

APPRENTICESHIP WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Mental Health in Apprentices: counting the cost

Good & Best practice identified in other curriculum areas

 South Devon College



PETROC

City College Plymouth Intervention 1: Signposted Support for Apprentices - Case Study Highlighting Issues And Impact

City College Plymouth, through the Apprenticeship Workforce Development (AWD) project, identified that some key issues meant apprentices at the College did not receive support for mental health issues to the level they needed (or, on occasion, that was offered to full-time 16-18 students). This was particularly the case over the summer break where apprentices were not coming into college and meeting with peers or other 'naturally occurring' support groups.

Shortly after launching an extensive well-being survey for apprentices (part of the AWD project) the College drew together a help sheet (available online and paper based) which pointed apprentices to support they could access 24/7 at any time of the year. This was given to construction apprentices by their tutor (who was available if anyone wanted one to one support at the time), who are typically male and aged 16-24, as '40% of men won't talk about their mental health', with '29% "too embarrassed" to speak about it' (from research conducted by the Priory Group). Therefore, the support put together was based on a variety of criteria: it was anonymous (bearing in mind the latter point above); it included a variety of external services including online, text based, help lines; support for a range of potential services were covered.

From a follow-up survey, it was apparent that awareness of support (particularly nationally recognised organisations such as Samaritan's) was reasonable. It was encouraging that there was evidence of apprentices (over July & August) reaching out for support for a range of concerns, including: financial concerns; relationships; dealing with work & workload; time management; and family life. There was evidence that half of the apprentices responding to the survey felt more supported – though the College recognises there is still much to be done.

Dealing with mental health issues is obviously a complex and far-reaching challenge and an example of this would be in the case of a female construction apprentice, Learner B. As a result of flagging mental health support through the project, Learner B reached out to her college tutor with concerns about her mental health caused by how she was being treated by her employer. The concern began when she became pregnant and started missing work due to pregnancy related sickness. For the College, it is difficult, beyond basic employment rights, to advise on employer/employee relationships but important that apprentices feel supported in navigating what is often a new chapter in their lives.

The tutor was able to signpost Learner B to appropriate employment rights support and, separately, counselling so she knew the right organisations to approach and who could support with the causes of mental health/wellbeing challenges.

The impact of this intervention demonstrates that apprentices are willing to ask for help when it is needed but that this should be as frictionless as possible, e.g., reinforcing that support is available at every opportunity, and there should be no stigma attached to asking for help.

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