

New in-school initiative helps beat NEET problem

An independent evaluation* of a breakthrough early intervention initiative, which aims to reduce the number of young people who drop out at 16, has found that four out of five schools involved in the pilot recorded NEET (not in education, employment or training) rates of below one per cent for their Year 11 leavers.

Despite working with 321 of the most 'at risk' students in schools across the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, 12 months into the two year support programme, only nine of the young people were classified as NEET in destination data. Each NEET young person continued to receive intensive help, which resulted in 98 per cent of the participants being in education, employment or training after 18 months' intervention. Of those who made successful post-16 transitions, 44 per cent chose a vocational route, 34 per cent an academic course, and 18 per cent were involved in foundation learning. Three per cent had accessed Apprenticeship training and one per cent had moved into work.

Tower Hamlets' School-to-Work Transition Pilot Activity was one key project in the Borough's ongoing and comprehensive work on the NEET issue which has enabled it to consistently hit its targets for reducing 16 to 18 year old NEETs. Since 2011, the School-to-Work Transition Pilot Activity has been developed by the Private Equity Foundation, to become 'ThinkForward' and remains a relatively new phenomenon: working with young people in school to prevent disengagement.

A further distinctive part of the programme is its use of 'Super Coaches' with the advanced professional skills necessary to work effectively with senior management teams in schools. The University of Warwick found that a strong relationship with the five pilot schools was vital for the coaches to identify and offer sustained support to a targeted number of 'in need' students.

Emphasis within the programme is on building trust and meeting the individual requirements of young people over the long-term. One-to-one support encompasses both advice and guidance, for example on identifying post-16 choices, completing application forms, setting up mentoring arrangements and work placements, as well as supporting young people with personal issues. Coaches act as advocates for young people at home and at school, support those at risk of exclusion or who have been excluded, and help with everything from anger management to offending patterns, low self-esteem and homelessness. They remain contactable for advice even after a young person has left school.

Shaks Ghosh, Chief Executive of the Private Equity Foundation which has taken over from the London Borough of Tower Hamlets in building on the programme's principles and practices, said: "Tower Hamlets is the third most deprived authority in the country with youth unemployment amongst the highest in London yet, as this evaluation shows, we can radically improve the life chances of even those most at risk of becoming NEET. The Private Equity Foundation has committed to build on this early success. Now called ThinkForward, we've extended the programme to provide vulnerable young people with five years of sustained support from 14 years to 19 years, and have already expanded it into ten schools in Shoreditch.

"The secret of its success is having someone who is part of the school but who isn't a teacher, who has the time to build long-term trusting relationships with the ten per cent of young people who are already struggling before they leave school. According to this report, if it hadn't been for their Super Coach a number of young people felt they would have been excluded, and some would never have applied for a college course. One young person is quoted as saying that friends a year or two above are now on the streets doing nothing because they never got this help. That's heartbreaking and a stark reminder of why we need to act now."

Seven key criteria were identified by the University of Warwick as being integral to the coaches' establishment of effective relationships with young people:

**Final report to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Evaluation of School to Work Transition Initiative, Centre for Education and Industry, University of Warwick*

- Tackling uncertainty about the support that is being offered
- Establishing trust and parameters
- Ensuring confidentiality
- Assessing and addressing individual needs
- Sustaining contact and support
- Providing motivation
- Tackling low self-esteem

The value that the young people gained from working with coaches fell into four broad categories:

- Offering sustained contact
- Developing trust
- Identifying needs
- Meeting needs

Professor Sue Maguire, Centre for Education and Industry (CEI), University of Warwick, said: “The upsurge in the number of school leavers not in education employment or training (NEET) is alarming. Urgent measures are needed to stem the flow and to re-integrate those already NEET.

“The uniqueness of this initiative is its focus on NEET prevention, that is identifying and working with young people ‘at risk’ of disaffection before they leave school. It successfully reduced the incidence of negative outcomes. A key element of this programme’s success was the highly committed and skilled staff who identified and met the needs of young people and who offered them regular and sustained contact. Many young people also stressed the importance of a trusting relationship, where they were listened to and could express themselves freely, underpinned by assurances of confidentiality. This seems a small price to pay to prevent some young people from long term social exclusion.”

In the words of the young people participating in the pilot:

“...you always feel you’ve got someone to go to, if you’re stuck..., she [the coach] makes you feel like you can come back any time you want.”

“...we trust [name of coach], we tell her everything so she knows, she’s like one step ahead, she knows what we would be good at, whereas someone else they’ll just think, *oh either he can do this or he can’t*, she actually knows, she’ll tell us what she thinks would be good for us.”

“[name of coach] gives you advice and options and just helps you be prepared to leave school and just knocks you into reality really, when in school when you’re just in a bubble and you don’t want to listen to teachers, and you have [name of coach] there and just sort of shows you how it’s going to be when you leave and makes you buck your ideas up..”

“...if you’re not in school no more and you don’t have that security, now if you’re out of a job, if you lose your job you’ve always got that bit of advice from [name of coach] and you can go back...it’s good to still have that security...”

“Without [name of coach] I wouldn’t even go around to any place...by myself I would not find anything.”

“I have friends as well that are a year above me, two years above me that they’re not doing nothing because they never got this help that we did. So like they’re just out on the streets doing nothing.”

Note to Editors

- In April 2011, the Centre for Education and Industry (CEI) at the University of Warwick, was commissioned by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets to undertake an evaluation of the School-to-Work Transition (SWT) Pilot Activity.
- The Tower Hamlets SWT Pilot Activity supported 321 young people in Year 11 during the academic year 2009/10. Each young person who was NEET at the end of the academic year continued to be supported by their Super Coach who provided intensive support to enable them to secure other options.
- From September 2011, the Private Equity Foundation has built on the principles and working practices that have been developed in the SWT Pilot to identify young people who are at risk of becoming NEET at age 14 and provide them with targeted and intensive support over a four to five year period to ensure they experience positive transitions. Its ThinkForward programme is now running in ten schools in the Shoreditch area.
- The Private Equity Foundation (PEF) is committed to unlocking the potential of disadvantaged young people. By helping four to 24 year olds at home, through school and into the workplace, the charity aims to transform their life chances and drive down the nearly one million young people currently not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Since 2006, PEF has connected money and pro bono business expertise from the private equity community to the very best youth interventions, to increase their impact and change 60,000 young lives. Where the right breakthrough programmes don't exist, PEF has drawn on its research and international experience to pilot and scale up its own. (www.privateequityfoundation.org)

- The Centre for Education and Industry (CEI) is a research centre within the University of Warwick (established 1988). CEI offers a team of research staff based at Warwick, as well as regional directors located across the country. The Centre has undertaken significant volumes of relevant work for government departments and public agencies and has an international reputation for research in the field of youth transitions, work-related learning and qualifications and learning, including generic skills, design and pedagogy, development and regulation of qualifications, and credit and qualifications frameworks.