

Developing an enterprise with students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

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Summary

The aim of this project was for learners in the Bridgeway provision for learners with learning difficulties at Huntingdonshire Regional College (HRC) to be involved in developing their own plan to expand an existing enterprise project into a profit-making business. The intended outcome was for learners to develop the skills to plan, build and deliver a small business from their own enterprise work, thereby enhancing their work experience .

Key lessons learned

Working with a large cluster proved challenging when planning an event for students to deliver a joint enterprise activity.

Things to consider when building a small business:

- Finance – ensure enterprise is financially efficient
- Business Plan – from beginning of enterprise project a business plan provides guidance and supports a more effective delivery
- Branding – it is important that items can be easily recognised as College enterprise projects
- Progression route – learners to follow enterprise and extend on saleable products

Introduction

About

The clusters involved within the project were from within the Further Education Sector of the Eastern Region. The organisations involved all work with young people with a Learning Difficulty and/or Disability and for the purpose of this enterprise will draw upon those students within discrete provision. Learners across the cluster region come from differing backgrounds and communities. HRC is located in the centre of Huntingdon.

The aim was to encourage young people with learning difficulties to be included in community and work experience to empower learners to deliver business plan and progress in community and local markets to sell produce and, for all learners to develop new and existing skills.

Implementation

Planning our approach

A range of opportunities were explored, including Learners selling items inside College and making and selling craft products externally in the community. The learners designed their own business plan as part of their learning which includes planning to open a shop on the College premises to sell their craft items.

Research and planning included the following:

- Initial meetings with clusters
- Agreement that HRC should take the lead on a regional event
- Identifying clusters which were geographically a broad distance apart
- Making the decision to research on-line trading
- HRC adopting a consultative approach with learners as to how to deliver an enterprise project
- Investigating a shop outlet on College site
- Researching local market for craft stalls

What we did

- HRC staff teams have worked with MENCAP to decorate a shop environment
- Using a Business Plan, the learners in Bridgeway have created their own enterprise products. A new knitting machine was purchased for learners to make snoods, scarves and hats
- Learner response has been very positive and has provided young people with learning difficulties and/or a disability an opportunity to be included in an enterprise project which will extend their skills for work experience
- Parents responded by being very supportive of the learners' enterprise project
- The opening of the shop has been delayed due to financial restraints on providing a ramp for the entrance to the building

Outcomes and impacts

What we have achieved

Fifteen learners with learning disabilities have worked together to plan and deliver an enterprise project. They have been included in all decisions, from planning through to delivering the enterprise project. Other stakeholders in the community have supported the project and this has led to increased collaborative working with partners.

What are we taking forward

We are now planning on opening a College shop. Learners have been involved in planning, decorating and delivery of shop sessions. They will gain retail experience selling their own handmade goods and will receive a broader retail and creativity experience which may support them in employment.

The next step is to work together with the local council to deliver a market stall every month as an enterprise project for learners. Anglian Water has donated shop fittings and learners have been involved in choosing colours for the shop.

The project we are working on with learners will lead to them gaining retail and enterprise experience.

The LSIS project has given our learners the opportunity to develop their own enterprise project and enhance their creative and working practice.

What advice would we give to others

Plan at an earlier stage, with the Finance team, for the delivery of a small enterprise project to ensure the business plan and timescales are achieved for successful implementation and financial efficiency.

How are we sharing our success

We are sharing our project process and success with the region via a Cluster newsletter and our own College newsletter.

Date published: 10 June 2013

Provider names: Huntingdonshire Regional College, Bedford College, Colchester Institute, East Norfolk College, James Paget Hospital, City College, Norwich, SENSE College

Sector coverage: Further Education

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