

Job coaching and peer mentoring for independent life and work skills



Background

This project is delivering a personalised programme of transition support based on individual learner needs and transition from school to college into adult life. Gateshead Council, Dryden School, Gateshead College, Dilston College and Voiceworks (Gateshead Council's community based work experience programme) are working together to support a group of learners with learning disabilities and autism. The work focuses on a joint planning and delivery study programme that supports learners and their parents and carers through the transitional period of leaving school and progressing into college and training.

Learners are engaged in a person-centred curriculum at Gateshead College based on Foundation learning areas of vocational studies, personal and social development and functional skills. This is supported by a block week residential programme at Dilston College at the start of the course focusing on independent living and work skills. This is followed by a second block week residential programme at Dilston College mid way through the course that builds on the learners' person centred curriculum and further develops independent living and work skills. Job coaching support is a key feature of both the residentials and is built into the college programme, preparing learners for work experience placements arranged through Gateshead Council's Voiceworks.

This project gives learners access to local provision. They will gain skills and experiences relevant to independent living and learning. Building on each learner's transition plan, a scheme of transition activities has been developed and delivered in the residential block weeks at Dilston College and in small blocks of community based learning activity, depending upon individual need. Feedback from learners to date about of this programme has been very positive.

Independent life and work skills

The dual support system offered within Dilston and Gateshead Colleges' person centred curriculum shows how joint planning and co-delivery improves the academic, work and social skills of learners, the latter two being of real importance when learners are moving into the wider area of job searching and independent living skills. Learners also benefit from specialist support in their local area which promotes independent travel, local community knowledge and employment opportunities, aspects learners see as invaluable when looking at progression opportunities after college.

Job coaching and work placements

As part of the person centred college programme, learners are encouraged to think about future career aspirations and take part in a work placement to support the achievement of long term goals. Job coaches work with learners and support them as they plan and apply for placements. These placements enhance and develop the learners' employability and focus on skills such as punctuality, appropriate dress and personal responsibility. Learners receive regular feedback from job coaches and this is used to support them in their applications for work. The vocational learning choices offered through the person

centred college programme are supported by an extensive work placement provision that uses a wide range of local employers. These include placements for kitchen porters, cafe staff, leisure attendants, car valet, shop assistants, conservation and outdoor staff, farm hands, kennel staff, nursing home staff, nursery assistants, stable hands, laundry assistants, teaching assistants, customer service workers and office receptionists.

Peer mentoring

This project is unique in Gateshead in setting up a peer mentoring programme involving college learners as peer mentors working with current Yr11 pupils at Dryden School. The peer mentoring programme is part of the cluster's transitional planning model with peer mentors helping Yr11 pupils (and their parents) to make informed decisions about curriculum options available for September 2013. It also involves an overnight stay at Dilston College for Dryden School's Yr11 pupils with a two day programme based upon independent living skills involving peer mentors. The results of this pilot have been very positive and mirror the success of the residential independent living block weeks and work skills programme that the Gateshead College learners have undertaken.

This model will be rolled out for future Yr11 cohorts at Dryden School with peer mentors being involved in supporting transition into college and training.

Opportunities and challenges

This project aimed to raise expectations of learners to develop independent living skills for adult life. Throughout the course, learners have been given ample opportunity to complete tasks and work towards targets to improve and build on skills learned. Future planning based on positive life outcomes in housing, employment and community participation are also part of the programme.

For external stakeholders this project is building on the work being completed via the Gateshead College partnership and the success of the work placement scheme is being enhanced by the involvement of trained and experienced job coaching staff from Dilston College.

The benefits for learners of functioning within a real living environment during the residential block weeks is invaluable, as it enables tutors and job coaches to assess the level of need per learner in terms of support required for work placements and general life skills including independent travel. Learners are gaining an awareness of living outside of their family/carer home.

This model is a new model of working between GFE and an ISP in the Gateshead region and its effectiveness will be measured by the sharing of good practice amongst the cluster and local partners and stakeholders.