

“Happy New Year”

Here we are in 2014 and already it is shaping up to be another busy year in the Employment Services Department.

Our Work Choice team have even more demanding targets to meet this year in terms of job outcomes, progressions and sustained jobs for our clients. However building on the successes of the second half of last year I am confident that all their hard work will pay off and more clients than ever will achieve a positive job outcome.

In an aim to help improve our outcomes we are working with our colleagues in Job Centre Plus to ensure that only the most appropriate clients, who we can best assist into work, are referred to the programme.

The Skills Builder programme is our delivery of the Study programme. The better clarity and level of funding in the last year has allowed us to deliver a much more structured and transparent programme. Our learners have engaged in numerous activities both on and off site all of which have enhanced their confidence and abilities.

Another key focus for our Skills Builder team is the forthcoming Ofsted Inspection sometime this year. Considerable work is ongoing to ensure we improve our grade and properly showcase the good work and support that goes on. We are grateful to Azure board member Chris Litchfield who is supporting and aiding us in this effort.

A thank you to our Busy Bees!

Anchor Housing wanted to plant bulbs as part of their Bee Friendly Campaign and approached Azure to get involved. Our Skills Builders learners, staff as well as some colleagues from Azure’s Landscapes department all helped.

In total four Anchor Housing sites were visited with a wide variety of bulbs and shrubs planted in order to attract bees in the spring.

Staff and residents at Anchor’s Saga Court sent a lovely card thanking everyone for their help.

We wish Anchor Housing success with their Bee Friendly campaign.



Mark lands his dream job

Although Mark has had paid employment in a variety of fields including landscape gardening and warehousing, he had been unemployed for some time, he was lacking confidence but was keen to get back into work. Due to a brain injury Mark has problems with his memory and was referred to Azure in August 2013 to access the Work Choice programme.

Mark was allocated to Recruitment Adviser Richard Oswald. During their first meeting Mark made it clear he did not want another job in warehousing as this type of environment made him feel too enclosed which caused him to feel anxious. Mark was ambitious and stressed how much he wanted to work in landscaping again.

Richard was determined to assist Mark achieve his dream job. Richard's first task was to identify local landscaping firms. Richard made contact with a company called Landscape Outlook who was keen to meet Mark.

Mark's initial meeting with Landscape Outlook went very well and Mark had greatly impressed them.

The owner of business made arrangements for Mark to make his way to the depot each morning (along with the other landscapers), he would be picked up in the van and taken to the job each day and return them to the depot every night. Not being able to drive, this situation was ideal. The depot was local to Mark too!

Mark was offered the job and was absolutely thrilled. He started employment as a Landscape Labourer in September and is going from strength to strength.

“ I love working outside and Landscape Outlook is helping me to further my skills which will help me in my future career. ”

Mark receives lots of support from his Manager and colleagues and is happy in his new role. He has a dedicated Work Choice Employment Adviser (Steve Pinkney) who visits Mark at work every month to review his progress.

“ Since Mark has joined our company he has shown great enthusiasm and is now a key member of the construction team within Landscape Outlook. ”

Well done on your achievement Mark and thank you to Landscape Outlook for giving him this great opportunity.



Mark Swan and his manager and company owner Mark Walker

A thank you from the National Trust

Our Skill Builders team received a wonderful thank you message from the National Trust following the work they did there earlier this year.

Mark Warr, Community Engagement Officer for the National Trust at their Seaton Delaval Hall property emailed Azure thanking the team for all the hard work they'd put in transforming the playscape area.

Mark said "It's a real credit to the hard work of all of those involved and it has been enjoyed by thousands of visitors this year... and will be by many more thousands in the future!"

“ **the transformation down there has been fantastic** ”

The learners and staff were 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. They were also involved in a number of other developments including the creation of new pathways and planting masses of bluebells.

The learners gained a lot from the experience of working at Seaton Delaval Hall. The evidence from this went towards their level 1 Diploma in Horticulture for preparing ground for planting and establish a shrub/bed border and their Team Working and Work Experience Units from the Employability and Personal Development qualification.

... furthermore

In addition to our story about Paul in our last issue back in August, Paul has now finished his diploma in Health and Social Care and his assessor has nominated him for the Achievers Award. This award recognises the achievement of individuals in overcoming barriers to learning.

During the completion of this qualification, Paul used audio recording to assist him to complete his coursework.

Having enjoyed this experience, Paul has now enrolled and started a new qualification; an NVQ level 3 in Activity Leading, which relates directly to his job role as Activities Co-ordinator with Ashlea Park Care Home.

The award ceremony is to be held early next year and we wish Paul the best of luck.

We are very proud of you Paul – well done on your achievement

Confidence boost for Graham

Having had two heart attacks and needing to have five cardio vascular stents fitted, Graham could no longer work as an executive coach driver. Driving passengers around Europe and the United Kingdom was proving too much for him and therefore had to give up work.

Having worked continuously for 34 years Graham took being out of work badly. Graham explained that it wasn't just the financial aspect of being out of work which he found difficult; the social aspect was also badly affected. After a while work colleagues and friends stopped ringing and slowly he became depressed.

In August 2013 Graham was referred to Azure's Work Choice programme. He recalls how he was sceptical about the programme and thought he wouldn't get any support. Graham explained that at the time of being referred to Azure he was depressed but hadn't realised it.

Graham was allocated a dedicated Recruitment Adviser, Dawn Wallace who meets with Graham every week. Graham appreciates the time he spends with Dawn; Graham explained that Dawn gives him advice and encouragement and allows time to listen.

During her time working with Graham, Dawn has helped him to update his CV and has encouraged him to try volunteering with a previous employer to test his capability in a work environment again. Graham took on the challenge and was very active making contact with organisations with whom he'd previously worked. Not wishing or able to drive coaches any more, he would be willing to consider driving cars

With a boost to his confidence Graham has also felt able to start an IT course to further enhance his already strong CV. Graham is also attending a regular exercise class and is positive about the future.

Graham feels that since being with Azure his confidence has grown, "being on Work Choice is voluntary and I am seeing the benefits of being on the programme."

Graham feels strongly about ESF and government funding to support programmes such as this, having experienced first-hand the positive changes it can bring.

“ Work Choice really does work ”

Job Start update

In the last Work Choice year (October 2012 – October 2013) we assisted **59** clients into employment. This was a mix of supported and unsupported jobs.

Happy Halloween...!

Our eagle-eyed Training Assistant Ruth McSherry spotted a free Halloween party being advertised for the Alan Shearer Centre in Newcastle. After making enquiries to attend Ruth established that our Skill Builders learners would also be eligible to become members of the centre and be able to access its facilities.



Leading up to the event the team organised a 'guess the weight of the pumpkin' competition. The giant pumpkin was grown by Training Assistant Ray Summerbell who donated it to the learners; to be used as a fundraising opportunity to help fund the trip to the Halloween party.

To get into the spirit of things, learners enjoyed carving individual pumpkins, using either templates or free hand designs. Their artistic flair has certainly been captured with this wonderful array of horrifying and humorous lanterns.

On 31st October our Skill Builders team made their way to the Alan Shearer Centre, upon arrival they were given a guided tour of the Centre and its wonderful facilities.

The 'spooktacular' event was well attended and consisted of a disco and buffet, one of our learners demonstrated even more of his skills when he was announced winner of the dancing competition. Our learners (and staff!) appeared to relish getting into character for the party.

A good time was had by all – and it provided an excellent opportunity for our learners to see what other facilities and services are available to people with disability.



Operation Christmas Child



Our Skills Builders learners were keen to get involved with Operation Christmas Child. This is where shoeboxes of gifts are given to children, based on need, at Christmas time around the world. They began by sending an email to staff asking for a wide variety of donations and empty shoe boxes. Once all donations had been received they began filling the shoe boxes, our learners included letters telling the box recipient about their life in the North East of England. Once packaged the boxes were taken to the local sorting station.

At the local sorting station there were hundreds of shoe boxes waiting to be filled. There were piles of toys, toiletries and gifts that had been donated and which were waiting to be packed. It was a hive of activity. We learnt that our boxes were destined for the Ukraine.



The learners and staff met experienced volunteers who were also filling boxes for the appeal. The volunteers were very helpful and spent a lot of time explaining how they made up the gift boxes and what techniques they had picked up over the years.

Once each shoe box is filled, it's packed along with others into larger boxes ready to be collected. Learners Thomas and Laura were obviously very impressed with the amount of boxes ready for collection! The lorry came on 29th November to take the boxes to the ferry terminal. It's nice to know that our learners have helped to make a child's Christmas.



Christmas Lunch Café Day



On 17th December our Skill Builders learners and staff provided a fantastic Christmas lunch. This exercise formed part of their learning programme; learners were involved in every aspect to make the event the huge success it was.

Learners helped to design the menu, made posters to advertise the event, planned quantities of ingredients, shopped for ingredients, decorated the room and created handmade place settings. The learners prepared and made the food and then plated and served the meals.

The event consisted of a 3-course meal; a choice of pate or spicy lentil soup to start, then a choice of hot gammon or turkey bun with roast potatoes, pigs in blankets and stuffing. Then there was the tough choice between Christmas pudding or chocolate mousse!

The learners' café days are always well supported events and this one was no exception. In total the Skill Builders learners and staff catered for 60 people with a mix of sittings and takeaways.

Colleagues from a range of departments enjoyed lunch; it was nice that people had the opportunity to spend time together.

Every learner had a role to play from plating meals, serving meals and drinks to being responsible for collecting payment!

Pauline Smith, Training Manager and one the diners on the day, commented

“ **The room seemed transformed with decorations, it looked magical. The yummy fabulous food filled us to the brim! The friendly smart servers made everyone feel welcome and special. There was a wonderful atmosphere of Christmas – you've done it yet again!! Thanks to everyone in the Skill Builders Team for a memorable Christmas Lunch.** ”

A huge well done from everyone, we all really appreciate the hard work and effort that goes in to making these events such memorable occasions. Thank you!



Adrian Forster story

Adrian was referred to Azure in 1988 for support to find employment. Adrian works as a Car Valet at Tyne Mills Mazda at Hexham; being supported throughout by Azure.

Adrian has a very supportive line manager, Tracy Graham, who works closely with him and understands his needs.

Due to his learning disability, Adrian finds multi-tasking difficult as well as reading and learning new tasks.

On a day to day basis Tracy breaks down Adrian's tasks, giving him clear instruction with small tasks to complete one at a time.

Earlier this year it was identified that Adrian needed up update his training in Health and Safety.

Steve Pinkney, Adrian's Work Choice Employment Adviser arranged for Adrian to undertake this training using a web-based course. This meant that Steve could provide support to Adrian. A number of sessions were put in place and in September Adrian achieved his qualification.

Well done Adrian!



Adrian with his line manager Tracy Graham



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**