

CASE STUDY: Smart Steps

Smart Steps is a borough-wide project across the whole of Oldham, delivering targeted life skills support for young people aged 16-18 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). It is run by Connexions and based in The Centre, a targeted youth support centre.

The project has been running since 2007, and a four week programme runs two or three times per year. The culmination of the project is a residential weekend, where the young people use the life skills they have built up throughout their time on the project: for instance, cooking their own food, and planning activities for the group to do. Each project is delivered by two male and two female project workers. The overall aim of the project is to build soft skills in areas such as confidence and communication, in order to prepare the young people to move onto college, a paid job, training or voluntary work.

The activities on the project focus on four areas: healthy eating, transportation, money management and leisure. They take place on three levels developed by project-staff: Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced. As young people progress on the project, they progress up to higher levels, with each level increasing in intensity: young people go on the residential weekend as part of the Advanced level. As well as the residential weekend, activities include a trip to Manchester (for which the young people must plan what they want to do, and buy tickets for themselves), a cooking session where they learn how to prepare healthy dishes within a budget, and sessions relating to living on a budget and managing money.

Young people interviewed who had completed Smart Steps about a year ago felt that it had boosted their confidence and helped them to move onto other learning:

“The most useful [aspect of the project] was the team building, you get to know more people so when you get a job, you’re not scared of going and talking to other people”. (Female, 18, now working as a receptionist)

Others had found that it had improved their enthusiasm and motivation to work:

“When I was in school, I didn’t really listen in lessons, but now I do all the work, and I’m ahead of everyone else”. (Male, 19, now completing an Apprenticeship in upholstery)

Of the 40 young people who have accessed the Smart Steps project so far, 19 young people moved into a positive destination (employment, education or

training) immediately after the programme. Five more young people had moved into a positive destination within 13 weeks of finishing the project. Eight young people remained NEET, and the rest were unavailable (for example, due to illness, pregnancy or teenage parenthood, or moving out of the area).

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