

Case Study: Integrating Equality and Diversity as part of learning within the Autism Spectrum Condition.



The context:

Thornbeck College specialises in working with young adults who have been diagnosed within Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC). The majority of the learners follow a two-year educational programme centred on developing life skills funded by the LSC.

The challenge:

Individuals who have been diagnosed within the Autism Spectrum Condition often have difficulty in understanding abstract concepts such as culture or religion. The challenge was to promote Equality and Diversity within the college in a way that the learners would develop a better understanding and to ensure staff were adequately trained to continue the promotion of these issues.

The strategy adopted by the college focuses upon two areas; the learners and the staff.

The learners

In order to develop awareness of Equality and Diversity amongst our learners the college organised a week of interactive activities specifically designed to stimulate interest. Because of the nature of ASC and the need to provide concrete examples for the learners to understand the issues being presented the learning strategies employed for the activities had to meet the learner's needs. This involved lots of visual, tactile and audible stimulation such as dressing up in traditional ethnic clothes, role-play and music from an African 'Gum Boot' dance group. Each day covered different aspects of Equality and Diversity.

- Religion
- Race and Culture
- Disabilities
- Age and Gender
- Sexuality

The staff

So that the impetus begun during the week of activities was not lost, it was decided to integrate Equality and Diversity as part of our staff training and development. This

has been achieved by making it a required training standard for all our staff to undertake a distance-learning course through the City of Sunderland College. As a result of completion of this course our staff qualify for a level two certificate in Equality and Diversity.

The outcomes:


The success of the Equality and Diversity week has led us to organise the event on an annual basis. The College intends to promote the 'Learner Voice' by involving a greater participation from the learners in the planning of the week's activities. This will include the learners selecting some of the activities to be included during the week and some of the learners taking an active part in presenting them. For example one learner who has diabetes is going to explain to the other learners about the condition and how it affects their life.

With regards to the staff development aspect of the strategy this has resulted in a third of our staff attaining a level two qualification and over half of the remaining staff at present working towards the completion of the level two course.

The impact:

The impact of these strategies has been the increased awareness of Equality and Diversity within our college both amongst our learners and the staff. Equality and Diversity is not a side issue paid lip service to, but an integral part of the work ethos practised in our daily tasks. Autism remains the over reaching issue irrespective of the individuals origin or background.

In recognition of this work Thornbeck College was awarded in April 2009 the Equality Standard from Equality North East. We are one of only three organisations within the region to receive the award.

 <p data-bbox="240 1518 571 1547">Tyne and Wear Autistic Society.</p>	<p data-bbox="660 1368 1110 1397">For further information contact:</p> <p data-bbox="858 1438 1161 1503">Mark Topham Tutor (E&D Champion)</p> <p data-bbox="906 1538 1110 1568">0191 510 2038</p> <p data-bbox="823 1606 1193 1635">mark.topham@tawas.org.uk</p>
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