

Homefield College Case Study- Mentoring



Mentoring 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](#)

Mentoring

- Mentoring was introduced as a pilot in October 2012.
- Staff who were interested in / felt they had the potential to be a mentor attended an initial meeting at which the [LSIS presentation](#) was used to provoke a discussion around what is involved and how the process works.
- A total of 4 mentor / mentee partnerships were set up (8 staff), who then went on to meet regularly, using the [LSIS documentation](#) to record activity and support the creation of a development plan.

At first those acting as mentors lacked confidence. A manager had been appointed to oversee the pilot and she provided support. This included informal conversations as well as more formal support to complete and review documentation. Early development plans tended to focus on operational activity such as learning to drive a mini bus. Over time, the focus of mentoring has increasingly moved towards training and development, with mentees gaining the confidence to request mentor observations to help develop practice and prepare for future observations.

Feedback from those involved has been very positive, with Mentees commenting positively on the support they have received from their mentors, as this comment shows;

“I wish I had had that support when I first started.”

Critical success factors to support the implementation of “Mentoring”

- The use of the LSIS presentation at the introductory meeting to ensure staff understood the role and associated skill set.
- The use of the mentoring documentation. The college had provided mentoring informally in the past, but the paperwork provided a “ready to use” means of capturing this effectively.
- Ensuring that both mentor and mentee know each other and are comfortable with the pairings. It takes time to build the necessary trust to enable mentors to work effectively as a ‘critical friend’ and having a good starting relationship is important. Mentors were consulted about who they felt they could best mentor. For example, one mentor had reservations about mentoring a new member of staff who was considerably older than herself.
- Above all, support from management is crucial to success to facilitate the process. Staff involved in the mentoring process need to have the same working patterns, and some overtime was agreed to facilitate meetings and /or to undertake peer observation activity.

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

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