



Catapult Youth Transition Service

By Kevin Blogg

From my experience working in supported employment the most gratifying aspect of my work is to see clients, once placed into work, develop self esteem and confidence. Their social networks increase and they feel comfortable weaving through a society from which they may previously have experienced some alienation. Studies prove that appropriate employment is a major factor in recovery from mental illness.

Apply these factors to youth at school identified as being at risk of social isolation, mental illness, coming to the attention of the justice system, or benefit dependency. Research proves that these people are generally lacking in many skills and do not experience the secondary benefits of employment as I have outlined above which are self esteem, confidence and social skills which lead to social inclusion.

Subsequently, at Catapult Employment Services' last strategic planning meeting it was agreed that working with this group of youth was sound proactive practice, and we should pursue opportunities to develop a transition to employment service to work with at risk youth.

Catapult already has very sound community and employer networks, along with experience. Negotiations are underway to send two youth to Outward Bound, we have a service user on work experience one day per week from school with the goal of developing a career in the motor industry, we have engaged a youth advisor and consultants to work within this service, and we have also placed 45 youth into work.

Catapult Welcomes



North West Mentoring Trust, has just (1st March 2007) become part of the Big Brothers Big Sisters group, which is the largest, oldest and most effective youth mentoring organisation in the world.

BBBS reached the pinnacle of cool when it was featured in the Simpsons and it's profile was further raised recently when the First Lady, Laura Bush, fronted a national recruitment campaign for mentors in the US.

The BBBS website - www.bbbs.org - is full of interesting information about the organisation.

We are very excited about BBBS coming to Christchurch - it has huge implications for the mentoring of young people in the City says Tim Webster trustee of BBBS.

BBBS History

In 1904, a young New York City court clerk named Ernest Coulter was seeing more and more boys come through his courtroom. He recognised that caring adults could help many of these kids stay out of trouble and he set out to find volunteers. That marked the beginning of the Big Brothers movement.

By 1916, Big Brothers had spread to 96 cities across the US. At around the same time, the members of a group called Ladies of Charity were befriending girls who had come through the New York Children's Court. That group would later become Catholic Big Sisters.



Both groups continued to work independently until 1977, when Big Brothers of America and Big Sisters International joined forces and became Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. More than a century later, Big Brothers Big Sisters operates in all 50 states in the US and in 35 countries around the world.

National research has shown that positive relationships between youth and their Big Brothers and Big Sisters mentors have a direct and measurable impact on children's lives.

Little Brothers and Sisters are:

- More confident in their schoolwork performance
- Able to get along better with their families
- 46% less likely to begin using illegal drugs
- 27% less likely to begin using alcohol
- 52% less likely to skip school

Kevin Blogg, from Catapult has recently been appointed Trustee of BBBS. "Not only is this a proven concept, BBBS Christchurch has available to it all of the information and experience of many years of service provision overseas. I am pleased to be associated with BBBS, and am looking forward to future involvement."

Youth Employment Work Focus

As mentioned Catapult is in the process of expanding its services to meet the needs of young people coming out of schools and training. In the years to come we see this as an area where we can greatly develop our scope of operation. We have seen a major need where youth with disability or health issues can experience difficulty navigating the tricky changes from the world of education and training into the open paid job market.

Teenage depression, anorexia and other health issues for young people are frequent topics in the media and the suicide rate amongst teenagers in New Zealand is a major concern. It is estimated that twenty percent of teenagers here will experience clinical depression (Mental Health Foundation figures). Overseas studies have also suggested how effective positive job experiences are as part of an effective strategy to deal with these issues.

With the pressures of the job market clearly high for young people who already face challenges there is a risk of them becoming unwell due to these pressures. Our goal is to support youth starting right from the connection with schools and other training providers so there is a smoother transition for them into real jobs and positive experiences of working.

We currently have a focus group of clients under 25 and are liaising closely with schools and training providers to develop links between them and employers. A critical point in the process is when a young person is still at school and possibly fearful of what's out there. Our aim is to turn those fears into opportunities and support that can help bridge the gaps. The goal is to make this a major programme for youth within our service.

Vanessa and Tommy are two young people with whom we have been working closely with over the last 6 months. Both were referred directly from a local school and were in the same class together. The connection with the Transition Coordinator at the school was invaluable in helping us to develop rapport with Vanessa and Tommy and we were quite quickly able to place them into their first jobs.

This was quite a journey for these two young people. During his first few practices at interview skills Tommy was highly anxious and had difficulty making eye contact with the person role playing as his interviewer. After his second real life interview with an employer he was successful with a full-time position in a local supermarket. He started in October 2006 so began his working life at the start of the Christmas rush. At first the very busy environment took some time for Tommy to get used to. He was enjoying everything, but sometimes too much so because he would become caught up in conversations with workmates or easily distracted. Over the first two months Tommy received job coaching support from Catapult and his skills grew steadily. After Christmas he was clearly able to handle some very challenging behaviour from the general public yet remain calm and polite with some very professional customer service skills to his credit.

Vanessa has also started work, this time for a local holiday camp at 15 hours to begin with. Vanessa has a diagnosis of Autism and when starting work it took some time to get used to being in a small group and consistently meeting job expectations. With her perseverance and with a collaborative team effort between Catapult, the school and the employer she has grown significantly in her skills over the last two months and is now at the point of being offered extra work from her employer.

Both Tommy and Vanessa have attended workshops at Catapult for support developing communication and customer service skills to assist them with their jobs. A large part of our focus is to custom-make the job placement process to ensure job support matches the client's needs.

Between 2003 and 2006 Catapult has worked with 83 young people with health and disability issues and placed 45 into open paid work. Our future goal is to greatly develop this number and our connections with the training sector to provide a clear youth programme that really works to support the well being and aspirations of young people.

"Employer of the Month"



Readers who are also members of The Canterbury Employers Chamber of Commerce may have read an article about Catapult's association with Foodstuffs in the latest edition of Update Magazine.

Catapult not only wishes to acknowledge the positive association it has with Foodstuffs (SI) Ltd, including retail outlets, but to mention the enthusiastic help and support we have received from Employment and Training Co-ordinator, Barry Tutt.

Barry has always been available to offer support and advice to Catapult staff, and on many occasions, employing staff we support to apply for a position at Foodstuffs.

In some instances, our service users do not interview well, or sell themselves to the employer. Barry regularly sees past this, and often offers them an opportunity. Many are young people who have had little employment experience.

Catapult Employment Services Trust, staff and service users wish to thank you, Barry for your positive and proactive approach to employing a diverse workforce.

For more information please contact

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