



SPOTLIGHT
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Azure
charitable enterprises

On Azure Employment Services

Issue 7 – May 2014



Welcome to our latest edition of “**Spotlight**” showing the help we give to, and the success achieved by, the client group we are privileged to support.

Success has differing degrees of measurement which is not always the achieving of paid employment. For many of our clients success is the achievement of a step along the way (and one they must achieve before reaching their ultimate goal of employment) and these successes should be acknowledged and celebrated.

This will be my last “foreword” in our newsletter as I am leaving Azure in July after some 28 years. I have seen many changes in both our Supported Businesses and in the different Supported Employment programmes we have delivered, not least in the support we can now give and the outcomes we must achieve. There is, however, one thing that has not changed and that is the client group all these programmes were intended to help. I just hope that, going forward, the programme designers and funders do not lose sight of what this group can achieve if given the correct levels of support and a realistic amount of time.

Azure Employment Services is evolving and the new structure is highlighted on the last page of this newsletter. I wish continued success to all clients past, present and future and to all colleagues who are carrying on this work.

John Gemmell – Senior Manager, Employment Services

Mark Swan Update

To recap on Marks’s story; Mark was employed via Bridging the Gap funding by Landscape Outlook Ltd. The entire team at Landscape Outlook provide Mark with lots of support and his confidence and skills have developed tremendously over the past few months. Bridging the Gap funding came to an end in March, but Mark’s was delighted to find that his employer has continued his employment as a Landscape Labourer due to the commitment he has demonstrated.

Mark discovered that he is well suited to this type of work which involves the application of many skills. Mark is proud of having learned a new skill in stone masonry (stone wall construction and repair). Mark Walker, Managing Director of Landscape Outlook said “Mark has shown a particular aptitude for Landscaping and shows an understanding of landscape design and how its features come together. He gives 100% effort to the jobs and looks forward to starting work each morning”.

Mark has now progressed from Work Choice; being confident enough to no longer require Azure’s support. He commented “I never thought I would end up in the landscape gardening industry, I couldn’t have imagined that my search for a job would end in such a positive way.”

Mark Walker added “within a year Mark should have the skills to complete an individual project himself, to a high standard”. He went on to say “on several occasions there have been testimonials from customers, emphasising Mark’s good work on site and as a good team player”.

Well done on your achievement Mark!

Board Member Profile

Name... Chris Litchfield
Board member since... November 2012
Likes... Chocolate, having fun
Dislikes... Cheese, having photo taken



What is your career history...?

After taking Zoology and Physiology at Newcastle University I joined Fenwicks as a graduate trainee and stayed for 41 years. During that time I became a buyer, buying for various departments in Newcastle and other stores throughout the group. I then became a Merchant (managing a selection of Buyers) and for the last 6 years, Head of Financial Services. Amongst other things this gave me an insight into the financial make-up of the stores trading profit and required presenting a quarterly report to the Newcastle Board on the budgets affecting the end result. It was a challenging job both on the Merchandise and Financial side but I was lucky in that I found a career that developed and which I really enjoyed.

What is your role with Azure...?

I joined the Azure Board as a Trustee in 2012

Why did you want to be involved with Azure...?

Having had a long career within a commercial environment and enjoyed a brief spell of retirement, I realised I still had a large amount of energy and wanted to channel that into something worthwhile and positive. A friend suggested I use my experience in the Charity sector and the opportunity to join Azure's Board came along.

What is your involvement with Employment Services...?

As a member of the Board I was asked if I would become involved with the Skills Builder programme within Employment Services. Given Azure is such a large organisation with lots of varying departments, it was a great opportunity to gain a better understanding of how the pieces of the Azure jigsaw fitted together. My role is to be the link between the programme and the Board. I report to the Board on a regular basis about the activities and work being undertaken by learners and staff. As this role is totally different to my career background it is a steep learning curve but the enthusiasm and efforts of the staff and students is inspiring and I am enjoying being a part of it.

What are your hobbies and interests...?

I enjoy reading, travel and trying to play golf. I am taking French and sewing classes and do Pilates, Yoga and Zumba. I also love cooking and have a huge collection of cookery books, although I probably spend more time reading recipes than actually cooking!

Gavin Hall Story



Gavin was referred to Azure's Work Choice programme in October 2013. With a vast amount of work experience Gavin was keen to re-engage in the labour market. Azure saw something in Gavin, which at the time he couldn't see himself.

A vacancy within our Garden Centre became available and we thought Gavin would be the ideal candidate. After application and interview, Gavin was offered a 13-week position.

The short term contract was enough time for Gavin to prove to himself that he was able to do the job. Gavin's confidence increased tremendously and managers were very impressed with his ability and attitude towards work.

"I was going through a tough time before being involved with Azure; I had been struggling with health issues and confidence. Azure supported me and gave me the tools I needed to move back into employment. My confidence has grown and working within the Garden Centre team gave me a social environment too which helped my self-esteem, I'm more confident of finding future work and a career and I am enjoying life so much more too. Thank you Azure."

Upon Gavin's 13-week contract coming to an end, the Garden Centre didn't want to lose such an asset and so offered Gavin work on a casual basis. Well done Gavin!

The Azure 13-STEPS Scheme

How can you help our clients?

If you can offer one of our clients a **13-week job**, you will give them an opportunity to experience the world of work. Give them an opportunity to learn and develop new skills, enabling them to improve their CV. Make them more employable.

What we will do

Azure will help job-match clients to possible job roles you have identified.

You, as the employer, as well as the client will have a dedicated Employment Adviser who will support you during the client's period of employment.

By being involved in this scheme, employers can...

- Be Disability Confident.
- Provide opportunities for people with a disability in the local community by giving them a chance to partake in the world of work.
- Receive **£500!** Which you will receive at the end of the 13 week period.

How can you take up this offer?

Get in touch! We'd love to hear from you.

Please contact us using the details at the end of this Newsletter and we can arrange an informal chat.



Skills and Trust



Matthew

Two of our learners, Jamie and Matthew have gained some valuable experience via The National Trust.

Having worked with the National Trust on various projects (all covered in past editions of this newsletter!) we were informed that they were looking to recruit someone to join their team at Seaton Delaval Hall for a year's paid training within their gardening team, this being part of the Trust's Passport To Your Future project for 2014.

According to the National Trust's website they "want to increase diversity within the National Trust, the scheme is open to all, but it is all about breaking down barriers to enable people to succeed."

"The trainees will be paid and follow a structured training course, which we hope will act as stepping stone for a further career in heritage spaces."

Matthew and Jamie were very keen to apply and received support from the Skill Builders staff to make their application. Several weeks later they were both excited to receive a reply to advise them that they had got through the initial application stage and had been invited to attend a Taster Day at Seaton Delaval Hall.

This Taster Day consisted of indoor and outdoor activities; candidates were involved in talks and activities about The Delaval family. Outside activities consisted of sowing chilli seeds, dead-heading and pruning. It was a full but well structured day, the comprehensive activities were well co-ordinated and both our learners thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

Having successfully got through the Taster Day, both Jamie and Matthew were invited to the first stage of interviews. These photographs show them very smartly dressed for the occasion and judging by the look on their faces demonstrates how proud they were on their achievement.

Matthew and Jamie were ecstatic called back for a second interview. Unfortunately following this interview they both received notification that they had been unsuccessful.

They received a letter from the National Trust, giving individual feedback and some very positive comments.

Although they didn't get the job both Jamie and Matthew feel they have gained a huge amount from the experience and proud to learn they got through to the last 10!

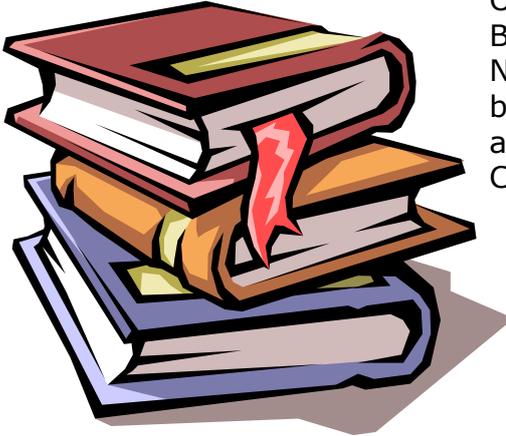
We are all extremely proud of you both – well done!



Jamie

Celebrating World Book Day

WORLD
BOOK
DAY



On 6th March learners and staff from the Skills Builder team visited the City Library in Newcastle. They set off early, travelling by bus to the city centre. They arranged to meet Barbra Bravey and Kim Dryden, Information and Library Officers at the Council.

Barbara and Kim gave them a very warm welcome. The visited started by giving the group a personalised and exciting tour of the library; from local studies and family history section to the children's library, from public computer suite to the huge area of fiction and non-fiction books.

The group were fortunate to be shown around the Newcastle Collection (a display of rare books and illustrations). Everyone was thrilled to see original letters that had been written by Laurel and Hardy! A touch that was very much appreciated.

The City Library is full of exciting innovations and unusual features and learners and staff were shown a sample. A highlight of the tour was seeing the self-return machine and conveyor belt which automatically sorts books when they are brought back by readers.

Barbara and Kim offered our learners the opportunity to join the library and the response was instant; registrations forms were completed with haste!

“ My favourite bit of the visit was looking at the very old newspapers and books. ”

“ I enjoyed visiting the book self-return machine and archives room. ”

Our learners were also given World Book Day tokens which each learner used to purchase a book of their choice. The day provided inspiration; as a group they are starting to read *The Tales of Beadle the Bard*.

Since this visit Skill Builders have been back to Newcastle City Library and books were borrowed, it is envisaged that this will be a regular event.

Staff and learners would like to Thank Barbara and Kim very much for their time and for making it such an enjoyable visit.



Skill Builders learners and staff sitting in the story area within the Children's library area.

Margaret Potts

In November 2013 Margaret was referred to Azure's Work Choice programme and was allocated to Steve Brown's caseload.

Steve recalls "I was impressed with Margaret's career history; having gained a wealth of experience in a variety of roles."

“ **From an early stage
Margaret
demonstrated a good
work ethic** ”



Margaret's last paid job was as a Support Assistant within a residential care home. Her role was to set up the dining room as well as provide personal support to residents at meal times.

Upon being referred to Work Choice Margaret had been unemployed for 12 months, but was keen to get back into this type of work.

Margaret is committed to Work Choice and meets all the demands of the programme. Meeting with Steve Brown every week they have worked together to update her CV; giving it a fresh modern look.

Steve has supported Margaret to undertake work based training such as Health & Safety and COSHH.

Eager to re-enter the world of work, Margaret continues to show strong commitment; she completes any task given and also uses her own initiative in job searching. Margaret has applied for a vast amount of vacancies; she has secured countless interviews and has received lots of positive feedback.

Margaret has all the qualities of an ideal employee; commitment, hard-working and has experience.

All Margaret needs is a break – an employer who is willing to give her an opportunity to demonstrate her skills.

Thank you to St. James's Place Foundation

A grant application was made to St. James's Place Foundation; the foundation is the charitable section of the St. James's Place Wealth Management Group.

The idea was to replace the two old and tired cookers in the canteen at our Head Office building. These cookers are used on a regular basis by the Skill Builders team; structured sessions enable learners develop their skills in home cooking and hospitality.

In these sessions our Skill Builders learn how to budget, plan, shop, prepare and cook food. Sessions in hospitality are delivered by hosting 'Café Days', where a table d'hote menu is offered and staff from across the organisation can book to attend.

These are well supported events and any money raised from these days go directly to funding other learning-based sessions and away days.

Unfortunately due to the age of the cookers, meals often took much longer to cook than they really should. Our Christmas lunch demonstrated this when the roast potatoes took 3½ hours to cook! Even with this delay the Skill Builders team still managed to serve Christmas lunch for 60 people, an achievement in itself.

When the opportunity arose to apply for funding we jumped at the chance. We made our application and waited eagerly for a reply. Azure was thrilled to be informed that our application had been approved.



St. James's Place representative Clare Clarkson (centre right) presenting the cheque to Tracey Summerbell (Employment Services Administrator) with John Gemmell, Senior Manager (left) some of our Skills Builder learners and Ray Summerbell, Training Assistant (right)

On Thursday 10th April Clare Clarkson, a St. James's Place representative visited Azure to formally present us with the cheque. Our learners were keen to meet Clare to thank her and St. James's Place foundation for their support.

A new electric ceramic range cooker is being purchased and our Skill Builders team are looking forward to putting it to the test.

Learners and colleagues of Azure would like to thank Clare and St. James's Place Foundation for their support – it is very much appreciated.

“ The St. James Place Foundation is proud to support Azure and I would personally like to congratulate them for the quality services they provide to people with disability throughout the North East ”

Clare Clarkson, St. James's Place Foundation

Facts and figures

Since the start of year 4, Work Choice have received **143** referrals and started **81** on the programme.

Currently we have **52** Work Choice clients on Module 1 who are actively seeking employment.

Since our last newsletter **23** of our clients have gained employment, working either here at Azure or with external employers.

2/3 of our Work Choice clients currently in Module 1 are male.

Skill Builders currently have **10** learners on their programme

45% of our clients starting Work Choice have been in the 26-44 age group.

So far this year **24** of our Work Choice clients have progressed into unsupported employment.

4 of our Skill Builders learners have applied to Kirkley Hall to start in September 2014.

Our Work Choice clients have been undertaking lots of training to assist them to gain employment, from **SIA licences**, to **Health & Safety training**, **COSHH** to **Food Hygiene**.

Christopher's Story

Christopher was referred to Azure's Work Choice programme in July 2013. Christopher already had some solid and good work experience; he just needed the right job opportunity.

Christopher was allocated to Azure's Recruitment Adviser, Dawn Wallace. Dawn and Christopher met each week to job search and Dawn provided support to enable Christopher to complete COSHH and Workplace Safety training.

They conducted CV drops to employers in the local area. It was back in November during one of these regular sessions where Christopher mentioned how much he enjoyed visiting the local SITA recycling centre in Alwick. Dawn immediately thought to approach them with a view investigating potential job opportunities for Christopher.

The site manager was very impressed with Christopher's CV. Initially SITA had some health and safety concerns, but they were keen to find a way around the situation. The Health and Safety representative at SITA advised that it was his job to put safe procedures in place to enable Christopher to work there, not to prevent it.

Unfortunately Christopher's time on the Work Choice programme came to an end in February 2014. However we can report that Christopher has since be offered a job with SITA for 2 days per week. He impressed them on his induction day when he could confidently talk about COSHH.

Well done Christopher, we wish you well for the future.



Christopher dressed and ready for work



STOP! ... Think ...

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

Could you offer a work experience placement, work trial or employment opportunity?

If you could give someone the green light to test or demonstrate their skills, 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**



Introducing Elaine Dobson

Elaine joined Azure Employment Services as a Welfare Benefits Adviser in 1998. Initially working from St. Cuthbert's House in Newcastle her role was to advise and advocate on Welfare Benefits for Supported Employment clients.

Over the years programmes changed and Elaine's role developed along with them. In 2006 she was appointed Deputy Manager of Employment Services. From July this year her role will be changing again when she takes on the role of Employment Programme Manager.



“ **My team and I will continue to provide excellent support for our Work Choice clients and are ready to take on the future challenges of the constantly evolving Supported Employment Programmes** ”

Introducing Pauline Smith



Pauline joined Azure Support Services in 1993; originally employed to set up an intensive supported employment department. Prior to this Pauline's background was in training young people with special training needs on youth training schemes.

Over time and due to restructuring Pauline became Assistant Manager within Azure's Community Access and Employment department. Then an opportunity arose when Azure Support Services set up its own training department, Pauline was offered the position of Training Co-ordinator.

Now due to the restructuring of Employment Services, Pauline will manage our Skill Builders programme in addition to her existing remit.

“ **I'm looking forward to the future with enthusiasm and excitement** ”