

national transition support team

working together to improve transition
for disabled young people

Case Study: Thurrock – experiencing the work place.

Introduction

Providing disabled young people with the skills and experience to make a positive step into work.

Overview

This case study looks at providing an opportunity for disabled young people in Thurrock to experience opportunities to take steps into employment. These opportunities include training, volunteering and work experience that would offer skills and CV development and hopefully lead to paid employment.

Main transferable learning points

- Schools need to ensure their curriculum prepares young people for work by offering skills training and meaningful positive work experience
- Strong links between schools and colleges need to be developed to ensure continuity for learners and prevent repetition of courses
- Developing the work market can be challenging and can be done alongside a programme of awareness raising to maximize chances for success

Introduction to Thurrock

Thurrock is to the East of London on the north bank of the River Thames. We have a diverse population of approximately 150,000 people (this is expected to rise to 166,000+ by 2021) made up of people from many ethnic origins, religions and countries. To the north we have scattered rural communities with a semi-urban population to the south, over half of Thurrock is green belt land with a mixture of new and old industries.

Thurrock has a younger age profile than the national picture, 20% under age 15, 12% aged 15 to 24. 970 children (2.4% of 0 to 19 population) have a statement of special educational needs; a further 1958 children (4.9% of 0 to 19 population) are on school action plus; and 3071 children (7.5% of 0 to 19 population) are on school action. There are currently 228 people aged 13-25 'in transition'

Background

Introduction to the case study

This case study focuses on our project to support disabled young people interested in experiencing the workplace through a volunteering opportunity as a route through to employment. The project was undertaken in partnership with **Thurrock Independence Resource Centre** a user led organisation which provides a range of advice, advocacy and others services to disabled residents to give them choice and control.

In 2010/11 the number of disabled young people aged 18 to 25 who entered employment was 24 (20 paid full time; 3 paid part time; 1 voluntary). In Thurrock we were aware that not all our young people leaving full time education went into employment and that potentially in an area of economic depression even fewer would enter paid employment in the foreseeable future. The project focussed on giving young people the opportunity to experience a work environment, supported as necessary, in time-limited voluntary activities as part of their transition into adulthood. As well as preparing individuals for potential paid employment the wider aim of the project was to build confidence and self esteem, encourage young people to make a positive contribution to their CV and in many circumstances make a tangible contribution to their own communities.

The project aimed to provide person centred support and opportunities for young (18 to 25 year olds) disabled people to undertake a fixed period of work experience as a volunteer. A work placement would be between 10 to 12 weeks with hours determined by an individual's assessment. The project aimed to have placed 20 young people into positions by 31 March 2011, make sustainable links with employers and have an action plan for sustainability after 31 March 2011.

In the event, some 15 young adults have undertaken the training and work experience with a noticeable change in some as they have visibly grown in self confidence. The training of learning disabled young people as they move from school to the adult world has been highlighted during this project as being crucial, even more so with local and national changes to post 19 college provision.

Aims and Objectives

What were we trying to achieve?

- Give young people an opportunity to undertake work experience in a volunteering capacity.
- Support young people through training sessions to stretch their thinking, self expression, confidence and knowledge to begin to promote within them a sense of choice and control over their own lives.

- Introduce young people to employers.
- Introduce employers to young people with a disability to help them understand the contribution that these young people can make to the local workforce and community.
- Identify employers who would be willing to employ young people after full time education and who would participate in the volunteering opportunity in 2011/12.
- Secure employment for young people.
- To assist young adults to be better prepared for adult life, and specifically in the areas of life choices and control.

What benefits were we hoping for?

- Raising the profile of young people who needed support into employment.
- Giving young people an opportunity to participate in work experience with appropriate support.
- Encourage young people to believe in themselves.
- Show employers that young people with a disability have much to offer the local workforce and wider community.
- Increase employment opportunities
- Helping young people to recognise their capabilities and achievements.
- Assisting young people to understand that they have choice and control over their lives.
- Helping young people to understand how events in their lives have shaped them, and to explore what sort of path they would want for themselves in the future, and what they need to do to get there.
- Educating young people as to the range of life choices they have, and the types of support that might be available to help them achieve them.

What are our long term goals?

Our short term objective for this project was to

better prepare young people in transition for entry into the adult environment and specifically into the world of work. We also took the opportunity to better understand the attitudes and aspirations of current young adults in the context of work.

The project team have had a number of years of direct experience in providing person centred planning and work experience to people with a learning disability of all ages, but were surprised that not all the young people were prepared for the workplace, and some also had very limited aspirations.

Traditional routes to life skills courses and vocational training have been through the post 19 college route, but there are a number of young people who may not be considered capable of undertaking this particular route and have therefore missed out. Additionally, within Thurrock and its neighbouring boroughs, there are changes to supported learning courses that will impact on this group of young people and we wanted to consider, as part of the project, how third sector providers may be able to offer support in this area.

The outcome of the project has identified that there are still gaps in “life and work readiness” training for young people with learning disabilities, and the proposal will be to work with special schools to find solutions that address a range of priorities such as pastoral care/national curriculum requirements/ risk taking and experimenting alongside the need for preparation for their journey into the “world of work”.

Approach

Project brief

Sourcing Volunteers - mapping exercise to identify young people who want to take part in the project.

Work with schools, Connexions and parents to identify 20 volunteers aged between 18 to 25 years.

Identifying needs of young people -

Interview to assess young people to establish their interests, abilities and aspirations in order to compose a profile of the young person as well as identify specific support requirements.

Work opportunities - identify and vet potential employers.

Preparation - provide accredited training for young people on a range of topics including health and safety, time keeping, appearance etc.

Support and supervision - link young people and employers and agree contract, support and monitor placement regularly. The level of support will differ for each young person.

Completion – young people will receive a certificate of their achievement, advice on CV completion, support young people with next steps, evaluate project, agree action plan for continuation and sustainability of project post 31 March 2011.

Timeline and milestones

April to May 2010 – draft project specification, approach providers, appoint provider to undertake project, draft work plan.

June 2010 (planned) – promotional material published, talk to young people’s groups about project, advertise for young people to take part in the project, promotion campaign to generate placement opportunities, workplace opportunities vetted.

July/August (planned) – initial volunteer candidates identified and interviewed, placement opportunities identified/inspected and placement sponsor agreements drafted, Job/PA buddies briefed, volunteers receive appropriate training.

August 2010 (planned) – second tranche of volunteers identified, volunteer interviews completed.

April to August 2010 – Delays to the scoping, bidding and funding process meant a revised short-cut process was undertaken in the recruitment phase. As a result, the target for numbers was reduced and the Special Schools (with their Connexions Advisor) were focused upon to short circuit the process.

September 2010 – first tranche of placements begin with group sessions for eight weeks.

October/November 2010 – first tranche of

placements begin with individual placements for 10 weeks.

December 2010 - Second tranche of volunteers identified, volunteer interviews completed, Job/PA buddies briefed, volunteers receive appropriate training.

Jan to March 2011 – First tranche of placements debriefed, certificates awarded and CV's issued.

Who were the key people involved on both a strategic and operational level;

Adult Social Care, Children's Service, Transition Steering group, Learning Disability Partnership Board, Provider, Employers.

How was the project financed?

TDP funding

Who was the target group of young people?

Young people who met the DDA description of disability/young people who have difficulty in finding employment.

How was the project managed?

Day to day operation undertaken by Thurrock Independence Resource Centre and overseen by Service Manager, LD Service, Adult Social Care

Project overseen by Transition Steering Group

How was the project delivered?

The equal value/no assumptions approach

From the start no assumptions were made about the young people. The providers deliberately knew little of the candidate's background or skills and did not want to know what others thought of them. The young people would be treated as valued individuals in their own right and would spend the first few weeks focusing on their perceptions, their views and their wishes. Only after this had been completed was the type of placement identified that would give maximum benefit to the young person.

Interestingly, when asked what they expected from the course most young people thought that they were going to *"find out about work"*. Other comments were *"to learn about the world of work; to gain work experience; it was on my time table; to learn about independence; to go*

and get a job; I hope to gain confidence; want the exercise; to find out about different jobs."

Based on the independent living principles, it was explained that they needed to explore their experiences to date and how these had shaped who they were now. Once we had an idea of how they saw themselves, then we would help them to look at whom and where they wanted to be in the future and finally we would help them plan how to get there.

Group Sessions

A number of techniques were used to explore what would work best - PowerPoint presentations, flip charting views and comments, using cuttings from magazines to illustrate their work and providing various coloured pens and pencils to write with. The power point presentations were written in simple English with illustrations. It was felt it important to introduce the young people to the kind of corporate training environment used with older adults.

Each participant had a dedicated file which they personalised for copies of presentations and other work they did themselves and an A3 pad for the creative work we asked them to prepare.

All could be relied upon to bring their records week on week. Photographs and videos of themselves were used in sessions. A number of mock interviews were practiced; and everyone individually presented to the group. We had memory games and worked sometimes as individuals or in pairs or, table groups.

Each day candidates had to complete a quiz at lunchtime which necessitated them going out and finding out about a range of things and report back to the group. As not all were able to read the questions, they paired up to carry out this task.

By taking the above approach it helped us to discover where their strengths lay. The young people were also asked to think about what "disabled them" and to consider how they were treated because of the "disabled labels", which many had not appreciated. Sessions then went on to look at individual's rights in the workplace

and discrimination.

Practical tests were used to illustrate skills and accomplishments; illustratively the candidates were asked to help plan and host an open day to which over 100 members of the public attended.

Work experience placements

Initial interviews to explore preferred work types was not successful because the young people were not assertive or forthcoming about their needs and preferences that they had begun to identify; they were rather too acquiescent and the interviews were stilted and formulaic and did not value their thoughts. They were videoed and the young people taken through the interviews to show them how they had performed and how they could do better.

Placements were eventually found mainly with a mix of voluntary and commercial organisations – working with materials sorting, helping at a second hand furniture refurbishment factory, working in the grounds of a visitors' centre, assisting in an office – and one young man was placed with a wheelchair user who needed help at home.

The clients' views

At the beginning of the last session a structure for a brief statement was supplied to individuals to present to the rest of the group about their work experience. Everyone was able to stand up and talk in a confident way about:

- The number of days they had worked,
- The best thing about the work,
- The place they were in, the people they worked with and the jobs they did,
- The one thing that surprised them about the placement and,
- The one thing they learned from it.

It was immediately clear that some had made a substantial step forward in the level of their self confidence and ability to engage.

We videoed the speeches, and one young

person spoke of a four day experience of which the best thing was going shopping with the wheelchair user they were supporting. He said that he and his charge had made up a "complete person" and that he had learnt new skills which he did not think he was capable of. At least two people were surprised that they enjoyed working. Another said that they had learned to do things on their own. One person had done the same placement work before, said nothing was a surprise and they learned nothing new but when they spoke, and wrote, about the experience we saw a distinct change for the better.

When we asked more general questions about the whole experience it seemed more difficult for them to articulate, or perhaps remember their impressions of what they had done, even though we had to remind them of the course content. Not everyone was able to find an answer to all of the questions.

First we asked about the training

What did you enjoy most?	Learning new information; meeting people; cutting and pasting helped me say things; working in the kitchen at the event; the Powwow event in the theatre; the games to get along with each other.
What was most useful?	Planning & helping the open day tasks; learning about assumptions; the tasks we did at the open day; explanations/ stuff/power point; socialising; about what rights I have as a disabled person.
What did you learn that was new?	What I can do in the future for a job; to talk to people; I learnt about setting goals; I learnt self confidence: possibilities of effort; learning and thinking; dealing with boredom.
Were there any problems/challenges?	I have got a positive control over my life instead of a negative one; control of my behaviour; we could have a few more videos; be more patient.
How did you overcome them?	Thinking I can do things in life like a job; do things on my own, try to listen; I should try not to stress; wait before speaking.

Then we asked about the work experience

Did you enjoy yourself?	Yes I did enjoy the work experience
What was most enjoyable?	Shopping, how an office business works; making a new friend.
Was there anything you did not like?	Weeding
What did you do about it?	Did it anyway
How has this experience helped you?	To have an experience in a different place; be patient with harder tasks

Finally, we asked if there was anything else they would like to say

<p>“That I have really enjoyed what I have learnt over the weeks”</p> <p>“The training and work experience was great”</p> <p>“I don’t have to worry about labels”</p> <p>“Its been fun – taught me a few things”</p> <p>“You guys are very understanding – always happy to come here on a Friday!”</p> <p>“You treated me like an equal, not disabled”</p>
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Challenges

Recruitment

- In order to secure a viable cohort, it was decided to link into the Special Schools. This worked well in achieving a quick route to a single group of individuals who already knew each other and avoided individuals having to get to know each other. The converse was that it meant new entrants from other potential channels were excluded from joining.
- Whilst this undoubtedly limited the intake into this programme, others referred from other sources were accommodated within other programmes run by the service providers.
- It has been clear that a material gap in preparing school leavers for the adult world exists; a point acknowledged by the schools themselves. This course provided a vital bridge that could be expanded further.

Content

- It is important to understand what has taken place in the way of training etc previously to avoid duplication and overlap.
- Our assumption proved too optimistic in terms of training received.
- Better liaison with the schools on work already covered or not would be helpful.

Placements

- As always, placing adults with learning disabilities into work experience is always a challenge, even for a relatively short term period.
- In the event, we were able to place everyone but invariably attitudinal barriers continue to be an obstacle.
- Better awareness and support from government at all levels, both monetarily to be able to provide better supervision, and by way of endorsement and publicity, and also logistically by providing placements.

Successes

- The individual outcomes for each young person taking part in the project, i.e. meeting new people, learning about the world of work, setting goals for themselves, raising their expectations and aspirations.
- The training programme that empowered young people to think about things that they wanted to achieve rather than what they had been told to expect.
- The positive feedback from the young people about their work experiences.
- Raising the profile of these young people with local employers.
- Local employers and representatives from the Council participating in the project and working together to ensure sustainability of such a programme in the future.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the programme has been a success in achieving its objectives, and no question that training of this nature is needed. As mentioned above, there is a material gap in the preparation of these young adults for entering the adult world and employment. Individuals moving from the highly pastoral and curriculum focus of the schools into the adult world is a hard enough challenge for any young adult, let alone one with a learning disability.

Currently one of the main local colleges is withdrawing courses suitable for these young people that would offer them life skills training. The young people, families, schools, local authority and providers are looking for ways to fill the gap that will be left. This project has provided evidence that this or something similar is needed for the future generations of young people with a disability in Thurrock and that there are alternative ways to provide what has

traditionally been provided by colleges.

Key issues and principles

- *Be clear on objectives (be realistic). Making individuals more work ready does not get them jobs. The focus should be on enabling the individuals; don't try to convert every business at once. People are more often limited by their aspirations (often formed by others), or lack of them, rather than their capabilities.*

Barriers

- *Have the assets to deliver. Experienced trainers must understand and work to the social model of disability.*
- *Work in groups for economy, but small enough to be able to adapt to individuals.*
- *Keep advocating amongst businesses, there are good people out there – find them. Challenge discrimination, but don't use the clients as weapons (you will set them up to fail, or someone else will).*
- *Don't use schools or colleges for group sessions – this is an adult world, use adult environments.*
- *Encourage risk taking (within reason!), trust individuals and their capabilities, just keep them safe.*

How to turn it into good practice

- *Create links to the schools; build the course together*
- *Get to know your clients as individuals; make no assumptions*
- *Help them to explore the future choices, but let them make them.*
- *Make sure you have enough supervision and assistance.*

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National Transition Support Team (NTST)

NTST is working alongside the National Strategies and the Child Health and Maternity Partnership to coordinate the delivery of the Transition Support Programme.

NTST is based at the Council for Disabled Children (CDC), the umbrella body for the disabled children's sector in England. CDC is hosted by NCB. www.ncb.org.uk/cdc

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