

Case Study: Sustainable Enterprise – College Way Market



Introduction

College Way Market is a sustainable enterprise project originally set up as a monthly Clothes pop up shop by students in our Inclusive Learning department. The initiative provides a platform for employability education, hands-on life skills development and the cultivation of essential meta-skills. College Way Market equips students with practical, transferable experiences that prepare them for future employment opportunities while promoting sustainability and community engagement.

Overview

The project was planned and is run by our Skills for Employment and Skills for Life and Work students. Our objective is to give students attending supported courses the opportunity to gain valuable work experience in a retail-like environment. Students gain employability skills such as customer service, teamwork and stock management while building confidence as they manage College Way Market. Students also develop critical meta-skills such as problem solving, communication, adaptability and self-management as they prioritise tasks, navigate challenges and interact with peers and customers.

Clothing donations are sorted, sized, cleaned and then displayed in our now permanent 'boutique-style' shop situated at the College entrance, where students and staff can help themselves and update their wardrobes for free while reducing the effects of fast fashion and high street shopping.

We request clothing donations from staff and students to avoid unused clothes going to landfill and provide access to casual clothes students can wear to College and smart workwear they can wear to attend job interviews, reducing barriers to employment for those who cannot afford to invest in professional clothing. The venture is supporting students in a cost of living crisis, addressing sustainability priorities as well as equipping students with vital enabling employability skills.

Impact

Learners

Students attending supported courses follow a progressive learning pathway which gradually builds their independence, confidence and employability skills. College Way Market provides the platform to support the essential learning to scaffold the students' route to employment.

National 2 Skills for Independence students undertake a volunteering award. The skills gained are built upon as they progress to National 3 Skills for Life and Work where students undertake work placement units working in College Way Market and different areas within the College environment. These courses provide learners with the foundations and essential skills required for National 4 Skills for Employment where the students take full responsibility for managing College Way Market before undertaking work placements with external stakeholders.

Learners in all stages are supported to develop transferrable skills relevant to their learning, lives, the wider world and future employment that can immediately be put into practice. For many of the learners, confidence building is central to provision. Recognising and developing meta-skills helps build confidence and transferable skills and contributes to learner success and achievement.

Working as part of a team managing College Way Market supports this.

A number of students who have undertaken National 4 Skills for Employment have transitioned to mainstream courses in South Lanarkshire College and other FE providers, to Project Search, and into paid employment with their external work placement providers. In 2023-24, 90% of the students successfully achieved their award, and early indicators are that this level of success will be sustained in 2024-25.

Staff

An increasing emphasis on meta-skills delivery has given staff on supported courses cause to re-evaluate and enhance their practice and provided a further tool to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of both learners and stakeholders.

Stakeholders

Work placement provider partners have reported learners who are more sector relevant, flexible and adaptable. Stakeholders have reported recognition of the students' skillset which is directly transferable to their organisation.

Supporting National and Local Strategic Priorities

This highly successful project supports both national and local strategic priorities. Withers (2023) recognises that meta-skills should be the product of a good learning system rather than learning which is separate to higher or further education. We have successfully integrated and signposted meta-skills within our supported courses programmes.

SDS (2021) sets down that it is imperative for society that we have an understanding of meta-skills and that these skills are essential to excel, particularly in an environment of change. Our students have not only been certified to evidence their meta-skills profiles, they have developed a clear understanding of the skills they offer and feel comfortable in promoting their capacities.

This project is an excellent example of SLC's strategic priorities in action:

- Successful Students;
- Highest Quality Education and Support; and
- Sustainable Behaviours.

Evidencing how well we meet the requirements of the "*How Good Is Our College?*" framework and the Curriculum for Excellence, whilst embracing the key themes of the Adult Learning Strategy 2022 to 2027, Skills Development Scotland's "Skills 4.0" 2018 report – and preparing our students for the world of work.

