



Learning,  
Skills and  
Work Service



## Learning, Skills and Work Service

*'Trying hard and being well meaning is not enough we want to get the results that help change young people's lives'*

St Basils is a youth agency which uses housing as the medium to work with young people aged 16 - 25 to enable them to find and keep a home, to develop their confidence, skills and opportunities and to prevent homelessness. To do this we provide a range of services to young people in Birmingham and some of the surrounding areas of the West Midlands.

This briefing paper tells you about one aspect of the range of services we provide.

### Summary

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The Learning, Skills and Work Service plays an important role in preventing homelessness by increasing the necessary confidence and skills that young people need in order to engage with mainstream education, training and / or employment.

The key results for all young people are to have comprehensive, impartial information, advice and guidance that will assist them in entering appropriate education, training and / or employment.

These results are monitored and reviewed via young peoples' individual action plans that include targets agreed by both the young person and Learning & Skills Worker.

Their achievements contribute to bigger outcomes of reducing the number of young people in Birmingham & Solihull not in any education, employment or training (NEET). Also, to aid young people to increase academic levels to level 2 – the Government's national target.

The Learning, Skills and Work Service has positive working partnerships including Connexions, Learning & Skills Council and Next Step Network. These partnerships enable us to access resources and information that enables us to deliver an optimum service for young people.

The Learning, Skills and Work Service delivers numerous projects and courses that enhances the development of young people. Approx 300 young people are provided with an intensive service each year and 90% re-engage with some form of education, training or employment as a result of the interventions from the Service.

The Service holds the Matrix Standard Accreditation for Information, Advice & Guidance Services.

The Learning, Skills and Work Service strives to deliver work that compliments strategic national outcomes in Every Child Matters and Youth Matters.

### The challenge and the evidence

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For many young people, a bad experience at school or college is a key factor in them becoming homeless or being at risk of becoming homeless. Bad experiences can lead to poor academic results that in turn will dent the young person's self-esteem and confidence. Ultimately, they do not have the skills to enter into further education or employment. Around 40% of young people that come to St Basils each year have no or very few recognised qualifications. There is also a high percentage of young people who have experienced school exclusion on either a permanent or temporary basis who later experience homelessness.

We believe that all young people should be given the opportunities to fulfil their aspirations and potential. Learning, Skills and Work Service sets out to address the issues of low confidence, skills and self-esteem and to raise young people's aspirations.

A major challenge we face is engaging young people into an area that historically for them is one that has let them down, been fruitless and stressful.

The Learning, Skills and Work Service sets out to address these issues by involving young people in every decision and opportunity available to them and devising an action plan that is personal to them. Feedback has shown that young people want to learn and develop themselves and in light of this, a variety of courses are delivered in-house where young people are comfortable and in a learning environment that suits them.

The challenge is to tap into young people's interests and passions. The things they like doing – and using this as a base to develop their skills and aspirations. By showing young people they can achieve by doing something they enjoy, creates satisfaction and increases confidence to further pursue their goals.

## **Developing the Learning, Skills and Work Service**

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The Learning, Skills and Work Service was developed to provide young people with opportunities to succeed where previously those chances may not have been apparent.

We started out by offering young people the opportunity to meet with a qualified worker on a one-to-one basis about their educational needs. From these discussions, it was clear that young people needed a comprehensive service providing opportunities to learn and develop their potential.

## **How it works**

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St Basils Learning, Skills and Work Service has forged good links and partnerships with statutory and non-statutory organisations. Birmingham & Solihull Connexions being one of our major partners.

Next Step Birmingham and Solihull is a partnership of organisations giving information and advice to adults aged 20 years and over on learning and work. We are members of this network and have 2 workers delivering to young people aged 20 – 25.

The Learning, Skills and Work Service holds the Matrix Standard Accreditation for Information, Advice & Guidance services. Highlighting the quality of the work we deliver to young people.

### ***Information, Advice & Guidance (IAG)***

The Information, Advice & Guidance (IAG) element is aimed at young people aged 16 – 25 who are service users of St Basils.

The aim of this element is to provide young people with the opportunity to develop an action plan with the support of a qualified worker. This action plan sets out realistic goals and the steps to be taken in order to fulfil the young person's aspirations.

Follow-up sessions are offered to young people until the action plan has been achieved or the service is no longer needed by the young person.

All staff delivering Information, Advice & Guidance are qualified to at least NVQ Level 3 in IAG. However, most are at level 4 and we encourage those to reach this level during their time working in the service.

### ***In House Courses***

A variety of courses developing basic skills in a creative way are delivered in St Basils accommodation projects' training rooms. The environment is relaxed but focused, creating an optimum space for young people to learn and achieve.

These courses are possible through working partnerships with local LSC and colleges and volunteers, providing tutors who adapt to the learning requirements of young people.

### ***Peer Education***

Through our intensive IAG work, we recognise that there are a number of young people with a range of talents and skills. We support young people to express these talents by planning and delivering workshops to other young people. These are educational workshops to develop a certain skill and the response and interaction between young people is instrumental in the development of their social skills, confidence and self-esteem.

### ***Group Work***

We have found peer learning to be invaluable for young people to develop their "soft" skills. Group projects are delivered on a range of issues that affect young people and that are prominent on the national agenda. Social issues such as sexual health, drugs and alcohol are confronted. Positive changes in attitude from the young people's approach to these issues as a consequence of these sessions, has a knock on effect to their focus, educational aims and life aspirations.

## Key Principles and assumptions

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There are some key principles that underpin the work of the Learning, Skills and Work Service that formulate our success:

- Learning and skills development can be significant in preventing homelessness.
- All young people can benefit from impartial information, advice and guidance in relation to their education, training and employment needs.
- Providing opportunities for young people to re-engage back into learning at a level that is right for them, speeds up their route to further education or employment.
- Creating a comfortable environment for young people to learn increases participation and achievement.
- Group Work and Peer Education is a valuable learning tool for young people that provoke increased self-esteem and confidence.
- For a comprehensive service to be delivered, effective working partnerships need to be developed with a variety of agencies.

We have a set of assumptions about involvement and working with young people which underpin all our work including Learning, Skills and Work Services, the most relevant are shown below:

- The quicker young people re-engage into learning, the more likely they are to fulfil their potential.
- By creating realistic goals and providing appropriate opportunities, all young people have the potential to realise their aspirations.
- We believe increasing confidence can reduce disengagement.
- It is young people who have to decide their goals and aspirations, they have to be realistic and own their action plan.
- Where a young person has been disengaged from education, training or employment for some time, this adds and contributes to low self-esteem, confidence and low skill levels. Being disengaged isn't an easy option.
- Low basic skills i.e numeracy and literacy contributes to lack of opportunities later in life.

## Impact

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The Learning, Skills and Work Service has some clear outcomes that are achieved on an annual basis. One of the good things about this work is that progress can be quite easily measured and monitored.

Our desired outcomes compliment those required by Connexions, Next Step partnership and the LSC. Nationally, there has been a large push to increase the academic and skills level of the country. The Learning, Skills and Work Service effectively contributes to this including reducing the NEET figure i.e those young people not in any education, employment or training, and progressing young people towards a level 2 qualification.

The impact of the work is highlighted in our Key Performance Indicators which show the effectiveness of the service:

- 90% re-engaged back into some kind of education, employment or training.
- Over 30% young people completed accredited qualifications.
- A range of in house courses delivered.

The key indicator here is the 90% re-engaging back into education, employment or training. As far as St Basils and the Learning, Skills and Work Service is concerned, this highlights the real impact of the service.

Working towards and maintaining the Matrix Standard ensures we deliver a high quality service to young people. This is reviewed every 3 years with an assessor scrutinising every area of the service.

### What young people have to say about it

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“To me I find the service very informative for my needs and requirements.”

“(my worker) has really helped me and made me feel better within myself for doing something better with my life.”

“I would like to thank the EET team for all the help they gave me and the effort they put in so I could concentrate on the course. If EET did not refer me to this course, I know that I wouldn't have been able to afford everything at the time.”

### Lessons Learned

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We think there are key lessons we have learned through developing and delivering the Learning, Skills and Work Service. These points may be helpful if you are thinking of developing a similar service or want to refresh your existing approach.

- Once the need has been identified, it is important to forge useful partnerships with agencies who have similar goals / targets so that resources are optimised.
- The service must be voluntary, once young people choose to engage with the service they are much more likely to succeed.
- Awareness of the importance of promoting learning opportunities needs to be an organisational approach in order for it to be effective.
- An easy and effective referral system is essential for ease of access for young people.
- Information, advice & guidance sessions are important in engaging young people and producing a plan of action. However, this needs to be followed up regularly to monitor progress and provide additional support.
- It is important to guide young people through the journey towards their aspirations rather than stifle their ambitions because they are perceived to be “unrealistic”.

- Never under-estimate the power of peer learning – the results will always surprise you.

- Creating a comfortable, non threatening learning atmosphere breaks down the barriers that some young people experience in school / college.

### Risks

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Here are some of the risks we had to manage and overcome in providing a Learning, Skills and Work Service:

- Generating interest from young people.
- Referral system being complicated and lengthy before the young person actually gets seen by an appropriate worker.
- Accessing enough funding to operate a quality service.
- Ensuring the service delivers in line with the Matrix Standard.
- Managing the expectations of young people.
- Managing the expectations of funders and partners i.e delivering to targets.
- Making sure all workers are qualified to at least NVO level 3 in IAG.



# Learning, Skills and Work Service

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## Further Information

If you want further information about the Learning, Skills and Work Service and how it operates, or how it was set up, then please contact:

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