

Napier Homecare Services

New insights and shared experiences

This project crossed generations and brought together care staff and students with learning disabilities in joint activities training. It involved community events with older local people and Napier's clients, all of whom benefited from the input of both students and staff in ways that were not anticipated.

Background

Ruth Jackson, project lead from Napier Homecare Services has always been keen to provide new and stimulating activities for older people across Blackpool. One example of this is the formation of a community event, held every Friday afternoon, where speakers from different clubs and organisations in the community come to the centre and entertain the older clients.

Ruth invited a group of students with learning disabilities from a local specialist school, High Furlong School, to come to a community event and talk about their lives and studies. These students were on the bridge of making the difficult transition between children and adult services and, from a life-changing perspective, between school and the potential world of work. The visit went down so well – with students gaining in confidence from a new social activity and with the clients evidently enjoying the occasion – that Ruth decided to take the interaction between her staff, the community group and students to a different level for the benefit of them all.

She subsequently planned a non-traditional staff development project which brought together:

- an element of activities training and also study for a qualification in Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) carried out jointly by staff and the young students with learning disabilities, and
- an element of work-shadowing for her staff at the young people's school

What we wanted to achieve

The overall aim was to develop the skills, confidence and experience of both the students and the staff by bringing each party into the other's work or study environment and by fostering one-to-one and group relationships that would be new for everyone involved. The project was planned so that:

- students would take part in the conduct of activity sessions provided for older clients at the weekly community events. They would be supported as necessary by staff and would gain new experiences of the world outside their family lives and classroom groups. They would also gain sufficient confidence and skill to lead the delivery of these activities while their new experience and their training towards a qualification would strengthen their CVs and help towards their employability
- staff would gain a deeper understanding of how to live, work and communicate with people with learning disabilities and would learn directly from the teachers at High Furlong School through a programme of work-shadowing

- the community events would be enriched and enlivened by the young students introducing different activities and ideas at the community events

What we did

Napier Homecare set about creating a 'team effect' involving students, staff, teachers and Napier management learning to be flexible as to whom they worked with, what they could achieve and how they could learn from each other individually and in team roles.

Six students from the school and six members of staff from Napier Homecare were selected for the programme. Students and staff trained together on an activities training course based at Napier Homecare. They also trained together towards a PTLLS qualification and all training was independently assessed.

Another important part of the programme was the work-shadowing, for which care staff visited the school to shadow teachers and learn directly from them about how to engage and communicate effectively with the students.

Each Friday, dependent on their availability, students visited the Community Centre where they developed increasingly friendly and happy relationships with clients and introduced a diverse range of activities.

The students proved to be extremely attentive to the clients. At the outset they learned client names in an exemplary way and, with permission, took their photographs. It was soon clear that everyone was having a good time.

According to Ruth Jackson, "Clients were particularly impressed by the students' IT skills – a subject well supported by their school – such as finding speedy answers to quiz questions through the use of their smartphones to access the internet. Occasionally this approach caused raised eyebrows by some clients who did not have an IT-wizard in their group."

What we achieved

All the aims considered by Ruth and Napier Homecare management for this project were achieved, in particular the rich benefits of gaining an understanding of each other's experience, work environments, ways of working and lifestyle needs. Because this was not a traditional classroom-led workforce development project but one that focused on relationship-building and new experience in so many ways, it is possible that long-lasting beneficial changes will result.

"This is particularly the case," says Ruth, "where confidence is concerned. We already see more confidence in the staff about interacting easily and usefully with people who have learning disabilities. This enables Napier to think about our own capabilities and to promote these to diverse clients in the future. Feedback from teachers and parents testify to a real growth in the confidence of the students. We have seen this in various ways, including for example, real improvements in the students' ability to sit still and concentrate when we have other speakers at community events. Initially, some found it hard to do this but gradually they listened more and more attentively and even asked questions."

“Clients really looked forward to the arrival of the students and took part in all sorts of activities led by them, from wheelchair curling and bowling to quizzes.”

Ruth Jackson, Project Lead

As a result of the interactive development programme, both students and staff also gained from the PTTLS and activities training – particularly by doing this together. This developed their confidence, skill and creativity in conducting activities sessions which was an important part of forging happy relationships with clients. “What was so refreshing,” Ruth comments, “was the ideas and challenges that uninhibited young people brought to the community events. I wouldn’t have imagined it possible to do curling or bowls in wheelchairs and even more difficult to get clients to take part. But the students achieved that.”

Added to this, the students had a substantial skills training qualification and solid experience of a working environment to add to their CVs.

The students continue to visit and take an active part in the community events much to the delight of the clients. “At the same time they have learned about some hard realities. Two of our ladies died during the project period; many young people have no experience of death among people they know or relate to closely. The students were saddened but reacted well and even sent condolences to the families.”

What we learnt

The best kind of learning is that of trying something entirely new which not only achieves the outcomes intended but adds a number of important values.

One such value is the sustainability of the programme which is demonstrated in two ways. The first is that workforce development in the care sector is about the relationships of everyone concerned. It is not just about one party gaining important skills to improve capabilities and knowledge for the short and long term, but also about insights into each other as people dealing as best they can with their daily lives. Whereas traditional and advanced methods of teaching and learning – and fashions and philosophies of training – change continually, the essentials of learning to live well and respect each other are constant.

Another mark of the project’s sustainability concerns work-shadowing. Ruth Jackson reports that the staff’s work-shadowing programme with teachers at High Furlong School was so successful

that Napier is embedding this approach in other areas of its workforce development. For example, a member of staff expressed a particular interest in end-of-life care so Napier Homecare arranged a work-shadowing placement in the local hospice.

Another lesson and unanticipated result of the project lies in the partnership between the school and Napier Homecare. The teachers, management and parents at the school learned that by bringing organisations with quite distinct agendas together it is amazing what can be achieved. This project opened doors of potential for other such partnerships.

“The biggest lesson was the importance of risk-taking – to get out and try something completely new and possibly daring. I had little idea at the outset how bringing together older people, care staff and students with learning disabilities would work. I am delighted with the results”

Ruth Jackson, Project Lead

For more information please contact

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Skills for Care Recommends

This innovative project was a relatively new area for Skills for Care to support. Whilst we have not developed any directly related resources, you may be interested in the following;

Community Skills Development

We have a range of resources, which include case studies which demonstrate the learning from the programme, and practical tools to embed community skills development.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/communityskills

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