

Case study

Personal and Social Development in Foundation Learning

Milton Keynes Christian Foundation PSD through Social Enterprise

Introduction

Milton Keynes Christian Foundation is a registered charity which was founded in 1985. It was set up as an ecumenical organisation to coordinate and add value to community projects being undertaken by a range of churches in the Milton Keynes area. It remains avowedly values-based and is inclusive of community members from all faiths and with none. Training of young people has always been a core activity and the charity currently delivers its community work through ten social enterprise projects, which also act as the context for this training. The enterprises are staffed by a mixture of employees, volunteers and trainees, and play a real part in the life of the town. The organisation was the first to provide a doorstep recycling service in Milton Keynes, a service subsequently taken on by the council.

Foundation Learning

The organisation currently has around 90 learners aged 14 to 19 and working from Entry 1 through to Level 1. Two distinct

groups exist: the extended training (ET) group, comprising learners from Milton Keynes' three pupil referral units, and the E2E group. Both groups are delivering a Foundation Learning programme. Spread across the groups are learners with moderate or severe learning difficulties or disabilities and others with motivational or engagement issues. Noting that most have a spiky profile, the organisation's director observes that, *'this is where the Foundation Learning model is very helpful.'*

During their induction week, learners spend one day completing diagnostic assessments for functional skills. This has been reduced from several days, with additional initial assessment now spread across subsequent weeks in order to minimize the amount of time spent in the classroom. Milton Keynes Christian Foundation recognises that for many of its learners, another classroom is the last place they want to be. As part of induction, learners also complete taster days in two or three of the organisation's social enterprises. These include:



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- 'Growing People' - an urban farm project
- 'Think Food' - a community catering project
- 'Community Task Force' - a project which provides painting and decorating, and small building works services
- 'Splinter Group' - an environmental furniture making project
- 'Amazing Waste' - a recycling project
- 'The It Project' - a graphic design project providing marketing and communications services.

On the basis of their induction experience, learners join a social enterprise which is most suited to their aspirations and skills. Most ET learners attend for three days a week, usually completing an eight-hour day, however modes of attendance are personalised and some attend for one, two or four days. E2E learners tend to work three to four days a week.

Curriculum

ET learners are enrolled on a National Open College Network (NOCN) post-14 Step-up qualification, with all learners working towards a generic set of core units. These are complemented by a selection of units specific to the particular social enterprise in which they work, for example some take qualifications in horticulture, design or catering. In instances where no appropriate units exist at a required level, Milton Keynes Christian Foundation writes its own qualifications which OCN validate as local units. Although these attract neither funding nor credits, they enable learners to receive recognition. One such example is a level 1 recycling unit developed for learners working on the Amazing Waste project. The organisation takes a parallel approach for its E2E learners, though these take units which lead to the achievement of a NOCN Qualification in Progression.

All vocational learning occurs in the social enterprise workplace. The introduction of Foundation Learning has brought challenges around assessment, and the recently appointed director of learning and development is working to devise new systems and to support staff to carry out observational assessments.

Some functional skills development, including preparation for functional skills tests, takes place in vocationally contextualised classroom sessions. In addition, functional skills and social enterprise staff also support functional skills development in situ, for instance helping learners with cashing up and spreadsheet activities. Specialist one-to-one support is also provided for learners who need it.

PSD programme

Milton Keynes Christian Foundation has PSD at the heart of its provision and not principally because the Foundation Learning framework requires it to be there.

The organisation believes that PSD brings opportunities to develop and accredit skills, knowledge and attitudes which are essential to the successful day-to-day operations of its social enterprises and to the growth of its learners. In the words of its director, *'The organisation exists to make a difference to the local and wider community, including the global community, and we believe that PSD will enable young people to bring about positive change in that context, and to move from being introspective and introverted to having a wider sense of responsibility and ability to make a contribution. We want to bring out their value and potential during their time with us.'*

All learners work towards NOCN units, for example Level 1 customer service, Level 1 personal budgeting and money management, and Level 1 health and safety awareness in a working environment.

The organisation's director of learning and development explains how the work context drives the learning, rather than the requirements of the qualifications: *'Working through social enterprise doesn't have the same curriculum restrictions as an academic course. A large amount of personal and social development takes place during daily interaction, as of necessity, considering the needs of our learners. Although, of course, funding is important to our viability, PSD is central to what we do and is driven by our learners' needs, rather than by funding.'*

Each learner attends regular meetings with a social enterprise employee to set and review personal development targets as part of their personal development plan. An in-house behaviour support team, which takes a solution-based, coaching/mentoring approach, is available to provide one-to-one support.

Progression

Most learners progress to further education, mainly to land-based or catering courses. Once on a programme, it is sometimes found that their experiences at Milton Keynes Christian Foundation have equipped them with higher than anticipated practical skills. One Entry 3 learner who progressed to a catering course at college, was moved onto year two of the programme after a couple of weeks.

Another learner was taken on as a trainee by Raymond Blanc, after Blanc had sourced vegetables from the urban farm, and met learners from both the urban farm and community catering projects.

Summary

Key successes have been:

- The social enterprise model provides a meaningful and effective vehicle for PSD and the development of vocational learning and functional skills
- PSD provides a good fit with the values of the organisation
- Clients of the various social enterprises often express surprise that the person dealing with them is a trainee rather than a full-time employee
- The organisation is finding Foundation Learning flexible and responsive to the spiky profile of learners.

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