

THEME Getting Young People into Work

Other themes referenced in this work: Collaborative working / Learner Voice

Salford Cluster NORTH WEST REGION

Cluster group Oakwood Academy Salford
Fujitsu UK & Ireland
Oasis Academy MediaCityUK Salford
Irlam & Cadishead Sixth Form College Salford

‘Open for Business’ Oakwood Community Shop

Background

Oakwood Academy is a secondary day special school catering for pupils 11-16 with a range of complex learning difficulties. It is a barrier free school and takes pupils with different types of physical disabilities. The school has Arts, Technology and Sports Specialist Status.

Project Summary

Oakwood Academy is very keen to broaden the opportunities for young people and forge links that will allow transition to the world of work and college placements. The academy works hard to give the pupils experiences of the world of work, but it has always been a challenge to find suitable placements for students. For this project Oakwood Specialist Academy worked in collaboration with Oasis media UK Academy, a mainstream 11-16 school in Salford.

It was decided to open a ‘pop up’ shop within the Lowry Retail Outlet (<http://www.lowryoutlet.co.uk/>) at Salford Quays for a week 5 Day work experience opportunities for less independent students. The target group were young people with complex learning difficulties, who are recognised as having poor goal setting skills and low aspirations. Oasis Academy provided resources for the shop and identified 6 peer mentors to work beside Oakwood students and assist them in their learning. The aim of the project was to allow Year 10 pupils to experience the world of work and build confidence and employability skills in a real life situation. None of the pupils taking part had ever been involved in this type of learning as they were perceived to not have the skills to work in such an independent setting. This project took young people and staff out of their comfort zone. Nothing could have prepared the academy for what the young people achieved and the success of the shop as a social enterprise.

Project Aims

- To raise the aspirations around employment
- To move the curriculum into a real working environment
- To addressing concerns by both employers young people
- To challenge assumptions and create a positive approach to employing disabled employees

- To challenge pupils' low expectations and raise aspirations
- To help shape the curriculum for future post 16 provision
- To increase awareness of job options for pupils
- To identify and build employability skills
- To raise pupils' aspiration and confidence
- To forge sustainable links with local employers and give Year 10 and 11 students regular experiences of work.

The Process

As part of a consultation process Oakwood Academy parents were all asked to complete a questionnaire. The results included:

- All but one thought there was not enough provision for pupils with SEN within the local area.
- Parents / carers felt there needed to be strong links between employers.
- Clear progression routes and goals need to be drawn up at an early stage to give the young person the best chance of a fulfilling career.
- A significant number of parents / carers felt there wasn't enough Post -16 choice for their children within the LA
- 100% of parents /carers also felt the need for work experience / placements and employability skills were essential skills.
- All felt that Work is important, because it provides finance and independence, related to personal dignity and self-esteem

The pupils at Oakwood approached the management at the Lowry Outlet to ask if it would be possible to create a classroom within the food hall. This is part of the 21st century classroom approach. The thinking behind the project was it would give the pupils a safe environment to work in but also giving the pupils access to local businesses. They gained familiarity with the staff at the Lowry and through the discrete lessons within the food hall the pupils could go off to complete questionnaires with the employees as part of their course work.



Oakwood Academy was then offered access to a unit within the Lowry Outlet at Salford Quays to give students the opportunity to gain real experience of dealing with the public in a safe environment. The shop was given free of charge.

For this project the Academy teamed up with Oasis Academy MediaCityUK Salford. Prior to the shop week Oakwood students visited the outlet centre on a regular basis over a few months, using the centre as a classroom and workbase. Students met with shop staff, became accustomed to the hustle and bustle of the retail environment and researched how they would use the shop premises.

The students from Oasis played a fully supportive role throughout. Four students from their Year 10 Peer Mentoring scheme joined the project. Their role was to help as much as possible to set up the shop and, to serve and encourage the students to serve customers and interact with each other and customers. The Oasis staff and students created a marketing strategy targeting local media paper.

All students were involved in the setting up of the shop, some of the tasks were, giving out leaflets to the general public to increase footfall in the shop, helping to unpack and display goods, assisting customers with enquiries, making sales, dressing the windows and replenishing stock when and where necessary.

Thirteen Year Ten Students from Oakwood and four students from Oasis Academy MediaCityUK Salford made up the full team working in the shop at the Outlet.

Achievements

Getting People Into Work

As a social enterprise the shop was a roaring success. Merchandise flew off the shelves and everything was sold. The students had full control of the shop, they discussed the price of the merchandise and also how they would like the shop window to look. As soon as the clothes were sold from the mannequins in the window the team would pick other eye-catching outfits and re style to window. It was so good to see the pupils working as a team, they picked some great outfits and excelled when dealing with the customers.

The shop was very popular with customers.....



'More shops like this are needed, a good idea-good for them!'

'Excellent community spirit involving retail and social skills!'

'Much more exciting than the other shops, We would definitely come all the time. Loved it, not enough charity/recycling shops locally!'

'Can they stay forever!'

'Very good, the pupils have done a great job, the pupils were very polite, helpful and well mannered. It's a great thing for the community.'

Both Oakwood and Oasis students learnt valuable employability skills and experienced independence.

'I had a good time at the shop. I handed out leaflets to people passing by". I liked going to buy my own lunch.' **Riley Oakwood Academy**

The Lowry Outlet Shop and Inspirations days gave the students an insight into the world of work, gaining the right employability skills needed to gain a job.

Feedback from the students at Oasis academy.....

PEER MENTORS' PERFECT DAY'

Recently, the Learning Mentors at Oasis Academy took a group of Year 10 Peer Mentor students to The Lowry Outlet Mall on Salford Quays where they met up with students from Oakwood Academy. Oakwood had kindly been given a unit in the Lowry Outlet Mall for a week in order to get retail experience in selling to the public. Here they managed to sell lots of things that people had given them like books, bags, shoes and toys. The meeting of Oasis and Oakwood resulted in a collaboration between the two groups; developing social skills, social interaction and understanding. The students at Oakwood enjoyed the experience very much with Oakwood expressing their excitement at forthcoming plans on being able to open a retail unit on Eccles precinct in a years' time, which will hopefully be open for sales every Friday. Altogether the day was a very positive experience for all Oasis and Oakwood students involved!



Report by Aimee Louise Reynolds Yr 8 Oasis Academy

"I am on the Peer Mentoring scheme at Oasis and we take part in a number of different projects/fundraisers. This project involved us going to the Lowry and helping out with students from Oakwood Academy in their shop. I enjoyed sorting out the items to sell, even though I felt a bit nervous before because I haven't served in a shop before. After I had been there a while, I really enjoyed it and hope that we can get a shop on another precinct so we can go for work experience. I think it was a good idea because it gave us and the Oakwood students a real taste of what working in a shop would be like."

Gemma Wagstaffe, Peer Mentor, Oasis Academy MediacityUK



"When we were told that we had been picked to help with the Oakwood project I was really excited because I love the Lowry Outlet Mall. The students from Oakwood were lovely to work with and I was really impressed by how happy they were to be working in the shop. They all worked really hard and I think it was a great success. I hope we can work with them again in the future because they were all very friendly and happy. I hope they liked us too."

Jenny Hart, Peer Mentor, Oasis Academy MediacityUK

"We do quite a bit of fundraising for charity on the Peer Mentoring scheme within school, but this is the first time we have had a project that involved us going to a different venue. I was a bit scared at first because I wasn't sure if I would be confident enough to sell in a shop, but after a bit, I saw how well the Oakwood students were doing and I was able to join in. I would love to do some more work with them in the future and I hope to work in the new shop with them again next year. I was surprised how much I enjoyed working in a retail outlet and would consider this as a career, whereas before I had not thought about that as a career."

Lauren Kaye, Peer Mentor, Oasis Academy MediacityUK

"I loved working in the Lowry outlet. I loved working with the students from Oakwood. I think that this should be a regular thing so that people can see what it is like to be in a real shop experience at an early age. Working with the students from Oakwood was also great. I am thinking about working with children as a career and working with these students has reinforced by desire to have a career in a school environment. I hope that the new shop opens up and that we can go again in year 11 to have some work experience there."

Jodie Kelsall, Peer Mentor, Oasis Academy MediacityUK

Collaborative Working

'I have been delighted with the collaboration between Oasis Academy MediacityUK and Oakwood School during 2012/13.

Oasis Year 10 Peer Mentors have benefited greatly from working with younger Oakwood students throughout the year. In June 2013, Oakwood School had access to a retail unit in Lowry Outlet Mall our students assisted Oakwood students within the shop. This provided a real experience in a retail environment for both sets of students.

A major outcome of the partnership has been the raising of aspirations for the Oakwood students. It has enabled the exploring of their hopes and fears for the future and demonstrated to themselves them that things they thought may not be possible, are possible. We have been delighted to participate in the collaboration, which is a great representation of our students exemplifying the academy vision & Oasis ethos.'

Patrick Ottley-O'Connor Principal Oasis Academy MediacityUK



'We were delighted to be invited to join the LSIS project alongside Oakwood Academy. We selected some of our year 10 students who are Peer Mentors to work alongside younger students from Oakwood. The students visited the retail outlet on the Lowry Mall and interacted with Oakwood students, members of staff and customers. I have to say that everybody involved in this project thoroughly enjoyed every minute and it was wonderful to see the support the general public gave to the 'pop-up community shop'. Although it was tiring, it was well worth while and I know our students can't wait to go to the proposed shop in Eccles for work experience.

This was an example of how intergenerational projects can excel and all the students, from Oakwood and Oasis, were a credit to their academies. Full credit must go to Liz Cappell who worked tirelessly to ensure the success of the enterprise.'

Joyce Blackburn, Learning Mentor, Oasis Academy MediacityUK

'The LSIS project has been the catalyst to develop an outstanding work experience and transition programme within Oakwood Academy. Through excellent partnership work from Oakwood, Connexions Salford, Fujitsu and Irlam & Cadishead Academy we have built a legacy to ensure that Oakwood students with learning difficulties and disabilities will have access to a wide range of employment opportunities and feel better informed of vocational options as they move towards adulthood.'

David O'Sullivan Personal Advisor Salford Connexions

Key Learning Points

Employers are wary of taking on pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Some of the reasons that possibly put off employers are a lack of knowledge of SEN students and health and safety issues in the work place. This project has allayed many of the fears and barriers.

The Oasis Academy students have received a valuable insight into the difficulties some students have to overcome to ensure they can achieve their full potential once they leave school. They no longer take it for granted that transition is easy for some students. It made them put themselves in the places of the Oakwood students and made them understand how what they take for granted is not the case with every young person.



What advice would we give to others?

- Don't be afraid to ask employees for help, the best way is in person.
- Partner up with other schools; use each other's resources and contacts.
- Invite the potential employers into school to dispel any misconceptions of working with pupils with learning difficulties.
- Use your existing employers as good practice models to encourage other companies to become involved. The inspiration days are a perfect place to start as they are easy for the company to set up and deliver, in a safe environment.

What we are taking forward

Because the project was so successful, it has been decided that the experience and opportunities must not be allowed to go to waste. Oakwood Specialist Academy worked in collaboration with Oasis Academy. Discussions are in place to create a more permanent shop on another precinct (possibly Eccles) and it is hoped that this outlet would be open all year round giving a valuable opportunity for students, staff and volunteers to gain experience and work skills. The outlet at the Lowry would still be kept as a one off pop up shop opportunity each year.

'I was so impressed with this project between Oasis Academy and Oakwood Academy. I think both academies took things away with them that will be of enormous use in the coming years and we trail blazed the way things will be done in the future. This was all about inclusion and participation and was lovely to see in action. Both sets of students worked well and enjoyed the project and, speaking from the Oasis side, I know that the students are keen to repeat this experience. I sincerely hope that Oakwood can persuade Eccles Council to give them an outlet on their precinct and if we can help in any way whatsoever, we certainly will. A whole number of different avenues to explore have now branched off this initial project and the future is looking very exciting. A big thank you has to be extended to Liz Cappell and her sterling work in bringing all this about.'

Maria Hall, Learning Mentor, Oasis Academy MediacityUK

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David O'Sullivan Personal Advisor Salford Connexions

Oakwood Academy is responding to the need to start with the pupils from year 7 to engage and inspire them when considering their thoughts for the future. Giving the pupils aspirations early on will give the pupils goal to work towards especially when they are picking their options.

Advice and guidance has been given to students within Oakwood from year nine but the thinking is to catch the pupils imaginations from the beginning of their high school life. This will be done by inviting in guest speakers from different career roles into school to talk about their jobs, taking pupils out into the work place. Through starting early the pupils will have clear and realistic ideas of the job opportunities and the pathways they need to follow to achieve their goals.

Resources & information to support this work

- Case Study Report
- Customer feedback report PPT

Documents and resources linked to this work are available to download at www.oakwoodhighschool.co.uk or by contacting cluster members.

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