

## **Meaningful learning experiences for young people with an ASN background**

*Ellanor King, Additional Support for Learning Coach with Glasgow City Council Activity Agreements, shares her experience of creating meaningful pathways through Activity Agreements*



I am the dedicated Additional Support for Learning Coach with Glasgow City Council Activity Agreements. This means I undertake the Trusted Professional role for many of our Activity Agreement participants with additional support needs. I am also responsible for developing and co-ordinating meaningful pathways for this vulnerable group of young people.

This approach has enabled Activity Agreements in Glasgow to build strong partnerships with ASL colleagues and providers. We work closely together to plan and deliver a unique support service that both nurtures and develops/challenges the young people through clear and appropriate progression pathways.

Following assessment, many of the most vulnerable young people begin their Activity Agreement journey in Glasgow on a one-to-one basis, with their Trusted Professional. For those with additional support needs we have the option of using a life coach who has specific experience in supporting those with additional support needs through their first steps. This short period of intensive support allows young people to develop the personal and social skills to access the wider learning and activities available through Activity Agreements and integrate with their peers.

The next step is often to join one of our nurture groups. The nurture group allows young people to begin interaction with their peers in a safe environment, alongside a small number of other young people with similar requirements. The groups are facilitated by Activity Agreement coaches who help to create a safe and nurturing environment. We are working with the Glasgow Disability Alliance at the moment to come up with a bespoke programme for young people with an ASN background. The content of each nurture group is tailored to the needs of the individual, building their confidence and capacity to move onto the next stage of their Activity Agreement, at their own pace.

Following the nurture group, the Activity Agreement journey allows young people to focus on removing barriers and begin to learn about the concept of employability. A needs led approach is adhered to and the programmes are developed in response to the barriers the young people identify during their time with our life coach and nurture group, for example travel, confidence, self-esteem and relationships. One to one support from the Trusted Professional continues throughout.

The final stage of the Activity Agreement journey is the introduction of another agency and to begin planning for transition. We recognise that transitions are difficult for every young

person however for those with a learning disability this can be a particularly daunting process. Transition planning begins gradually, with reassurance that the Trusted Professional will support them throughout and maintain contact until they are comfortable to move on.

The challenge as a Trusted Professional is very often the lack of relevant pathways and sometimes a lack of understanding among training providers and employers. This is where I need to work particularly closely with partner agencies to plan and deliver a clear and appropriate progression pathway.

To give you an example, there was one group of young people with various support or learning needs and mental health issues including social anxiety. Prior to their Activity Agreement they had all disengaged from employability programmes due to not being offered the correct support. In planning for their transition from Activity Agreements, an appropriate progression was identified as a Princes Trust TEAM programme, delivered by the City of Glasgow College. Although this programme is inclusive, the young people in the Activity Agreement group required a more nurturing environment. I was able to share relevant information about the young people with the partner agency and subsequently, in conjunction with The Princes Trust, it was agreed that a group should be run that would be tailored to their particular needs.

Part of the adaptation to the course was the use of additional volunteers to ensure that the young people received the best possible support. In addition, the tutor was aware of all the support needs and adapted the course accordingly to ensure that it would be achievable for everyone. For example, the residential trip was shortened as some members of the group would have been unable to participate if we had continued with the mainstream programme. The course staff met with the group prior to the start and I accompanied the group on the first few days of their new course until they were confident with the travel route and the new staff.

The difference in the confidence of the group from the first week to the last was incredible and each young person went through a personal journey – gaining qualifications and real experience of the world of work. At times certain young people were finding it difficult to cope however the group as a whole were overwhelmingly supportive of each other, and combined with the support of the staff involved, this proved key to the success of the group.

I continued to be involved in the progression pathway of these young people and was keen to ensure they did not end up on a cycle of personal development courses. Following the 12-week TEAM programme the young people moved on to Stage 2 Employability Fund training programme with Jobs and Business Glasgow. Again our partner agency was aware of the needs of the group and the importance of identifying a tutor who would be supportive and understanding of their needs.