

Supporting learners into employment



Established in August 2010, MINT is the City College Norwich's entry-level employment agency specifically for young people, aged between 16 and 25, who face barriers to employment; this may be a learning difficulty or disability, mental health problems or low academic skills. The unique and flexible service seeks to provide all young people with supported opportunities to move into sustainable, paid employment.

Providing certain criteria are met (age, currently not in education, training or employment, with a barrier to employment but motivated to access paid work) a referral form is completed by a professional referrer and signed by the applicant to enable the highly personalised service to begin.

Building relationships with employers, MINT markets the benefits to the employer in terms of optimum use of resources in filling entry-level vacancies: zero-cost marketing and recruitment and on-going support and training for the new employee; an attractive proposition for employers seeking to reduce costs and minimise staff churn. MINT actively searches for suitable job openings and, once a suitable employer/client match is made, works with the employers and the young person to help train and support them in their new job. The list of employers actively involved with MINT is diverse in terms of industry and size of turnover; there are large, national companies and small local businesses.

MINT uses a job coaching model providing support for up to 8 weeks alongside the young person in the workplace. A technique of *Training in Systematic Instruction (TSI)* is followed whereby each job is broken down into its core tasks, duties and responsibilities with steps for skills development and mastery clearly laid down. The approach is personalised to each young person's abilities, for example by using pictures with clients who may find written instructions difficult to follow. Further support is available for as long as is deemed necessary.

Based in an easily accessible Norwich city centre venue, *The Forum*, with a nearby training suite, MINT prepares young people by developing their employability skills, such as job-search, CV and application drafting, personal presentation and interview skills. Support is also available for travel training. 6 - 12 week pre-employment projects, which involve a combination of classroom-based learning and 10 hours per week work experience with local employers, also help prepare young people for the world of work and provide skills essential in the competitive interview process. Once a paid job is achieved coaching is on-going to ensure that employment is sustained.

MINT works in partnership with other relevant organisations to whom clients may be referred for information, additional support and guidance, such as housing or financial matters.

MINT follows a structured recipe for success: job coaches contact employers and secure interviews; often for work placements that ease the young person into the world of work. Job coaches provide a high level of practical and emotional support; the aim being to provide a successful transition into sustainable employment.

Employers also view MINT very positively as helping them to fill their vacancies with hard working, capable young people. Employers acknowledge that all new employees will require support and MINT can provide that in a specifically tailored way.

MINT has its own website which is bright and informative and explains how young people are supported to find and sustain paid employment and also demonstrates the benefits to employers in using MINT to fill their entry level jobs.

Strengths of MINT include its professional marketing and its targeted approach to employers with entry-level jobs. It sells the benefits of this programme/service to employers as well as to young people and provides practical solutions to challenges and issues historically associated with this client group. Social media such as Twitter is used to further promote engagement across clients and employers.

Success for this programme is good in terms of numbers into paid employment. MINT successfully placed 37 into employment in its first year and currently has placed 90 motivated young people into sustainable employment; a better than 50% success rate. Relationships with employers continue to prosper which can only be positive for future applicants to the programme.

