



On Azure Employment Services

Issue 5 – August 2013

Welcome to our new 'Spotlight' newsletter which is intended to give a flavour of the type of activities and achievements of our learners and clients, all of whom are supported by the Employment Services department.

It has been a busy time since our last newsletter. We have been reviewing and increasing our resources to meet the changing demands of the programmes we run.

Our Foundation Learning programme (now called the Study programme) had a very successful time up to its year end in July 2013. It had a good increase in learner numbers, achievements and activities and we look forward to this year being just as busy.

Work Choice continues to be challenging with never ceasing pressure to achieve job outcome targets. We are pleased that the changes we made in our support for clients looking for work and an increase in staff resources has helped us to improve our outcome success. A real good effort all round!

The success of our clients and learners is always to be celebrated but we are aware it is often achieved only with the help of others. We are always grateful to all other organisations (some of whom are featured in this newsletter) that work with us and provide the opportunities for our clients and learners.

The National Trust ... and us!

Following a visit to Azure in August 2012 by Mark Warr, Community Engagement Officer at the National Trust, our Skills Builder team have been working actively with the National Trust at their Seaton Delaval Hall estate. After this initial meeting Azure was approached by the Trust to be involved in their Georgian-inspired fashion show. Our Skills Builder learners and staff made up 10 themed planters to line the cat walk which coordinated well with their location within the Great Hall.

Since then our staff and learners have been attending Seaton Delaval Hall on a regular basis and have been involved in a number of projects on the estate including the creation of a new shrub border to protect the brew house wall which is the oldest part of the estate still standing.

Other developments we have been involved with include the creation of new pathways and planting of masses of bluebells.



Wayne has experienced a remarkable transformation to land his dream job at the iconic Northumberlandia landform sculpture.

Having been out of work since 2000, Wayne was referred to Azure's Work Choice programme for support to regain employment.

"The last thing I wanted to do was work with public. I'd spent 11 years in care work for the NHS, which takes its toll, and so when that ended in 2000 I just wanted a job in the background. However, despite going on many training courses and even gaining an NVQ in Warehousing Storage and Distribution Operations, nothing came up".

"I then joined the job club at Azure Charitable Enterprise, who have been a great help. However I still remained adamant that working with the public was definitely not for me. Only a year ago I was told there might be an opportunity of short term work in the Azure Garden Centre but I had to say no thanks because the job involved a significant amount of public contact, which I wasn't comfortable with and I ended up with job in the nurseries".

Wayne attended weekly job club sessions at Azure and worked intensively with our Advisers who provided support and encouragement for Wayne to apply for various job vacancies.

Azure introduced Wayne to a new 'Lady' and things began to change. Azure are part of the team which manage Northumberlandia on behalf of national environmental charity the Land Trust. To build Wayne's confidence Azure encouraged him to get involved by doing some volunteer work at the park.

Wayne made such an impact during his time volunteering he has been appointed as the park's first site warden.

"I basically fell in love with the place. What the Banks Group and the Blagdon Estates have created here is really special, it feels such a privilege to be working in such a beautiful environment and I couldn't keep the smile of my face. Before I knew it, I was interacting more and more with visitors, since September I must have met thousands of people, who have been so nice that all my old concerns have gone."

Duncan Hutt from the Northumberland Wildlife Trust, who manage the community and visitor elements of Northumberlandia and now employ Wayne, comments "we've seen Wayne grow from a volunteer who was a sound bloke and worked hard but preferred to stay in the background, into a friendly outgoing character who is a real asset to the park. Therefore when the opportunity arose to take on someone to be 'front of house' at Northumberlandia, he was the obvious choice".

John Gemmell, Senior Manager at Azure, stated "All the team who have worked with and supported Wayne could see his potential in this type of role, it was Wayne himself we had to convince. We are delighted to see how he has developed into "Mr Northumberlandia" and how well regarded he is by all the agencies involved in the North East's newest visitor attraction".



Success at The Sanctuary

Deborah has accessed Azure's Work Choice programme twice previously, before being again referred in October 2012. Whilst working closely with her Recruitment Adviser Dawn Wallace, Deborah expressed her interest in working with animals having gained a first diploma in Animal Care some time ago. Together they explored various opportunities for Deborah to gain some work experience in her chosen field. They approached The Sanctuary Wildlife Care Centre in Morpeth who were happy to meet with Deborah.

After a successful first introductory chat, Deborah was offered the opportunity of a 3-week work experience placement. Dawn discussed Bridging the Gap funding with The Sanctuary, this is funding is available to employers who employ Work Choice clients for at least 16 hours per week for at least 26 weeks paid at minimum wage or above.

The Sanctuary were impressed with the skills and enthusiasm Deborah displayed during her work experience and were happy to offer Deborah a 6-month position as an Animal Carer via Bridging the Gap. Deborah commenced her employment with The Sanctuary in July and loves it!

It was during Deborah's job set up meeting with The Sanctuary's manager Kim that she mentioned they could benefit from some part time administration help. Not wanting to miss an opportunity we discussed this potential role with a newly referred client who was eager to get a job.

After 9 years of unemployment Stuart was referred in to Azure's Work Choice programme in June. Due to his health condition Stuart was unable to do the type of work he was used to and was keen to try something different. Stuart's job preference was a job within an admin-type role although he was unsure how he would adapt to a new working environment. Aware of the opportunity at The Sanctuary, Recruitment Adviser Steve Brown discussed this possibility with Stuart and reinforced that Azure would be there with him every step of the way to provide him with support. Stuart was keen to proceed.

An introductory meeting was held between Kim, Stuart and Steve after which Stuart started a brief work placement there; impressed by his enthusiasm The Sanctuary offered Stuart a 6-month job as an Administrator via Bridging the Gap. Stuart has settled into his new role very well and is enjoying the new challenge.

Staff and learners of Azure Employment Services are proud of the achievement of both Deborah and Stuart and also wanted to support The Sanctuary – so after much debate – the department decided to adopt a fox. It's nice that Sam the fox smiled for the camera!

This is a fantastic achievement for Deborah and Stuart – thank you to The Sanctuary.



David's Long Service Award

In 2004 Azure took over North Tyneside Council's Workstep contract and began supporting their clients.

One of the client's we began supporting was David who was working as an Assistant within their Adaptations and Loan Equipment Service. David had already had a long career within the Council but still required the ongoing support the programme provided.

In October 2010 David made the decision to transition across to the new Work Choice Programme, still being supported by Azure.

In May 2013 David received a Long Service Award from the Council; having completed 30 year's continuous service. David was thanked for his loyalty and for the contribution he has made to North Tyneside Council. As part of this award David was also given 2 additional day's leave every year.

Congratulations David!



David with his manager
Steve Wood

Module 1 Activities

Our Work Choice clients seeking work meet with their Recruitment Advisers on a regular basis and have been involved in a host of activities to enhance their skills and improve their prospects of gaining employment.

Activities include; a number of our clients having successfully completed the Construction Skills Certificate Scheme (CSCS) qualification, with others in the process of doing so.

A client who is looking for work in an administration/office role is attending a Bookkeeping and Accountancy course to further develop her CV.

Numerous clients have achieved Moving & Handling certificates and well as Health & Safety qualifications.

Our Recruitment Advisers are working hard with their clients to secure work placements; enabling clients to gain some up to date and valuable work experience which will be added to their CV. Organisations which Azure are working with and who are offering work placements include: The Sage, McDonalds, St Oswald's, Citizen's Advice Bureau, to name but a few.

Our clients are working hard to find employment and we thank all employers and training providers for their support.

Learners loved sunny Seahouses!



Gemma Bray, Transport Officer for Northumberland County Council offered Azure the opportunity to access funding for them to deliver Independent Travel training to our Skill Builders learners.

The first session took place on a bitterly cold snowy February day; learners left Azure and caught a bus to the local shops. After a successful first trip, learners took part in further training; they had to plan a journey a little further afield which included using a connecting bus. Learners decided to catch two buses and enjoy lunch out.



After the success of their second challenge of travel training our learners were pleased with their achievement which resulted in those who weren't very confident using public transport, being able to travel independently using the bus.

Gemma also assisted our learners to apply for bus passes and Bridge Cards; these cards alert the driver that the passenger may require some additional assistance.



As the learners' confidence had grown so much, it was decided that as a reward for their achievement an overnight trip to Seahouses would be arranged (using public transport of course!).

This was a major undertaking for the learners and staff; the route had to be planned, activities organised and fundraising undertaken.

To raise money for the trip staff and learners hosted a coffee morning and sold a wonderful array of cakes and biscuits, a host of other activities were on offer all to raise extra money for the trip.



On 9th July learners and staff set off on their adventure to Seahouses, once at their destination everyone settled in to their hostel accommodation. They then ventured to the beach for the afternoon where a host of activities were enjoyed; paddling, treasure hunting with a metal detector and water football!



Thanks to the extremely kind weather everyone was able to enjoy their evening meal dining al fresco in the garden.

After an early wake, all learners helped to make breakfast before another brief trip into Seahouses to buy gifts for family prior to their return journey. Everyone had a brilliant time especially those learners who had never been to the coast. Another triumphant event!



Mark's massive success

Mark was supported by Azure during his time on Workstep whilst working as a cleaner in a care home. When Work Choice commenced Azure could no longer support Mark as he was living in an area outside of our delivery location and so we lost contact.

Mark and his family obviously hadn't forgotten about us, because in April 2013 Mark was again referred to Work Choice and were delighted when Mark had been allocated to Azure's caseload. This occurred due to a change in the areas in which Azure deliver the programme.

During his time on module 1 Mark underwent a Basic Skills Assessment to establish his literacy and numeracy levels this enabling us to better understand his support needs. We also worked with Mark to update his CV and supported him through his COSHH training as Mark had identified he was interested in gaining work as a domestic. Mark worked with our Recruitment Advisers to apply for various cleaning vacancies and was successful in gaining an interview.

Prior to attending the interview Mark worked alongside Chris Nash, one of our Recruitment Advisers, on some interview preparation. Mark impressed the interview panel by being able to confidently talk about elements of cleaning that he had recently covered in his COSHH training as well as the practical experience he has. Windsor Court Care Home offered Mark the part time position as a Domestic and he commenced his employment with them in June.

Mark's parents wrote to Azure to express their appreciation "we cannot thank all those concerned enough for the help and support Mark has been given over the period of time both past and present. Your clients are treated as people and not just a number which is very important to the person being supported".

Mark is now being supported in his work by Employment Adviser Marion Marshall who reports that Mark is settling in to his new role well and feels very well supported by his colleagues who are assisting him to gain confidence as well as supporting him through any in-house training.

Well done Mark!



Calling all employers...!

Could you help our clients take one step closer to achieving their goal of getting paid employment?

If you can help us by offering work experience placements, work trials or employment opportunities to our clients then please get in touch.

We welcome any partnership working – *your support is much appreciated.*

Call us on **01670 717 106** or email **es@azure-charitable.co.uk**

Malcolm sees things clearly!

Malcolm was referred to Azure's Work Choice programme in March 2013. Malcolm made his intentions known very early that his goal was to become self employed; wishing to set up his own window cleaning business.

Malcolm regularly attended job club sessions where he discussed his dream; it was during one of these sessions and with the support he received from Recruitment Advisers at Azure that a meeting was set up with a Business Mentor from Enterprise Mentoring to assist Malcolm to develop his business plan. Malcolm worked hard researching information prior to his business set up and in early June Malcolm achieved his goal and "Mick's Window Cleaning" was formed.



Malcolm is developing his client base, researching the possibility of expanding into cleaning windows in commercial properties and looking into carrying out more marketing activities.

Upon starting his business Malcolm was eager to purchase a uniform which shows his trading name which he proudly displays in this photo.

Malcolm is now being supported by Employment Adviser Steve Pinkney who reports that he is doing really well, enjoying the job and is proud of his achievement (as are we!).

The growing's good!

The learners on our Skill Builders programme enjoy the practical side of learning so earlier this year it was decided to extend the vegetable plots to give more space for growing.

This summer learners have taken part in planting and nurturing a wonderful array of fruit and vegetables: carrots, pumpkins, onions, garlic, potatoes, beetroot, cauliflower, cabbage, runner beans, peas, swede, plums, red currants, gooseberries, cherries and strawberries and a variety of herbs.

Learners also enjoy sessions when they are involved in food preparation and take pleasure from eating the tasty meals they've cook. The fruits of their labour are much appreciated when learners hold café days when meals are sold to staff – these being very popular days at Azure Head Office!



... since our last edition...



Robert is supported by Azure on the Work Choice, working for the Co-operative Food Group. As soon as the opportunity arose Robert wanted to help out at the Olympics and was one of the 70,000 volunteers which helped make London 2012 such a success!



In October 2012 BHS Gateshead won the Percy Hedley Positive about Disability Award category at the Metro Centre's Kerching award night. Azure's Employment Adviser Steve Brown (centre) supports two clients within the store. Steve is pictured here with Radio DJ Anna Foster, Debbie Cook (Restaurant Manager) and Gavin Prior (Metro Centre General Manager).



Kaylee works at Marks & Spencer and is supported by Azure. Kaylee represented Great Britain in the World Transplant Games in South Africa this summer. Taking part in a number of events Kaylee achieved personal bests, bronze, silver and gold medals. This is Kaylee proudly displaying her gold medal. What a fantastic achievement!



Marie is a module 1 client who is currently being supported to find employment. In August Marie took part in the British Transplant Games in Sheffield where she was successful in gaining a bronze medal for Badminton in the doubles event and a silver medal in track and field for the 3km walk event. Well done Marie!

Paul's Progression

Paul is a Work Choice client who has recently sustained Unsupported Employment. Paul has visual impairment and was referred originally on to the Workstep Programme by his Disability Employment Advisor before his transition on to Work Choice with Azure Charitable Enterprises.

Paul has been employed by Leyton Health Care for several years now, having started as a night shift Care Assistant at Ashlea Lodge. Recognising his social and organisational skills and acknowledging his ambition to develop in his career, Paul changed role and moved to an adjoining Care Home; Ashlea Park as their Activities Coordinator. This is a role which is both diverse and challenging and Paul has continued to develop up to the present day. His job involves creating individual activity plans for all the residents. These reflect the residents activity levels and limits and allows for suitable participation in various occupational and leisure sessions such as cookery, gardening, bingo and arts and crafts. Paul also arranges for residents days out and organising entertainment within the care home. He is also a point of contact for residents and their families and regularly gives guidance on day to day activities as well as care related advice. Paul also serves on the Publicity Team, which comprises the Care Home Manager and Administrator and also has responsibility for organising the band of regular volunteers.

It was a conversation with his Employment Adviser, Steve Pinkney that led to him making the decision to go ahead with his Level 3 Diploma in Health and Social Care. Paul had reached a point where he was thinking seriously about developing his career and improving his chances of moving forward. As Paul said himself "I wasn't altogether certain of my abilities at this stage and in which direction I wanted to go".

"Steve discussed my issues with me and I concluded that by gaining a level 3 Diploma in Health and Social Care, it would open up possibilities of progression within the Care Home, or other opportunities should I choose to further my career elsewhere.



Paul with his Manager Gillian Varley

In short, he gave me the confidence and self belief that I could do it".

Paul is now halfway through his course, which due to his visual impairment, he has completed verbally.

He receives regular support from his course assessor who is delighted with his progress. His Manager Gillian Varley comments on Paul's new found confidence and compliments him by saying that "he is a very valued member of the team."

Matthew & Craig receive the right treatment



Matthew with mentor Andrew

Matthew was re-referred to us in January 2013. With a wealth of work experience in a variety of short and long term voluntary roles, Azure felt Matthew just needed an employer to offer him the opportunity to demonstrate his skills before employment would soon follow.

Matthew was a regular attendee at our job club working alongside our Recruitment Advisers; Matthew applied for various job vacancies.

It was during one of these job club sessions that Azure had made a general enquiry to the North East Ambulance Service about job vacancies and a conversation ensued about Matthew and the experienced he had. A positive initial discussion took

place and Bridging the Gap funding was broached. The North East Ambulance Service was keen to meet Matthew and a Work Trial was set up.

After a successful work trial where Matthew demonstrated his ability to use the computer, he was offered a 6 month job as an Administrator. Matthew now works within the Human Resource department, in their Equality and Diversity Team; his main duties include data input and is working on a data cleansing project. Matthew's line manager Jenna Brown said "Bridging the Gap creates the perfect opportunity for individuals to demonstrate their ability without the additional barriers recruitment processes can present. Matthew is doing really well." Matthew also has an in-work mentor called Andrew Harris who reports that Matthew is settling in well; his social skills are improving as he works more alongside his colleagues.

Craig was referred to Azure's Work Choice programme in January he has extensive work experience having worked within the banking industry for many years in a range of customer service positions. Craig attended all job clubs and applied for lots of administration type roles.

Having built up a positive relationship with the North East Ambulance Service we approached them once more, this time with Craig in mind. The North East Ambulance Service asked for a copy of Craig's CV, which Azure provided with his consent. Once they had seen Craig's CV; detailing his range of qualifications and breadth of experience the North East Ambulance Service were eager to meet him; they immediately had a role in mind for Craig.

A work trial was arranged; Craig impressed them with his skills and ability and the North East Ambulance Service offered him a 6-month position via Bridging the Gap.

Craig works within the Control Room, where his main duty is audio transcription regarding emergency calls. Lynn Pyburn, Craig's manager, reported that he has settled well into his role and is taking on new tasks in order too be fully conversant within his role.

Congratulations to Matthew and Craig on their achievement and thank you to the North East Ambulance Service for making their aim of employment a reality.



Craig with Manager Lynn

Skill Builder and Skill Builders Plus Class of 2013!



Azure held an awards event on 16th August to mark the huge achievement of a group of our Foundation Learning programme learners who completed either our Skill Builder or Skill Builders Plus programme.



Learners gained an award, certificate or diploma in either/both Personal and Social Development/Horticulture.



Qualification certificates were presented by Chris Litchfield, Azure Board Member, who congratulated learners on their achievement and praised the efforts of staff.



On the day learners were supported by family, staff and support workers who attended in force and helped make the day such a success.



Unknown to the learners four special awards were to be presented, these awards were presented at the discretion of management:



For best team work -	Matthew
For best attendance -	Laura
For the most helpful learner -	James
For the most personal progress -	Martha



Presentations were followed by a buffet lunch, a chance for family to chat with staff and have a look around our wonderful training facilities.



It was feel good event, which put a smile on everyone's face; everyone enjoyed celebrating the success of our learners.

A massive well done to Martha, Tom, Matthew, Laura, Erin, Jack, Anthony and James – our class of 2013!



Peter's Progression



Peter in his uniform working within Café Azure

Peter is 19 and after leaving school he attended college where he achieved an NVQ level 2 in Hospitality and a Food Hygiene certificate. Since leaving college Peter had been unsuccessful in gaining employment. His Disability Employment Adviser felt that Peter would benefit from the support he would receive from the Work Choice programme and so referred him to Azure in April 2013.

Upon being referred to Azure, Peter's preferred job preference was as a catering assistant.

Peter worked with Steve Brown, his Recruitment Adviser to gain additional skills to assist him in his search for his ideal job. Through Azure Peter attended COSHH training, as well as gaining a Health and Safety and Manual Handling qualification, all to further enhance his CV.

Peter was successful in securing several interviews including one at Scarborough Court Care Home. Although he had the desired qualifications it was his lack of work experience which was the barrier to him being offered employment; being unable to talk about work from a practical point of view.

A vacancy within our very own Café Azure, located in our Garden Centre, became available and Peter was keen to apply for the position after discussing the opportunity and its benefits with Steve. After a brief work trial Peter was offered the 13-week job as a Catering Assistant.

Peter has been involved in variety of tasks which have included serving food to customers, clearing tables and washing dishes. Peter's self-belief has grown considerably during his time at Café Azure and is more able to deal confidently with customers.

Although in employment Peter continued to be supported by Azure and has kept in regular contact with his in-work Employment Adviser Claire Gardner. Another vacancy became available within Scarborough Court Care Home; they were aware that Peter had gained employment with Azure and knowing he had now gained some practical work experience; they contacted him and offered him a part time job as Kitchen Assistant.

Peter was eager to accept the position with an external employer and is thrilled at the prospect of beginning a new chapter in his career and appreciates the help and support given to him by Azure.

We all wish him well.

All the photographs and stories used in the production of this newsletter have been obtained with the full consent and permission of each client.