

**SUBJECT: NHS DISABILITY PLACEMENT SCHEME**

**JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, THE FINANCE OFFICER AND PERSONNEL ADVISOR**

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**1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the success to date of the NHS Disability Placement Scheme.

**2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 In early 2010 the Chief Fire Officer identified a need to expand and develop the Authority's young persons' work experience procedure in order to ensure it was inclusive to young adults in the local community, in particular, young people with learning disabilities.
- 2.2 In response and with the help of the NHS Project Choice Co-ordinator, Sunderland Hospitals a pilot to provide work placement opportunities for young people with learning and physical disabilities was undertaken.
- 2.3 Two 13 week placements were established within the Business Services Department at Service Headquarters due to the variety of tasks available within a business administration environment.
- 2.4 The NHS Project Choice Co-ordinator provided background training for employees involved in the placements and mentored both individuals whilst they were supervised / supported on a daily basis by members of the Business Services Team.

**3 PROGRAMME AIMS**

- 3.1 The NHS programme aims to:
- Empower the student with their rights as individuals;
  - Change the perception of the people with learning and physical difficulties and their potential for work;
  - Bring equality into the workplace; and
  - Give students a life experience outside of the home and school.
- 3.2 Within the pilot it was determined to set project objectives / targets for the placements which included:
- To provide a meaningful and real work experience placement for individuals with learning disabilities.
  - To enable students to gain evidence towards completing their NVQ.

- To develop internal policies and procedures to assist the Service in working towards inclusivity for all.
- To provide practical experience for employees in terms of working with people with disabilities through daily interaction where employees can develop their skills in this area.
- To determine appropriate internal staff mentors to support students throughout the placement.

#### **4 EVALUATION**

- 4.1 Qualitative information was collated during the pilot which included discussions and one to one weekly updates with the students themselves, focus groups and a de-brief with employees involved in the pilot.
- 4.2 One of the main challenges was the level of and difference in disabilities of each student. This did not become apparent until the students attended for their induction.
- 4.3 Due to their profound disabilities, a significant amount of employee time was required in order to provide the appropriate and necessary support for the students. This level of input was necessary to ensure that the students had a worthwhile placement with the Service.

#### **5 OUTCOMES AND BENEFITS**

- 5.1 The Authority was able to share experiences and learning with our partner emergency services and specialist schools within the local community and to support the overall work placement scheme alongside partners, leading to improved engagement and services for people with disabilities.
- 5.2 Employees have gained a better understanding of the needs and expectations of people with disabilities to improve customer service for this under represented group.
- 5.3 The pilot ensured the Service continues to maintain the principles of the 'two ticks' disability symbol.
- 5.4 The success of the placements is reflected in the publicity the Authority has received in terms of the articles published regarding the students in the Journal's quarterly D&E publication, in ABLE magazine / on-line.
- 5.5 Whilst the Service and its employees have benefited from the programme, the two young people developed greatly during their time within Business Services.
- 5.6 The dedication and commitment of all employees involved in the project was highlighted through the number of nominations they received as part of the RISE awards and the success of the project was also confirmed when the team won 'Best Team'.

**6 RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 6.1 The appropriate risk assessments were carried out in conjunction with Health & Safety to ensure the students' safety was maintained at all times.

**7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The original total estimated cost for the pilot including employee time associated with the preparation, planning, implementation and on-going support for the duration of the placements was in the region of **£1,400**.
- 7.2 The actual costs were significantly higher than anticipated taking into account the above factors and were approximately **£4,000**, all being met through existing budgetary headings.
- 7.3 In considering whether the pilot should be repeated, given the current economic climate, there would need to be a differently delivery methodology in order to reduce the cost to the Authority.

**8 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 8.1 From the findings above, it is apparent that placements offer the Authority some benefits although the cost was higher than originally estimated. However, the cost will be greatly reduced if the number of students on the placement was reduced to one thereby also reducing the impact to the department.
- 8.2 The placements were overall very successful for the department, mentors and the students. Employees as a whole involved and encouraged the students constantly, gaining skills above work related tasks and building lasting friendships.
- 8.3 The Business Services Department are keen to engage in further placements with consideration to the recommendations with the placements being implemented into other departments.
- 8.4 The Chief Fire Officer therefore proposes that the Authority continues to support the NHS Work Experience Placements on the following basis:
- Providing a placement for one student at a time;
  - Reducing the level of mentoring required from employees;
  - Establishing more support from the NHS representative.

In addition in order to save time during the placement, one day assessments should also be carried out prior to the placement to establish skills, capability and support needs of the student.

- 8.5 If approved, all costs would be met through existing budgetary headings and the project would be subject to a further review after the first full year of operation.

**9 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The values of the Service were been taken into account as the placements are in line with one of the Authority's Diversity core values - We value diversity in the Service and the community by the promotion of fair treatment, providing solutions for different needs and removing barriers.

**10 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 There are no health and safety implications in respect of this report.

**11 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 11.1 Members are recommended to:
- a) Agree to the proposals as set out in this report;
  - b) Receive further reports as appropriate.

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**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

The under mentioned Background Papers refer to the subject matter of the above report:

- NHS Placements for Students with Learning and Physical Disabilities Start up form.
- NHS Placements for Students with Learning and Physical Disabilities Evaluation form, June 2011.