life of this project. Mentoring will be available not only to learning support staff but also to tutors who are either new to the role or who would benefit from mentoring as part of on-going training and development.

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