

## PRD project – case study

Building effective practice in partnership working to support young adults (18- 24) to progress to employment, including apprenticeships



### **Project title – Knowsley Family And Community Education In Partnership with Connexions 'My Time' Programme**

#### **Worth reading if you are interested in:**

Collaborative working with partners to devise a programme of learning/training. Sharing project approach findings with different partnerships as a collaborative peer review and development activity.

#### **Contact information**

##### **Participating organisation(s):**

Family And Community Education Service (adult education provider), Merseyside Connexions Service (referral partner for learners) and the Learn Together Partnership (PRD group made up of nine North West Local Authority Adult Education Services) were the key participating organisations.

### **What the PRD group set out to do and why**

#### **Background**

NEET in Knowsley remains a high priority in despite substantial intervention methods to reduce the levels of young people not in education, employment or training. There is concern that there is now a higher proportion of learners becoming unemployed between the ages of 18 and 24 with approximately 100 new clients being interviewed each month.

Funding was secured through LSIS to support a research project to determine if adult education provision or collaborative activities with agencies such as Connexions can impact on reducing NEET. The findings of this project will be disseminated across the wider sector. The key aims of the LSIS project funding were to:

- Engage with and develop partnerships with key local stakeholder to widen breadth and experience of PRD Group, and use this wider PRD group to undertake a focused review of providers' priorities, strategies and provision for the 18+ NEET cohort.
- Review and develop integrated plans to engage the 18+ NEET cohort in

education and training to support sustained progression into employment including apprenticeships, for example: using learning or community champions/ambassadors/mentors/buddies through community outreach.

Family And Community Education Service (Adult Education Provider), Merseyside Connexions Service (referral partner for learners) and the Learn Together Partnership (PRD group made up of nine North West Local Authority Adult Education Services) were the key participating organisations who set out to look at ways to improve the educational experience of young people through a wrap around programme of activity, focussing specifically on numeracy, literacy, digital skills, including employability skills. This programme was initially referred to as Your Programme in the original submission but renamed 'My Time' by NEET Young People.

In addition to the LSIS funding to provide support to look at partnership working, Family And Community Education secured additional Skills Funding Agency monies to deliver a bespoke programme for a cohort of 25 x18- to 24-year-old NEET. Family And Community Education (FACE) has a history of good relations with Connexions through a 14-19 NEET Strategy group and following initial discussions it was agreed to work on a collaborative basis to deliver the pilot programme.

A programme was designed (namely My Time) using key principles underpinning a successful Activity Agreement pilot delivered by Merseyside Connexions Service in 2009/2010. This programme successfully supported 16- to 17-year-old NEET and provided a range of incentives and programmes to engage/re-engage young people who had been NEET for 20 weeks into appropriate learning and work.

### **What we wanted to achieve**

#### **'My Time' Project aims**

The key aims of the project 'My Time' underpinned the LSIS project funding. These aims were to:

- Work collaboratively with Connexions to devise the right programme of learning/training in response to needs using the principles underpinning an old activity agreement.
- Share project approach findings with different partnerships as a collaborative peer review and development activity.

#### **Project objectives:**

- Work collaboratively with Knowsley Connexions Service on the 'My Time Activity Programme' to re-engage vulnerable NEET/unemployed young people, by designing, developing and delivering a personally negotiated 'activity agreement' programme around the education/training needs to support successful transition into pre-employment opportunities.
- Through a series of task group meetings between FACE and Connexions, monitor recruitment to the programme and check content/providers for delivery.
- Monitor the cohort of NEET learners on the programme to gather more information about their needs, aspirations, effectiveness of the programme,

planned destinations and actual destinations (over a period of agreed time).

- Research the intensity, costs, resources, time progression, outcome, other support necessary to determine if the average spend allocated to NEET learner is efficient/value for money.
- Identify if there are any barriers preventing NEET 19-24 LDD engagement.
- Identify a mentor-type person in FACE for the young people.
- Share findings of the research, discussion and feedback from NEET learner focus groups with members of the Learn Together Partnership Adult Education Network, North West LEAFA (23 North West Local Authority Adult Learning Services).
- Use the basis of this research/approach to hopefully influence decision makers in future funding allocations as well as to ensure future bespoke programmes can meet NEET learners' needs and support progression to employment.
- Highlight the potential impact that adult learning provision (accredited or non-accredited) can have on reducing NEET for the right learner.
- Produce a mini Step by Step Guide or Toolkit of helpful hints and tips on how an adult learning service can impact positively on reducing NEET.

### **What we did**

Knowsley Family And Community Education along with Connexions initially agreed who would best lead/deliver on specific parts of a programme but also agreed that young people be involved in the design to sustain engagement and motivation. Two core members of staff were identified to work on planning the programme based on understanding the needs of those being targeted to participate. FACE identified a mentor-type person who was not linked to any other service/agency that the young person may be involved with.

A series of monthly task group meetings between FACE and Connexions were set up to monitor recruitment to the programme and check content/providers for delivery. However, staff roles and responsibilities were revised during the early stages and it was agreed that the FACE staff member would lead on the programme to avoid duplication and ensure consistency when planning the programme to meet the needs of the young people.

A total of 54 enquiries were referred via Connexions/self referrals, (12 male, 42 Female, 4 of whom had pre-school children). There was no personal knowledge of the cohort prior to the programme commencing.

- 48 enquiries received from the Kirkby area.
- 3 enquiries received from the Huyton area.
- 1 enquiry received from the Halewood area.
- 2 enquiries received from the Prescot/Whiston area.

Communication methods in response of the initial enquiries consisted of letters, emails and follow up phone contact. The young people were then invited to attend a

series of scheduled induction meetings carried out at Kirkby Connexions, Whiston Library, Mackets Education Centre and 'Our Place' community facility, Huyton. A total of 24 young people attended scheduled induction meetings with further letters and follow up telephone conversations undertaken with those who did not attend.

Out of the total 54 enquiries, responses received were as follows:

- 1 already attending college.
- 3 found employment whilst just starting the programme.
- 2 already had employability trade and appropriate qualifications.
- 2 declined the programme due to personal demands for taxis as transport. Travel passes were offered as an alternative.
- 1 did not meet the eligibility criteria – out of area.
- 1 engaged on the work-programme - a series of discussions took place followed by written confirmation with Jobcentre Plus. Following approval to the 'My Time' programme the young person confirmed that they were no longer interested in attending. Jobcentre Plus were informed of this decision.
- 1 young person was unable to attend the programme as they were already registered with Ingeus.
- 27- no response to communication methods.
- 16 NEET 18-24 engaged on the 'My Time' Activity Programme (3 Male, 13 Female). Of the 13 female, 4 were young mums and vulnerable NEETs. None of the other remaining participants disclosed vulnerable categories, eg mental health, and Connexions did not have this data. However, it was apparent early on that all of the participants could be categorised within the Connexions broader definition of vulnerable NEET (re. substance misuse, youth offenders, mental health, including LLDD) but the young people needed to feel safe and secure before opening up any personal issues/dialogue with the 'mentor'.

### **Activity Agreement**

Individual discussions were carried out between the 16 learners to negotiate the programme design best suited to their needs. All were fully informed of the project aims and that their commitment was crucial in the success of the programme. Group meetings were carried out to discuss and agree the programme title and sign up to the 'My Time' Activity programme. 42% (5) young people were more adept to learning and 2 had previously gained numeracy/literacy qualifications. 58% (7) young people identified themselves as 'failures' with no prior achievement and low aspirations. 8% (1) registered LLDD. Additional resources were implemented to support this young person who was dyslexic.

### **Programme Activity**

NEET learners were offered the following options on the programme:

- In-fill into existing Numeracy and Literacy classes across Kirkby, Huyton, and Halewood.
- Daytime and evening time provision available to widen accessibility.
- Childcare and travel support to access a digital skills course based at Mackets Education Centre at Halewood due to lack of IT resources within the Kirkby area.
- Additional numeracy and literacy support available two days per week at Tower Hill Community Centre, Kirkby.
- Incentives to complete the 'My Time' programme. Eg learners attending an acrylic nails course who completed a minimum of two qualifications received Associated Beauty Therapist insurance to deliver a service within the community.
- One learner was scheduled to undertake forklift truck training, however the delivery partner ceased to trade. This resulted in an alternative option to undertake work placement at Knowsley Housing Trust via Connexions.

The demands with regards to when and where the activities were delivered were met with additional support including:

- additional tutor support;
- childcare;
- travel and transport available throughout the programme;
- intensive one-to-one support from a mentor;
- significant amount of handholding/reassurance.

It became clear that young people require a quick gain and that it will be easy for them, but they need high levels of support and encouragement including incentives otherwise their interest, motivation and staying power quickly wane.

### **Review of relationship with partners**

Sustaining enthusiasm within the partnerships and securing commitment proved to be inconsistent. It became evident that prior discussions with key partner agencies could have resulted in a clearer understanding of the programme aims and objectives. Clear identified roles and responsibilities would have developed stronger collaborative partnership working.

### **Connexions**

Partnership arrangements were slow to develop due to the re-organisation of the Connexions service and a re-organisation of their internal staff. It was soon realised that Connexions were not the correct first partner choice as their remit is to engage

and support **16- to 18-year-old** NEETs. Registration of LLDD 19-24 NEET/Unemployed young people at Connexions is by **choice**. Therefore, the project engaged a limited cohort. With hindsight, it would have been more productive to have worked with Adult Social Services when targeting the LLDD cohort. Partner discussions were undertaken with the following:

### **Jobcentre Plus**

Periodically, discussions with Jobcentre Plus advisors working with 19- to 24-year-old unemployed young people were undertaken to agree the attendance of the young person involved. Jobcentre Plus is potentially best placed to have supported the engagement of young people accessing the programme, and is the key agent to work collaboratively with FACE on the project.

### **Ingeus**

Discussions with Ingeus advisors confirmed that once a young person became attached to the work programme they were unable to release them onto an alternative programme.

### **Knowsley Employers**

A local Neighbourhood Network group chaired by Rev. Malcolm Rogers recognises the key role a local business park plays in the local economy in Knowsley. They wanted to create links with employers on the business park to see if there are employment and/or training opportunities for local people with these local employers. The idea for a business breakfast was developed and conversation with some local businesses took place, attended by the My Time programme lead and the 'mentor'. Discussion ensued with three local employers: Director of Locker Freight; Director of HTL Transport and Director of Mellwood Construction who all agreed to participate in the 'My Time' programme. They agreed to share with young people key issues identified by employers which impacted on recruitment and retention of employees, as highlighted below:

- lack of basic communication skills (making telephone calls, speaking with clients)
- Interpersonal skills;
- combating 'alternative economy';
- life skills (getting out of bed, work ethic);
- unrealistic expectations – wage levels etc.;
- access to training.

Three months into the programme it was decided the timing was not right to bring employers and young people together to discuss employer needs, due to the erratic availability of the young people as well not at all being 'job ready'.

### **Voluntary Sector Training Providers**

Fork Lift Truck training for one young person was arranged with a local voluntary sector provider. However, the organisation ceased trading, which impacted on programme delivery.

### **Private Trainers**

Strong links were developed with the North West Training Academy identified to deliver activities identified by the young people.

### **Eldonians – Liverpool**

Initial discussions were undertaken to develop potential working links. Following a number of enquires this was not progressed.

### **Learn Together Partnership**

This partnership was identified within the project in order that research activity and findings could be shared with other similar adult learning providers as a peer review and development group. A Learn Together Partnership (LTP) exists in the North West comprising nine Local Authorities (mainly Directors of Children’s Services). An Adult Education Manager’s Group sits within the partnership structure whose remit is to facilitate the exchange of best practice, seek out funding, align strategy/plans with delivery, provide peer support, work jointly on collaborative activities in the development of education and to draw up proposals to secure future sustainable funding. This LSIS project activity has been shared regularly with the LTP, with final reporting scheduled for September. Knowsley is the only adult education provider on this partnership who was fortunate enough to access additional SFA funding for delivery and also LSIS funding for research and development of appropriate partnerships.

### **North West LEAFEA Network**

This partnership was also identified within the project in order that a wider dissemination of project activity and findings could be shared. This network consists of 23 North West Local Authorities, of whom three are delivering activity for the NEET cohort. Face-to-face, email and telephone discussions took place to share ideas, approaches and experiences – all necessary to support further involvement of adult education providers in working with those NEET.

### **Knowsley 14-19 Partnership**

A key group exists in Knowsley made up of strategic decision makers involved in 14-19 Education. Dissemination of this project is scheduled to take place; however sensitivity has to be given to the detail provided around the effectiveness of some of the relationships with partners. There is high level interest in this project and the findings from both the research and activity.

### **Communication with young people**

Attempts to contact the young people via letters/emails on a regular basis failed, as they were unread and/or unanswered. Feedback from the young people confirmed that they “didn’t do letters” and “didn’t often check emails”.

Texting on mobile phones appeared to be the most effective way of communicating 7 days per week between 7am-10pm with the young people. Telephone calls would go unanswered if they didn’t recognise the number or if made before noon. As mentor to the young people, more frequent early morning texting took place to develop job ready qualities (ie ‘Just getting up out of bed’). This proved to be extremely time consuming but at the same time a good method of monitoring participation and backup for recording information. However, on a number of occasions young people failed to inform when contact numbers were changed!

Initially the programme experienced very high levels of non-attendance at pre-

arranged meetings, including those young people who were committed to the programme.

Excuses provided for non-attendance included:

- didn't get the phone/text message;
- didn't receive the letter/email;
- lost my Phone/number changed;
- no credit on mobile phone;
- could not afford the taxi fare to the meeting place;
- overslept;
- went to the gym;
- no response.

Meeting the needs of the individual learners presented further challenges. The following is not an exhaustive list:

- unrealistic expectations - job prospects with high levels of salary were high priority without the appropriate levels of education, skills and effort required to deliver.;
- life Skills – getting out of bed!
- inappropriate language during the teaching sessions;
- use of mobile phones;
- racist language;
- attitudes to tutors;
- homelessness;
- family relationships;
- lack of childcare support;
- personal relationships;
- friendships;
- mental health issues;
- childcare/young mums;
- fear of moving outside local area to other parts of the Borough.

A number of challenges identified were personal to the young person and accessing



support without interference or judgement was important to them. Guidance-suggested options for support or just a 'sounding off board' were received positively and appreciatively. This opened the door to discuss inappropriate behaviour, language and attitudes in a non-threatening manner and raise awareness of the impact that actions have on other people. This approach also gained the trust and respect of the young people which was a two-way relationship.

Tutors delivering the courses reported an improvement in behaviour, but it did not prove successful when encouraging the young people to turn off their mobile phones whilst in class.

58% (7) of the young people required intense 'hand holding' throughout the lifetime of the programme, confidence levels appeared to be good to the public eye, however they demonstrated extreme levels of low confidence when engaged in the learning and would become defensive when unable to cope in certain situations.

## **What has been achieved so far**

The following information provides insight to the overall learner outcomes.

### **Statistical Information**

Of the original 16 NEET/Unemployed young people engaged on the 'My Time' programme, the following statistical information confirms:

#### **25% withdrawals (4)**

- 1 enrolled onto a college course.
- 1 removed from programme.
- 2 left for personal reasons.

#### **75% (12) Retention of which 100% achievement**

Of the 12 on programme:

- 92% (11) achieved Numeracy accreditation at Entry, Level 1 or Level 2.
- 67% (8) achieved Literacy accreditation at Entry, Level 1 or Level 2.
- 67% (8) achieved Digital Skills accreditation at Entry Level.
- 42% (5) completed a Make-up certified course.
- 58% (7) completed an Acrylic Nails certified course.
- 8% (1) engaged in an Art activity.

Also of the 12:

- 33% (4) achieved 5 separate learning aims.
- 25% (3) achieved 3 separate learning aims.
- 16% (2) achieved 2 separate learning aims.
- 16% (2) achieved 2 separate learning aims.
- 8% (1) achieved 1 learning aim.

### **Progress/next steps for NEET young people**

- 1 learner (LLDD) now engaged onto a two-year full-time collaborative programme (Knowsley Meadow Brook project) and will undertake European Computer Driving Licence computer course in September with the Family And Community Education Service on a part-time evening basis.
- 1 has applied to study Music at university.
- 2 enrolling at Knowsley Community College to study Beauty.
- 1 – to continue with education to become an electrician.
- 2 – planning to volunteer with FACE to undertake community education research.
- 1 undertaking work placement with Knowsley Housing Trust via Connexions service.
- 4 not yet sure what they want to do but the 'mentor' is in constant touch to keep their 'next steps' on the radar.

### **What we learned**

- Evaluation of the programme confirmed that overall success of 75% appeared good, benchmark this to national accredited success rates using Connexions data, any retention above 50% would be considered outstanding.
- Ideally it would have been useful to introduce some 'quick wins' incentives from the start of the programme.
- Designing and developing a programme of activity around the individual needs is very time consuming and allocating only one day a week is insufficient.
- To provide effective one-to-one support with a manageable staff ratio requires a minimum of three days per week.
- Direct marketing and recruitment to the 'My Time' programme including initial assessment to determine suitability and eligibility for the 'My Time' programme.
- Partnership is more closely aligned to the Jobcentre Plus service and not Connexions.
- Make clear from outset expected behaviours and commitment to reduce the unrealistic expectations that young people have.

### **What still needs to be done**

## Resources to be shared with the sector

Four Case studies – attached.

## Key learning points

**Partnership Working:** It became apparent throughout the project that partnerships needed to be established with other key agencies such as Jobcentre Plus and Adult Social Services. Experience working with Connexions for this project identified many gaps in important information gathering and sharing which delayed opportunities for some young people as well as misled others who had been wrongly referred.

**Using a mentor to engage with NEET Cohort:** Honesty, transparency and a clear understanding of issues directly affecting young people whilst demonstrating a non-judgemental attitude was paramount when delivering on the 'My Time' programme. Mentoring the young people at the start was a key factor to successful engagement and retention, especially during the programme activity negotiations when open discussions took place. It was interesting to discover that 42% (5) lied about having qualifications, which was openly admitted and confirmed during the diagnostic testing process.

Relationships were developed on the basis of '**we are all in this together**'. Maintaining confidence and motivation was paramount throughout the 'My Time' programme and one-to-one support was crucial in sustaining the interest and retention of the young people.

A quick turnaround of programmed activity with high levels of resources over a period of four weeks proved successful in achieving positive outcomes for a few young people with less complex needs.

Overall learner evaluation highlighted that the 'mentor' was instrumental in keeping the momentum going and supported the success of the learners.

### **Key essential factors required to 'get it right' from the very start are:**

- The key partnership to be established for this age group of NEET is with Jobcentre Plus.
- Another partner to collaborate with is Adult Social Services to identify 18- to 24-year-old LLDD.
- Have clear vision and understanding of the programme aims and objectives.
- Agree 'buy in' from key partner agencies to ensure consistency.
- Agree eligibility criteria and adhere to this.
- Agree roles, responsibilities and processes so everyone knows what is expected from them.
- Agree learner-staff ratios as well as identify the right person to undertake a mentor/buddy role for young people.
- Have starting dates agreed for any programme for 18-14 NEET rather than roll on/roll off.

In summary, Adult Learning providers can offer and provide an enriching experience for NEET Young People which can be enhanced and quickened if effective and

successful partnerships can be established with the most appropriate agencies.

## Case studies

### Female 1

#### **Aged 21**

Lives at home with her parents, attended All Saints, Kirkby, left with no qualifications. She initially stated that she did not have the capability to achieve accreditation. However, after successfully completing and achieving her chosen five learning aims, she felt that this is a massive step forward to securing future job opportunities.

**“This time last year I wouldn’t have achieved as much as I have this year, having a dedicated person keeping me on track throughout the programme has been really useful. I wouldn’t have got level 2 Maths and English. Originally I wanted to do acrylic nails but now I feel inspired to do more and gaining the qualifications has given me the confidence to volunteer with Knowsley FACE by helping to carry out research in the Kirkby community, identifying the importance of education and the opportunities to learn”**

#### **Mentor Observation:**

Undisclosed issues.

Boyfriend recently released from prison, this young person turned up to class drunk early on in the programme this was not repeated. She has grown throughout the ‘My Time’ programme and does demonstrate potential. With the right guidance and support in place to motivate her she could become a good ambassador for young people in learning.

### Female 2

#### **Aged 19**

Lives at home with her parents, attended Alt Bridge, left with no qualifications. Diagnosed with dyslexia after joining the ‘My Time’ activity programme four weeks prior to the end of the pilot. After implementing an intensive programme of support with one-to-one guidance successfully achieved accreditation in her three chosen learning aims: numeracy, literacy and digital skills and will be continuing with her studies in September 2012 attending an ECDL course.

**“I can’t believe I’ve done so much and achieved it in 4 weeks! I have loved it. I didn’t think I could do it because I wasn’t good at school. It has made a difference in my confidence and Sandra was there when I needed her, everyone has been very friendly”**

#### **Mentor Observation:**

Diagnosed Dyslexic but not known until diagnostic testing took place.

High levels of motivation and commitment to the ‘My Time’ programme were demonstrated.

Attended class three hours prior to scheduled admission into hospital for an operation, stayed in overnight and attended course the next morning.

Most positive young person the ‘My Time’ programme.

### Female 3

#### Aged 20

Lives at home with her parents, attended All Saints School, Kirkby. Originally completed an apprenticeship in hairdressing but has not been able to find work and is not very confident. She stated that she was very happy that she attended the 'My Time' programme.

**“Now I have more qualifications which will help me with the career I would like to do, having Sandra there was useful, she kept us informed about the programme and reminded us about the classes. I now plan to volunteer with Sandra researching the educational needs of the Kirkby community**

#### **Mentor Observation:**

This young person demonstrated significant improvement in motivation and confidence throughout the 'My Time' programme. Overcoming the challenge to get out of bed earlier in the morning was achieved. Being more adept to learning she appeared to enjoy the learning and overcame the challenge of getting out of bed earlier. This young person recognised her potential and is now looking to volunteer but incentives may be required to sustain engagement.

### Female 4

#### Aged 19

A single parent living in Kirkby, attended Kirkby Centre for Learning, and left school with no qualifications. Described as a 'non-stayer' in education, Toni demonstrated very low confidence levels and poor attitude. She received additional childcare and travel support to undertake part of her study and successfully achieved accreditation/certification in her chosen five learning aims. Toni has not yet decided what she wants to do next? However, during discussions Toni stated that she will continue with her education.

**“Because Sandra has constantly been in touch with me throughout the programme and I've been able to call her any time has been good. I didn't want to let her down. I wouldn't have done the digital skills if the childcare and transport hadn't been available.”**

#### **Mentor Observation**

This young lady required significant reassurance throughout the programme. She demonstrated poor behaviour and attitude at times to mask very low personal self-esteem and confidence.

Overall a really nice young person who, with the right guidance, support and mentoring could progress onto further opportunities.