



Accrington and Rossendale College Improving Mental Health and Wellbeing Through Partnership Working

Accrington and Rossendale College (ACCROSS) is located in the Pennine region of Lancashire with a population of 35,346. The College is set in an area with challenging demographics; unemployment rates higher than the national average and proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) is also higher than that nationally. There are 906 students on 16 to 19 Study Programmes; 2,600 adult students study at the college or community sites, 55 of whom are on full-time access to higher education courses.

There is a strong ethos of mutual respect together with zero tolerance of any form of discrimination or bullying and a range of strategies are applied to promote diversity across the college; noted in the recent Ofsted report (2016). Learning programmes and pastoral support systems are strongly focused on promoting access to learning for all regardless of background.

The Challenge – Improving Mental Health and Wellbeing Through Partnership Working

Partnership working is central to sustainable and effective interventions that support mental health and wellbeing in the college community and beyond. The College has well established collaborative links with employers, individuals in the local community and other stakeholders.

In an effort to formalise this way of working, ACCROSS has recently jointly funded a post with Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust Mental Health Services. Both organisations had identified enough funding for part-time posts and discussed the idea of working in collaboration to create a full-time developmental post. The training manager works across both organisations and supports the development of projects that specifically tackle poor outcomes in relation to mental health. Bringing together expertise from a specialist mental health services and a learning provider helps to raise awareness of mental health issues and improve service provision, ensuring that targeted interventions effectively support mental health and wellbeing by improving practice.

Planning into Practice

Collaboration and Partnership working has enabled and supported the following developments:

- ACCROSS team has a wealth of experience in developing education opportunities with those still accessing mental health support. Establishing



working partnership with the NHS has enabled the delivery of accredited learning opportunities for services working with those affected by mental illness and alcohol and substance misuse; including bespoke learning programmes that support recovery and promote emotional health and wellbeing. Many of those who access these programmes go on to access further learning opportunities either as part of their own recovery or in an effort to develop the knowledge and skills to support others facing similar difficulties. The Training Manager post is currently working with ACCROSS to establish a Recovery College as part of medium and low secure mental health services at Guild Lodge Lancashire.

- Utilising expertise from the field of has enabled mental health and wellbeing to become an established part of the curriculum at ACCROSS. There are a range of learning programmes from entry level courses right the way through to foundation degrees and professional development. This vocational education along with tutorials and enrichment programmes support both professional and personal development.
- A series of seminars have recently been delivered in partnership with Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust about the importance of communicating about mental health. The seminars, including topics on young people, learning disabilities and service user experience, have been attended by over 70 people - students, service users, college staff and professionals from the field.
- Ensuring that those working in FE have a basic understanding of mental health, the ability to identify issues and manage concerns appropriately is a key priority. The ACCROSS team is currently working in partnership with AoC and Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust to develop a package of staff development opportunities in order to achieve this. The package includes face to face training sessions, eLearning platforms and a vehicle for sharing good practice.
- The College prides itself on ensuring that students who access learning programmes are offered appropriate support in relation to mental health problems. Offering the right help at the right time is an essential part of managing mental health difficulties effectively. A number of support packages, are available and these are managed effectively through established referral pathways managed by the Safe Guarding Team. Again partnership working with the NHS has enabled an onsite nurse post commissioned by Public Health (0-19 children and families) to be available as support for our students. The College Nurse works within a robust process for the identification and referral of pastoral and safeguarding concerns are in place. A team of pastoral staff support personal tutors and teaching teams to provide on-going emotional support and personalised programmes and support packages where required. This includes the provision of a Specialist Learning Support Tutor who is able to



mentor students experiencing mental health difficulties and behavioural conditions. All students are assigned a personal tutor when they enrol. An onsite counselling service is provided in order to meet the needs of students whose learning is impacted by mental health related issues.

Measuring Success

- Currently we offer several courses off site to those seeking support with mental health and wellbeing related issues. The Recovery College at Guild Lodge Secure Mental Health Services has just finished delivering its first calendar of courses. To date 12 service users have accessed accredited learning opportunities as part of their recovery. Four Peer Mentors have successfully completed their training and are now developing their roles within the service.
- Retention rate was 90% for those students undertaking college based courses in 2015-16 and is currently at 96% for this academic year. If all students are retained the predicted achievement rate will be 95%. Keeping people in education is a proven protective factor in terms of mental health/wellbeing and promoting long term recovery.
- Students with mental health issues account for the second largest number of SP1 referrals with an increase of 3% between in 2014-15 and 2015-16. The vast majority of those referred are offered support via the College Nurse or Counselling service.
- The college based counselling service evaluates its effectiveness using the PHQ9/GAD7 outcome measure monitoring tool (Patient Health Questionnaire 9 and General Anxiety Disorder 7). This provides quantifiable measures of the outcomes of therapy and indicates the cut off point for intervention. The counselling service receives qualitative feedback in the face to face approach adopted reinforcing that the quality of the therapeutic relationship; being non-judgemental, empathetic, confidential and trusting, has a positive impact on outcomes.

Future developments

- The increased use of, and ever changing technology, brings with it significant safeguarding issues and concerns. In line with best practice, identified in KCSIE (2016), an online safety group has been established. The group have completed a 360° online safety self-assessment and from this, collection of evidence and development of an action plan has begun. The review has provided a robust analysis of existing provision and policies including staff and student training, curriculum, filtering and monitoring, governance, working with parents, and



responding to incidents. The action plan will influence a whole college approach to embed online safety across the College.

- All teaching assistants working in learning support to complete online mental health training as part of the Mind Ed suite of eLearning resources.
- An online notebook on One Note to record concerns making information sharing more effective.

Key Learning

- Relationships matter: the co-funded post arose from strong relationships built between the college and the provider trust over time.
- Jointly funded posts can offer an excellent opportunity for service providers to pool small envelopes of funding in order to build development opportunities. Having someone straddle settings can open doors and gain access to other opportunities that might benefit organisations, their staff and the wider community.
- Make best use of contacts and expertise in your local community and amongst service providers. Many services will leap at the chance to become involved in education that will benefit their staff teams and service users.
- Approach with a 'can-do' attitude. Often barriers to accessing learning are not always fully understood by those in education settings. Working with other organisations and service user groups can help to offer a different perspective and offer a different way of doing things.
- Look within your own staff teams to see what knowledge, skills and expertise you have. You might be surprised to find someone with a background in mental health who has some good ideas or contacts.