



South West London
Academic, Health and Social Care
 System

Case Studies- Series 3

Enhancing Employability Skills for Young People with Learning Disabilities

In 2012, in response to a decline in job prospects for young people with learning disabilities, St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust launched its supported internship programme, Project SEARCH. Last year the project was given a further boost when SWLS funded an 'employability skills rubric' to evaluate and guide trainees' development, and increase their chances of securing paid work.

In 2014-15 only 6% of people with a learning difficulty were in some form of paid employment. *

Project Search is a much needed international initiative for 18-24 year olds with learning difficulties; delivered in south west London by St George's Hospital, in partnership with Mitcham's Cricket Green School, and Action on Disability. The year-long programme combines work placements, employment advice, and on-site classes; and has led to some real success stories. But the team still felt there was scope to improve.



"As a mentor I felt that whilst I couldn't guarantee my trainee a job at the end of their work experience with us, I had a real responsibility, and opportunity, to enhance their employability. And to do that we needed some way to identify, evaluate, and develop those specific skills."

Annette Bygraves, Work Experience Team, St George's Hospital Universities NHS Foundation Trust

'Making best practice accepted practice'

Researching the Rubric

After a successful bid for SWLS funding in September 2015, the team began gathering research data to inform their evaluation tool. They studied learning disabilities and employability skills in-depth online, looked at NHS jobs across various bands to map out specifications and competencies, and also interviewed Project SEARCH mentors, managers, trainees, and trainees' families, from previous years to assess the impact of the scheme.

By February the first pilot version of new evaluation tool, comprising four stages and nineteen skill sets, was ready and swiftly put to the test assessing and supporting that year's cohort during their last two work placements. But the rubric was just the start.

Building in an Iterative Approach

"During the pilot phase it became apparent that it would be good to involve mentors and parents in the reflection on, and recording of progress, so we wanted to devise a way for them to be engaged."

Annie Brine, Project SEARCH Co-ordinator, Cricket Green School

In order to fulfil this need, the team provided mentors, trainees, and parents with Professional Development Logs to fill in; each with specific guidance notes. This constant feedback has enabled the team to repeatedly fine-tune and

improve the rubric; creating eleven versions in six months.

The research phase also led to additional benefits. Discussions with past mentors and parents provided enough helpful advice about encouraging employability skills to develop Mentor to Mentor Packs and Parent & Carer Packs for future intakes.

Improving Employment Prospects

"Although SWLS's funding has ended it has had an enormous impact. It's helped both us and our trainees be clear about our accountabilities and has provided a framework for continuous quality improvement; learn, develop, evolve."

Annette Bygraves, Work Experience Team, St George's Hospital Universities NHS Foundation Trust

In terms of disseminating their work Annette and her colleagues recently delivered a masterclass to job coaches and other interested parties. They have also just started sharing their findings with other organisations in the UK and Europe for educational and employment purposes.

But most importantly, four of last year's six trainees who used the rubric have now found paid employment, some within St George's, some at external organisations; one has secured a place on the Prince's Trust programme and another continues to work with their local employment team to explore further employment opportunities.

"I believe the visual evidence of growth we're now providing really strengthens a young person's sense of self belief, and enables them to feel more powerful about taking that next step into employment."

Using baseline assessments with the new cohort is already enabling staff to identify strengths and formulate specific, individual areas for development.

* <http://base-uk.org/information-commissioners/key-facts-and-data>

Small Grants, Lasting Impact

Small Grants is a programme that supports collaborative projects across academic, health and social care sectors. This is a unique programme in south west London, helping to promote innovation that could potentially be of great benefit for the population of the area and even beyond.

Could your idea be one of our next Small Grants beneficiaries? To find out more about SWLS Small Grants funding [click here](#)



@SWLSsystem



GCAHSN@sgul.ac.uk



www.swlondonsystem.org
