

New scheme gives job opportunities to young people with learning difficulties

Less than six per cent of children in the UK with learning disabilities will go into employment as an adult,* so the council has set up a new scheme to help more young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) into work. *Hillingdon People* met some of the scheme's interns to find out how the project has helped them gain their first step on the career ladder.



Project Search was set up by the council in partnership with the Marriott Hotel, Heathrow and Meadow School, Uxbridge to provide young people with SEND with a full year's internship to gain experience for future employment.

As part of the programme, young people learn invaluable skills in the workplace such as working as part of a team and dealing with customers, as well as everyday tasks like waiting tables and housekeeping. The interns also undertake job interviews and get help updating their CV to prepare them for working life.

As a result of the scheme, four young people have already been offered full-time employment, and all other interns have job interviews lined up.

Meet the interns

Michael Vickery, aged 22 from Ickenham, is autistic and has just accepted a permanent full-time job at the Marriott. Michael said: "Before I started the internship I didn't communicate well, but now I speak to lots of different customers. Project

Search is all about learning new skills so that you are ready to apply for jobs, and it's helped me to be more confident. I really enjoy working at the Marriott as I like to be busy and do lots of different things in my job."

Jason Mann, aged 20 from Ruislip has moderate learning difficulties and speech, language and communication difficulties. Jason has just been offered a job at a company in Heathrow where he will be taking on a customer service and cleaning role. He said: "Guests like my service as a concierge at the hotel, and I like booking cabs for people and taking luggage to their rooms. I went for an interview for a job and I was really nervous but my experience from the internship helped me to succeed. I get two buses and a train to my new job and now I feel confident being independent."

Rhianna Lavender is 23 years old from Hayes and has moderate learning difficulties and severe dyspraxia. In June, she started working as a care attendant in a care home in West Drayton as a result of the programme.

Rhianna said: "During Project Search, I worked in housekeeping as a room attendant and then in the public areas, which I liked because I got to talk to the guests. The programme has changed me quite a bit. I've got more confidence in myself and I can talk to other people more now. I like my job working as a carer and caring for residents."

Project Search has helped 10 young people in Hillingdon in its initial year.

Cllr Philip Corthorne, Cabinet Member for Social Services, Housing, Health and Wellbeing, said:

"Project Search has already been extremely successful in teaching young people with learning difficulties the skills needed to get into full-time employment.

"Our partnership with the Marriott Hotel allows young people to build confidence and get real-life experience to prepare them for the first step in their career as an adult.

"We look forward to helping more young people into employment across the borough."

Free Getting Ready for Work event

The council is also holding a Getting Ready for Work event on Tuesday 26 September at the Civic Centre from 10.30am to 12.30pm for young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and parents, schools and colleges who work with people with SEND. The event is an opportunity to learn more about various internship programmes taking place in the borough. Anyone interested should email cahern@hillingdon.gov.uk.

For more information, visit www.hillingdon.gov.uk/youngemployment