

Wilson Stuart scheme is helping to give students a buzz about working

By **AMY BOWEN**
Education reporter

One of the purposes of education is to help young people get out into the world of work – and it's a tough environment at the minute.

But what if that young person has a physical or learning disability?

Well, then things are more complicated.

At 26 a young person with a disability or special need is four times more likely to be unemployed than their non-disabled peers.

One college in Erdington is turning things around.

The Hive College, based at Wilson Stuart School, offers young people aged 19 to 25 with physical and learning difficulties a study programme that is designed to get them into work.

Work placements are arranged for the students with employers within the Birmingham area, with a view to building their confidence and experience and, ultimately, finding them full time, paid employment.

And it is thriving; many have found work through the scheme while others, who previously felt directionless and didn't know what they wanted to

do with their lives, have dared to form ambitions.

"We found that these young people were leaving school with no job prospects and unsure what they were going to do in the future," says Julie Pallister, work placements coordinator at Hive College.

"We don't look at the student's disability; we look at what they can do and find placements that are meaningful and meet their career aspirations.

"You can't teach enthusiasm, and our students have got that in droves."

In September 2013 the Hive started with 10 students and currently has 29 students who all participate in work placements.

In addition to work placements, which students carry out one day per week, there are 11 students who are currently on supported internships.

Supported internships are the next positive step towards independent employment for the Hive students. They have to complete 16 hours in the workplace and attend college one day per week, which can be for anywhere from six to 12 months.

One condition is that the employer has to have a paid vacancy available, and that employer is expected to officially employ the student if they prove competent enough to take on

the role.

A job coach supports the interns and the employers to ensure a smooth transition from college into work.

All students enrolled on the programme are willing and able to work and want to make their contributions to society.

Head of college, Kim Everton, is brimming with pride at how well the students are doing and how well the staff support them in the college and out in the workplace.

"Julie works really hard to source employers that are suitable for our students and has built up an excellent working relationship with them," she said.

"When the students start at the Hive many of them have very low self-esteem and do not know what they want to do in the future. We encourage the students to be realistic about what they can do; we do not put them into jobs that they are never going to be able to achieve," she adds.

"They will often say 'I can't do that,' but the team of staff will work with the students to ensure that they do achieve their goals in life.

"We have had many success stories of students leaving the Hive to take up paid employment and students who have gone on to apprenticeships in catering and early years."

■ If you are an employer who can



Some of the students taking part in work placements through the Hive college.

offer students a work placement, call Julie Pallister on 0121 306 4800 or

contact art.co.uk

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