

Removing Barriers

Cornerstone Employer Case Study

Background

Birmingham Careers Hub has a SEND Community of Practice which includes several Cornerstone Employers. Through this group, employers learnt that adults with learning disabilities in Birmingham are 4 times less likely to be employed than the national average. Many young people with disabilities are not being supported into positive destinations such as supported internships, inclusive apprenticeships, or employment.

This shocking disparity in employment rates for SEND students galvanized employers to take action. Cornerstone Employers Wilmott Dixon, Jacobs and HS2 formed a working group which developed into a new employer networking group 'Inspire for Higher' with a mission to change the future for young people with SEND in Birmingham.

Aims

Improve employer confidence and knowledge about supporting young people with SEND.

Increase meaningful career development activities in SEND schools and positive employment outcomes.

Specific business issues included; lack of knowledge about how to create accessible career development opportunities such as experiences of the workplace for SEND students; lack of understanding of who young people with SEND were; desire to tap into a hidden workforce but unsure on business strategies required to achieve this.



This group and the programme I was on last year has really helped my confidence to grow. Being able to come and talk to employers who are interested in me has made me feel that I shouldn't be ashamed of my disability, or of who I am and I feel proud that I can be accepted as myself.

Young SEND Ambassador



I just wanted to say what a great event yesterday, inspirational speakers and great networking. However, the star of the show for me was Pietr. From greeting me, making my tea, a quick chat and keep giving me such a lovely smile when I looked over at him I could have taken him home with me.

These events are so rewarding and definitely why I love my job. Whenever I come away I always have a huge smile on my face and a warm feeling inside.

Marie Wilkes, Wilmott Dixon

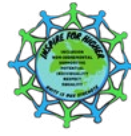
Actions

Cornerstone Employers Jacobs, Wilmott Dixon and HS2 formed a working group to. This led to setting up a new Birmingham employer networking forum where employers could meet regularly face to face to share their own best practice, learn from others and support employers attending the group to take a small step towards offering inclusive career development activities and outcomes for young people with SEND.

The Careers Hub set up a Young SEND ambassador programme where students applied to share their experiences, aspirations and ideas at the employer meetings. The students designed and developed the name, logo and strapline for the group; calling it 'Inspire for Higher'.

The 'Inspire for Higher' group launched on 29 September. The event was held at a special school and was attended by 25 employers, providers, young SEND Ambassadors and members of the Careers Hub team.

Two further meetings have been held. Most recently Careers Leaders were invited so that educators and employers could collaborate on what schools need to support career development opportunities for young people with SEND.



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Outcomes

Early Wins:

25 employers attended launch event, with 35 attending subsequent meetings. 10 young people signed up to become ambassadors. By the April event their confidence had grown so much that two presented their 'I am Employable' speech. It was incredibly moving.

The group has 10 founding members (of which 8 are Cornerstone Employers): HS2, Wilmott Dixon, Jacobs, Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Trust, HSBC, National Grid, Severn Trent, Gordon Franks Training, Sport4Life and Birmingham City Council.

Seven employers are providing Enterprise Advisers for special schools: Avanti West Midlands, Gordon Franks, National Grid, Serco, Wilmott Dixon, Jacobs and HS2.

One employer is now developing an organisation wide diversity and inclusion strategy.

The group has heard from speakers from Birmingham Women and Childrens Hospital, Barclays, Tesco, Edgbaston Priory, National Grid, all of whom have showcased their targeted work supporting young people with SEND into employment.

Emerging:

As a result of the April event, where students from Braidwood delivered a mini sign language workshop to guests, they were asked to share their business cards with the employers with a view to them delivering workshops for staff, generating their own experiences of the workplace and encounters with employers.

Employers from the group have expressed an interest in the concept of the Hubs bid into round two of the Hub Incubation Project fund, 'Work With Me'.

Learnings

Meeting the employers request to hear directly from young people with SEND was resource intensive for the Hub. However it led to good outcomes, and allowed young people to have a positive experience of engaging with employers as well as ensuring that the group's work was influenced by key stakeholders.

Next Steps

Shift focus from awareness-raising and inspiration towards action on delivery in and with schools.

Co-create targeted SEND transition pathways to support more young people with SEND into employment.

Consider how Employers can move towards hosting and running events themselves without the Hub team.

This would enable the group to move towards becoming self-sustaining.

Relates to Careers Hub Coordinated Actions



A self-improving system



Removing barriers



Careers education as part of economic recovery



Employers build long term sustainable, mutually beneficial partnerships with schools and colleges

Relates to Gatsby Benchmarks

3

Addressing the needs of each pupil.

5

Encounters with employers and employees.

6

Experiences of workplaces.

How did the work align with the Cornerstone Employer role?



Helped to tackle disadvantage



Helped to embed inclusive careers education in the Cornerstone Employers' organisations



Helped to achieve better outcomes for young people



Helped attract and retain EAs



Focus on SEND



Helped business to respond to the Social Value Act