

## Work Choice



Elaine

Welcome to issue no.8 of Spotlight.

Since taking over management of Azure's Work Choice programme in July, time has certainly passed very quickly. As always, we have taken on the challenges and have undergone quite a few changes, including new management, staff coming and going, the reduction and relocation of Jobcentre Plus Disability Employment Advisers and the inevitable administrative exercise that is the end of the Work Choice year! All the while, striving to ensure that our focus remains firmly fixed on the service we deliver to our customers.

It's testimony to our hard working and adaptable team that great results have been achieved in this last 12 months, only some of which are contained within this newsletter. I know that this New Year will present us with many more challenges however, I am confident that we are well placed to meet them.

## Welcome Sheena

I'm from an English Language and Literature teaching background at Newcastle College. I still mark exam papers for Cambridge University's English Literature department each year and enjoy this link with my original teaching subject.

After many years teaching I diversified into delivering the CTLLS and PTTLLS Teaching qualifications for Northumberland Adult Learning.

During my time with Newcastle College I had spent some time working with SEN AND ESOL students and I found I wanted to work a lot more with learners with individual support needs. My role as Functional Skills and P.S.D Tutor at B-Skills, Blyth allowed me to work with young people who had a range of different support needs and I enjoyed liaising with other referral staff.

Gaining my I.A.S qualifications I then worked for Connexions Northumberland and moved more into Employability. That saw me becoming Employability Tutor and Internal Verifier with Northumberland College and a short while teaching Functional Skills at Buzz Learning.

The lure of Azure occurred! I applied and was really happy to gain the role I currently hold (Recruitment Adviser). It's been lovely to meet the people at Azure, not only in Employment Services, but across at the Garden Centre, Supported Living and the complete team at Keele Drive. Everyone has been so welcoming and supportive and there's a real and tangible focus on the quality of support for our clients which I have not witnessed for a long time.



# Bridging the Gap

Bridging the Gap is an initiative that offers employers £2,624 if they employ one of our Work Choice clients for 16 hours or more each week, for a minimum of 6 months.

This initiative provides an individual the opportunity to gain paid employment and hopefully progress into mainstream employment.

We have already had huge success with this scheme with some of our clients gaining employment with a wide variety of organisations such as Northumberland Wildlife Trust, North East Ambulance Service, St Oswald's Hospice, Bede Community Primary School and North Tyneside Disability Forum.



“ This opportunity has given me a chance to work in a great outdoor environment and at the same time meeting so many different people. Carrying out work I really enjoy and at the same time learning new skills. ”

Shaun working at Northumbria Wildlife Trust



“ I enjoy working at NTDF particularly for its inclusiveness, understanding and support of hearing impaired people. I am grateful for the support of Azure Charitable Enterprises and the opportunity that has been afforded me. ”

Helen working at North Tyneside Disability Forum

If you could offer one of our clients a paid job and would like to access Bridging the Gap, please get in touch! You could even feature in our next edition of Spotlight!

## Shirley

Shirley joined Azure Garden Centre team at a busy time of year but she is thoroughly enjoying her new role. She is proving a big hit with the customers and feels like she has been part of the team for years! As a proud grandma of seven grandsons and a great granddaughter the family have already been in to visit her and enjoy the Christmas decorations and lights.



“ I love the whole atmosphere in the garden centre, from the staff I work with to the customers I serve. The feeling of earning my own money again and the way I feel about myself from how I felt six months ago is amazing. I never thought I would feel as good as I do now. ”

# Care to Support

Several months ago Azure's Work Choice decided to create a new scheme called Care to Support. This scheme offers employers £500 if they employ one of our clients in a 13-week support assistant role. Care to Support also offers new employees on the scheme a package of training which will take place during this 13-week period. Training will include:

- Health and Safety
- Equality and Diversity
- Food Hygiene
- Infection prevention and control
- Manual Handling

This scheme was trialled internally first; 5 of our Work Choice clients were offered 13-week support assistant roles. Training took place, skills were developed and experience gained. Everyone settled into work really well.

On two separate occasions permanent positions became available and some of the Care to Support clients applied for these jobs and interviews were offered. Both Simon and Gail were thrilled to learn they had been successful in gaining permanent positions as support workers.

This trial has been a huge triumph and wish for its continued success. We are now promoting the scheme to external employers.

If you can offer one of our clients the opportunity of a 13-week support assistant role, then please get in touch.



“ Having been on the sick for 3 years I never thought I'd work again. Azure's Work Choice programme helped me get this 13-week position.

It gave me an opportunity to try a new avenue of work – and I love it! ”

“ The 13-week training role turned out to be a really good move for me. It provided me with excellent on the job training and experience which boosted my confidence to gain employment after being made redundant two years ago.



# Task Force

In early summer 2014 it was identified there was a need to tidy up areas around the site at Head Office and the Garden Centre. It was agreed that five 13-week positions would be created to carry out this specific plan. This group would be known as 'The Task Force'.

When these positions became available a number of our Module 1 clients were keen to apply.

Elaine, Gary and Michael were excited to be offered interviews and were even more thrilled to learn they had been successful in gaining paid employment.

On 15<sup>th</sup> July the Task Force was born. When Elaine, Gary and Michael met each other for the first time it was evident their bond was going to be strong. Working two days per week, they arrived prompt every day and worked incredibly hard to complete all tasks allocated to them.

They provided one another with great support and their team working skills were second to none.

Prior to gaining this job Elaine, Gary and Michael had varying lengths of time unemployed, so this 13-week position is a positive entry to be added to their CVs. It has provided them with up to date work history and an opportunity to learn new skills. They can confidently use this experience to promote their skills and abilities to potential employers.

No doubt you will have seen them if you were at Head Office on one of their working days, their beaming smiles were a joy and their enthusiasm infectious! If you didn't see them, you could certainly tell where they had been!

All three are leaving Azure with their CVs updated to reflect their new skills and a confidence that will carry them forward to securing employment in the, hoped to be, not too distant future.



# Work Choice year 4 statistics

This has been an incredibly busy year for us!

Between 25<sup>th</sup> October 2013 – 24<sup>th</sup> October 2014, **129** clients started on the Work Choice programme with Azure.

We supported **46** clients to progress into unsupported employment and **37** of our clients achieved sustained unsupported employment; still working with their employer 6 months after our support was no longer needed.

We assisted **76** clients to gain employment; achieving a huge **93%** against profile.



## 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**

## Welcome Brian



Having supported people with health conditions and disabilities for over 33 years I am looking forward to using the skills, knowledge and experience I have gained to support the clients at Azure in my new role as a Recruitment Adviser.

Although I have only been working for Azure for a few weeks I already feel 'part of the family' and I know I am going to enjoy my time here a great deal. Everyone has been very welcoming and friendly.

A little bit of personal background, I enjoy 'trying' to keep fit by running 3 to 4 times per week. In my younger days I did Shotokan Karate and completed 12 Great North Runs. The last one was in 2012. And that will be the LAST ONE!!

To relax I like to play on my guitars and learn the rhythm and lead guitar parts from some of my favourite bands.

## Welcome Kirsty



Having spent 20 years working in my family's retail business I decided I needed a change, so I grasped the nettle and embarked on a course of study. I left school with only a handful of CSE's so you can imagine I was faced with an uphill challenge. Four years later I graduated from university with a 1<sup>st</sup> class degree in Occupational Therapy at the ripe old age of 43.

OT is about enabling people to do the things they want or need to do and this fits perfectly alongside Azure's mission to help disabled or disadvantaged people. I feel that in my role as Recruitment Adviser I will be able to use the skills and ethos of occupational therapy to enable our clients to lead productive lives and hopefully find employment.

My previous life in retail means I am also able to understand things from an employer's point of view and appreciate what it means to have a varied and diverse

workforce and the benefits of this to the business and customers alike.

In my spare time I enjoy all things crafty and when I get the chance I like to bake, my son says I make the best chocolate cake in the world...but I think that may be a ploy!!! My ambition is to be a contestant on the Great British Bake Off and rub shoulders with Paul Hollywood, but until then there'll be a steady supply of goodies available in the Employment Services office.

I look forward to working alongside you all and being part of the team, not just in Employment Services but as part of the Azure family for many years to come.

# Skills Builder



It has been an eventful and exciting time over the past 6 months as everyone adapts to the new structure within the Training Department.

The Skills Builder study programme was awarded Grade 2 "Good" from the Ofsted inspection in June and the team continue to look for ways to develop, and build on the good work and improve the study programme further for current and prospective learners.

Our remit is to provide education and training for people with learning and other disabilities who are 16-24. Our study programme aims to support, develop and provide young people with vocational, employability and independent living skills as they transition into adulthood.

Our team are enthusiastic and committed and continue to plan a varied programme to broaden experience and knowledge, including events and projects that involve learners within the local community, learning about diversity and equality along with horticultural and practical everyday skills to name but a few – all of this whilst embedding Functional and ICT skills!

A previous feature, revived in recent months, has been the offer of placements to young people who are due to leave a couple of the special schools within the area. This is with a view to provide a taste of the programme, enabling the young person on placement to make a more informed decision about whether they'd like to join the programme as a learner when they leave school.

The past months have been a steep learning curve for all and I know shall continue to be so for me in the months ahead!

## Angela - volunteering



Angela started with Azure Training Department in April 2014 as a volunteer one day a week.

Angela had experience of working as a tutor with learners with additional needs; she had recently went back to education signing up for a Level 1 Adult Social Care and Support course, alongside her Level 2 Literacy and Numeracy. She wanted to put her skills and experience to good use helping learners to gain their own qualifications.

Angela works with the Skills Builder team, supporting the learners in their literacy, numeracy, ICT, personal development and horticulture.

Angela has recently started her level 2 Adult Social Care and Support qualification and her level 1 Counselling qualification.

**“ I enjoy every day with the Skills Builders and feel I learn more skills every time I am here. ”**

# Interim Awards Ceremony

On 7 November an interim Awards Ceremony was held at Azure Headquarters in recognition of Skills Builder Learners' achievements so far. Chris Litchfield, Board Member presented learners with certificates for Horticulture and Personal and Social Development.

Staff from various departments who have supported the learners during the year were invited to witness the special event.

Tea and scones were provided and this gave the perfect opportunity for colleagues to informally chat with learners.

Thanks are expressed to Chris for this, her ongoing commitment and representing Skills Builder to Azure Board of Directors.

Well done to everyone!



# KEVI

As part of the programme and evidence towards Horticultural and Personal and Social Development units, in November Skills Builder Learners and the staff team worked on a project in partnership with King Edward VI School in Morpeth (KEVI). The project involved planting a wave of 3000 bulbs on a bank alongside the school drive and clearing the overgrown memorial garden - the latter in readiness for a Memorial Service to be held on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2014. The learners, supported by the staff team, cleared and planted the borders of the memorial garden using a red theme to transform the area. Thanks to Azure Garden Centre for the loan of some large pot shrubs for the day to enhance the display.

Many compliments were received from the Head Teacher and staff of KEVI School all of whom were grateful. The learners' efforts were highlighted in the Morpeth Gazette.

The learners have been invited back to help create a conservation area for Red Squirrels within the school grounds and this is currently in the planning stage.



“ Very many thanks for all the hard work that everyone put in at King Edward's this week. Can't wait to see what the spring bulbs will look like when they come up and the War Memorial area looks absolutely lovely! We really appreciate all that you have done. ”

Sheila Clark from Kind Edward VI school

# Christmas lunch Café Day

To round off the year in December, as part of their hospitality unit, the learners planned a Café Day with a 3 course Christmas lunch for staff.

This is always a popular event and places were sold out very quickly. In total there were 57 covers; a mix of sit in diners and take away meals.

As always the team had transformed the dining room which was adorned with decorations and an impressively dressed Christmas tree. The tables had been decorated and each diner received an individual name setting/sweet filled favour box.

Each learner was in fancy dress and diners had to vote for their favourite elf!

It was a fun-filled event with a serious purpose; for learners to gain valuable experience in hospitably. The learners who cooked the food, plated the meals, served and attended diners and took payment all did an amazing job.

“ Thank you very much for the fantastic lunch. It was another great effort by both the learners and staff team in equal measure. Catering for over 50 people I imagine is a huge task that takes time to organise and deliver. Once again well done to everybody and the food was delicious!! ”

Steve Brown, Employment Programme Team Leader – and diner!



Skills Builder learners and staff in the canteen prior to hungry diners arriving!