

Homefield College Case Study- Learn and Share



Learn and Share 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](#)

Learn and Share

“Learn and Share” is a professional development tool which involves bringing staff together to share practice, experience and challenges in a semi structured environment with a view to developing skills knowledge and understanding across the organisation. The staff team were keen to introduce “learn and share” and found the [guidance](#) very helpful in supporting them to implement the process. During the life of the project, the college has held 2 learn and share meetings:

Meeting 1 – The person identified to chair the meetings was chosen by the team specifically because he was perceived by staff as being approachable and enthusiastic. An agenda was put in place by the chair identifying issues that were current.

Agenda:

1. How to access key information on Databridge (the college information system)
2. Working with 1:1's key communication with handover
3. ICT room monitoring
4. Lone Working
5. Support Worker concerns
6. The whole package- Caring About
7. Key Documents when out

Minutes were taken, attendees recorded. Actions were noted which were later followed up by the relevant managers. This included a number of practical changes to operations. For example guidelines related to suitable activities for lone working were developed. It was suggested that key documents such as learner likes/dislikes were made more available in kitchens, so staff could easily check food preferences of learners with limited communication skills.

The meeting minutes were sent out to all staff and used to identify areas for discussion at future meetings. Although the meeting was aimed at learning support staff, a number of tutors attended this first meeting, some of whom had a tendency to dominate the agenda.

Meeting 2 - Drawing on lessons learned from the first meeting, the second Learn and Share session was deliberately scheduled in the holiday period when most session leaders were on annual leave. This was to ensure it was solely attended by support staff. To further facilitate support staff in contributing, a specific agenda item was used to focus discussions, i.e. specific students were discussed. Support staff were able to share experiences with confidence and identified strategies which best enable individual students to participate and learn effectively. This information was then used to review and update various documents such as behaviour plans. Staff are very positive about “Learn and Share” and clearly value the opportunity to share their views and influence practice.

The benefits from the Learn and Share meetings have been:

- A number of practical and “common sense” changes have been made to daily operations, which were simple to implement yet have resulted in smoother operational activities for both staff and students
- Staff appreciate that their suggestions have led to improvements, thus improving communication and empowering staff

- An effective forum for the collation of key information from staff that work directly with specific students, thus unlocking and recording information that can otherwise be hard to capture.
- An effective forum for quality assuring documentation and updating information for specific students as required such as behaviour plans, care plans

Although finding time for the staff team, who work a rolling rota, to meet together was challenging, it has been very worthwhile. As an organisation we have found the 'Learn and Share' meetings highly beneficial in enabling learning support staff to recognise that they are valued and important.

Critical success factors to support the implementation of "Learn and Share":

- The chair needs to be positive and passionate
- Experiment with ways of enabling less confident staff to raise their concerns. Some staff preferred to express their views and ideas within small groups and by writing down key information (on post-it notes) rather than discussing in a larger meeting setting
- Ensure that the actions generated as a result of the meetings are acted upon and well documented to underline the influence and positive impact that the support workers have on students and the organisation.

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.

Case study prepared by Vic Myko (Assistant Principal) Homefield College

March 2012