

Extracurricular Practical Life Skills project

**Preparing SEND young people for
independent living and higher education**

Extracurricular provides support to more than 200 young people a year in Brighton & Hove and West Sussex through after-school clubs, holiday schemes and family fun days; most but not all have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The project aimed to deliver term-time, practical life-skills training to SEND learners aged 11 to 25 at Extracurricular youth clubs in Portslade to build their skills and confidence and support their transition to adulthood, independent living and higher education.



METHODOLOGY

The project provided term-time training in key skills including cooking, basic accountancy, communication and basic home skills to 15 SEND young people aged 11 to 25, to boost their confidence and support their personal growth and development. Extracurricular delivered weekly group sessions (4pm to 7pm) and weekly Grub Club cooking sessions (4pm to 6.30pm). At Grub Club, young people learnt how to cook, deal with basic money transactions and, through working in a group, understand how their behaviour affects others. All those who attended the project tried a new skill.

To improve the impact of these sessions, Extracurricular's skilled staff built on their existing strong relationships with the SEND young people, and the sessions were held in a familiar setting adapted to meet their needs.

Listening to young people is at the heart of Extracurricular's work, so its participation lead colleague (herself a young adult with experience of living with autism) supported verbal and non-verbal young people to share their opinions and identify what they would like to learn during the sessions.

Evaluation of the project was carried out using non-verbal feedback methods, for example, Makaton signs, and written feedback from parents/carers to ensure all views were heard.

To measure the project's impact, Extracurricular considered criteria such as the number of young people who had improved their communication skills, boosted their confidence, gained greater independence and tried a new skill. This information and the feedback from young people and parents/carers will be used to plan the coming year's activities.

Young people leave Extracurricular at age 25 but it remains in touch with many of them as they become independent adults and informally monitors how many from this project go on to higher education.

PROJECT SUMMARY

Context

Overall, young people with SEND are hugely underrepresented in higher education but have the ability to study and succeed. Just 8.7% of pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and SEN statement progress onto higher education by age 19 compared with 48.6% of non-SEND pupils, according to a 2022 Gov.UK report. Multiple barriers to accessing higher education can be overcome with prior planning and appropriate learning and support.

Duration

1st November 2022 to 25th April 2023

Funding source

SLN Community Fund

IMPACT

Thanks to the project, 15 SEND young people have been able to develop their life skills and new friendships, both of which are greatly beneficial to their confidence and future independence

Other positive impacts of the project included:

- reducing isolation through providing opportunities to make friends and build interpersonal skills (opportunities often lacking in other settings)
- increasing confidence by supporting young people to develop new communication skills (for example, learning a new word or sign)
- offering them the chance to get involved with YouthWise, which gives a voice to local young people
- having their ideas and thoughts listened to and their achievements celebrated
- empowering them through working together: for example, young people decided on the activities they wanted to learn to help them become more independent.

In terms of longer-term impact, the project expects that:

- young people will become more confident about their ability to live away from home
- they will be more likely to consider attending higher education as a result of gaining these skills
- as a result of their child's increased independence, parents/carers will be more likely to feel positive about them attending higher education.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For the project to succeed:

- inclusive activities must be designed to be achievable regardless of disability or support need
- special relationships between the staff and young people must be built on trust so that the young people are more likely to try an activity they are unsure of
- specialist equipment, including methods for communication, must be readily available, removing real and/or perceived barriers to trying a new activity
- peer support from other young people with SEND needs helps encourage a 'have-a-go' attitude
- activities should be fun and delivered in an exciting way so the reward for getting involved is easy to see
- delivering learning in a safe, accessible/adapted, fun and friendly environment is more likely to result in greater learning and self-belief for the learner.

Unfortunately, Grub Club sessions are unlikely to continue due to staffing difficulties and high overheads, but the popular youth club sessions and life-skills training delivered during these will continue if funding can be secured to cover their cost.

Merging the sessions will enable:

- more young people to access cooking sessions and improve their independence and confidence
- young people to access the Grub Club's lessons without committing to doing it every week
- the youth club to offer young people a wider range of life skills and 'multi-task' activities, for example, cooking sessions combined with numeracy skills
- the project to be more cost-effective, meaning greater sustainability and longer-term viability.

Recommendations

There is a need for more projects like this, providing opportunities for young people to access a safe space, food and activities outside of school.

Given the opportunity, a longer-term project would deliver more detailed data and an in-depth understanding of the correlation between life skills attainment and having the confidence to attend higher education.



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