

Preparing vulnerable young people for employment – Developing Initiatives for Support in the Community

URN: 51535

Region: North East

Remit: Further education and skills

Provider background

[Developing Initiatives for Support in the Community \(DISC\)](#) is an independent charity based in County Durham. It supports disadvantaged and excluded communities and works to ensure that all its clients realise their potential. It provides specialist services for:

- housing support
- drug and alcohol recovery
- children and families
- employment
- health.

The organisation is made up of eight service delivery units. Education services are located within the health young people and families (HYPF) delivery unit.

Brief description

This good practice example shows how DISC provides an education and training programme aimed at particularly vulnerable young learners to enable them to develop independent living skills and get ready to begin an apprenticeship, take further courses or start work.

The success of the programme is a reflection of the high levels of personal support from DISC staff and a curriculum that incorporates high quality work experience.

The good practice in detail

Learners taking courses at DISC have complex histories of school refusal, low levels of educational attainment, low self-esteem or disruptive behaviour. They work in small groups with teaching and support staff who challenge and support them to review their barriers to learning and success. Alongside very well-structured teaching over 26 weeks, learners benefit greatly from counselling and guidance to prepare for adulthood and develop skills for independence and emotional resilience.

The passion and commitment of all stakeholders through well-developed partnership arrangements, including the highly effective use of the complementary expertise and knowledge of advisers and support workers, secure very high quality training and outcomes for all learners. A very large majority of learners make exceptional progress, achieve challenging learning goals and gain valuable qualifications; most go on to find employment, begin further training or enter higher-level education. Retention and attendance rates are very high because learners enjoy learning and find their experiences at DISC particularly stimulating and very rewarding.

A shared vision to realise potential

The partnership between HYPF, other DISC delivery units and external stakeholders such as schools, the local authority, careers advice and guidance, and counselling and support services is exceptionally strong. All agencies share the same vision for excellence and ensure that they work as a team to review how they can provide appropriate support and direction to meet the needs of individual young people.

Initial assessment

Tutors and support staff carry out detailed [initial assessments](#) and then use them well to plan [individualised learning experiences](#) for each learner. Many learners arrive having withdrawn from college or from an apprenticeship owing to poor behaviour. Initial assessment sets clear boundaries, expectations and support pathways for learners that help them to get back on track.

Targets set at initial assessment are monitored every six weeks in [review sessions](#). Learners and tutors also use a [self-assessment grid](#) to monitor the progress that learners make. Staff involve parents and carers at every stage and the parents and carers comment that they notice the difference that this makes. They value the support and feedback they get about the changes in attitude, behaviour and progress that young people make.

One-to-one support

Through well-structured one-to-one support and guidance sessions, learners are able to talk about things that trouble them and 'let off steam' so that they can take part in their learning more effectively.

Weekly one-to-one sessions enable learners to:

- review the behaviours they need to manage better so they can function in an adult world, such as:
 - anger
 - panic attacks
 - loss of confidence
 - punctuality
 - swearing

- identify other agencies and support networks to deal with issues such as:
 - housing
 - finance
 - sexuality
 - gender identity.

These one-to-one sessions are timetabled throughout the week, but the young people know that they can request one at any time. For many of the learners, ad hoc conversations help to modify their behaviour and deal with issues that are troubling them. A request may not lead to an immediate support and guidance session, but learners say that things get better just because they know that session is coming up.

Links with other providers

Managers work closely with the local authority to ensure that their provision aligns with the local area education and care plan for young people with a clear focus on transition. For some young people, partnerships with local schools ensure that they have better access to further education and training. Future developments, through youth employment initiative funding, will enable learners to benefit from access to supported internships.

This means that learners benefit greatly from a 'wraparound' service that deals effectively with social, financial, accommodation and emotional support. They are therefore able to attend classes.

Focusing on the individual

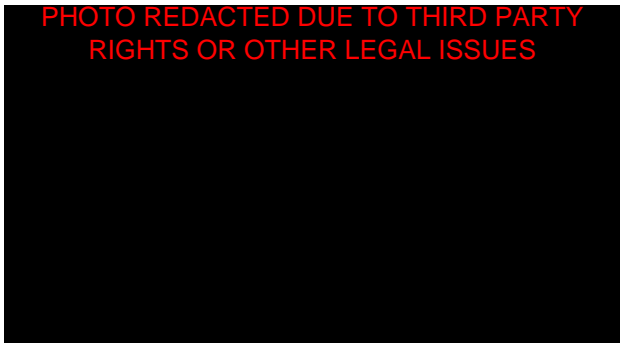
Everyone focuses on the development and achievement of individual learners. Although learners are taught in classes and small groups, highly individualised learning plans ensure that the particular needs and aspirations of each young person are met. One learner, for example, had additional support in IT and computing to develop the knowledge and skills he needed to get work experience before moving onto an apprenticeship.

Targets for development focus on things that learners need to achieve or change, both quickly and over a longer period.

Learners can do this by giving and receiving gift tags to express their thoughts and targets concisely or by using spider-grams.

These 'messages' help teachers, support workers and learners measure progress and set new targets through regular reviews that challenge learners to think about:

- what they have achieved
- what they have overcome
- their future aspirations
- the barriers they face in making further improvement.



Supporting learners into employment

All DISC education and training programmes include a period of work experience that young people begin when they are ready, often started with support and supervision that reduce over time as learners gain confidence and skills, such as planning independent travel.

These work experiences include placements in local cafes, administration, animal care, NHS IT support, game-keeping, childcare, adult day services and retail.

DISC arranges extra support and supervision for learners with additional or high-level needs. This means that many learners develop valuable work skills that help them to extend their learning or begin an apprenticeship. One learner explains:

'My work experience has really helped me. Before, I was shy and had real problems turning up to anything. Because I enjoy my work, and if I'm honest, because I get phone calls and texts from [supervisor] if I'm late, I've hardly missed any days. Now, I'm much more confident. In fact, I'm something of a social butterfly.'

What learners say

Learners really appreciate the advice, support and challenge they get from tutors and support workers at DISC. In direct contrast to their descriptions of previous learning and training experiences, learners say that they feel accepted, looked after, challenged, positive and happy.

One learner was particularly clear about the benefits of his time at DISC. He said:

'I hadn't been to school very much because I was bullied and felt threatened. The situation didn't change very much when I went to college

and so I just stopped going altogether. I was a bit reluctant to come to DISC but my social services support worker said that it is exactly the sort of place that would help me to get the qualifications I needed.

'What I've found is that you get more support if you're different yourself... They work really hard with you to make sure you attend, and they are really flexible and friendly and supportive if you've got issues that you need to deal with. Every Thursday, I spend an hour with a support worker, that's really helpful and it's also really helping me and my family deal with the problems I have.

'I actually enjoy coming here. They have changed me from being miserable into the sort of person that can make friends. That's never happened to me before.'

Other learners, parents and carers affirmed these benefits:

'Before she came here she was very shy and incommunicative. Now she is much more open and confident, and can see a future. I really value the fact that my daughter can now focus on a routine and is enjoying being pushed on to do more. What really helps me, is that I know how well she's doing and can remind her of the great progress she's made really quickly.' (Parent)

'Coming here has really changed my image. I'm much more confident now and turn up in a way that I never did before. They've made me realise that I have potential. I have really enjoyed my work experience, and through that I have been offered an apprenticeship. This has encouraged me to buy in. I do still need my weekly reviews; that pushes me because we talk about the attendance tracker... If I don't attend it might make it more difficult to get my English and maths and wouldn't look good for my apprenticeship.' (Learner)

The good practice case studies that Ofsted publishes highlight specific examples of practice that providers of education, learning and children's services have used to achieve successful outcomes.

For education, the case studies do not recommend a single particular approach to teaching and learning. Ofsted has no preferred lesson structure or teaching style. We showcase and share a wide range of approaches that providers have found work well for them in achieving good outcomes for children, young people and learners.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

To view other good practice examples, go to: www.gov.uk/schools-colleges-childrens-services/inspections#good-practice.

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