



SWRAC
Specialist Independent College

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2024

WELCOME

Over the last couple of years, I have written this section of our newsletter to give you a feel for some of the things that are going on in SWRAC. This time, I would like to ask for your help and also make an offer which I hope some of you may find of interest.

Firstly, my plea. In my role, I have to go to so many meetings with different professional groups and associations that as I get older, my brain struggles to remember what each is about! One of the common topics that is discussed is the desire for organisations to have a more diverse workplace.

This means having a wide range of people with diverse skills and abilities to enable organisations to respond to the full range of tasks and events that are thrown at us in everyday business life.

This excites us at SWRAC, in that maybe, some organisations may follow their positive messages with the offer of work experience and internships to enable our students to help meet these challenges. But the great intentions rarely go beyond the words.

By far, the most difficult part of our work is finding organisations that can offer meaningful and substantial work experience. You and I can only guess at the reasons for this but, sometimes it is due to worry and uncertainty. This is frustrating for us and a lost opportunity for the employer.

We know that employers are finding it very hard to recruit people at the moment. It isn't just an altruistic act to consider employing people with SEND; it can help meet the labour gap as well as provide reliable and productive employees.

Can you help by speaking with businesses you know or work for?

Secondly, we have a number of premises which are pretty much unused during weekday nights and at the weekends. On social media, there are many groups of parents/carers of young people with SEND who share experiences, seek advice and generally discuss topics of general interest.

There is a lot of mutual support within these groups and wouldn't it be great if we could make our premises 'real' versions of these mutually supportive groups?

If you are interested in hosting sessions at either Dorchester, Boscombe, Winton or Merley, please let me know. This is a completely free offer that we feel could be of use to you. I am really sorry though, but due to the terms of our lease, we aren't allowed to offer this at our premises in Bootle (yet!).

Adrian Gunner

ADRIAN GUNNER
MANAGING DIRECTOR

Spotlight on... **ELSA**

SWRAC learner, Lewis, provides feedback on his experience of the Emotional Literacy Support (ELSA) sessions.



“

Before I started doing Elsa with Jon, I was always stressed, nervous and tense all the time, to the point where I would worry about future events before they even happened, such as present jobs and if I've done a task in hand correctly or if I've done enough work. When this used to happen, I would struggle to move on with my next job as I would worry the task isn't complete.

I have been having weekly sessions with Jon, working on dealing with my stress and anxiety, as well as developing my confidence in ways I haven't done before. For example, understanding what causes my thoughts and how to deal with them.

Now I feel happier, calm, and relaxed in myself as I know now that negative thoughts are temporary. I can process my negative thoughts in a way that causes less stress and regulate my emotions more effectively.

Lewis' tutor, Will, also commented:

“

When Lewis first joined the Supported Internship course, he was extremely anxious about a lot of things, which had a huge impact on his confidence and his ability to be himself. Since he started having his ELSA sessions with Jon, there has been a dramatic increase in his general happiness and confidence, he is a lot calmer over situations and has learnt key techniques in order to manage his anxiety. ELSA is a vital resource for our students and has benefited Lewis in his overall independence and wellbeing.

About ELSA

This intervention programme is designed to support the emotional well-being and social development of young people in educational settings. ELSA sessions are typically delivered by specially trained teaching assistants or professionals who provide targeted support to individuals or small groups.

ELSA aims to enhance emotional literacy skills, which include recognising, understanding, expressing, and regulating emotions effectively. The intervention addresses a wide range of emotional issues, such as anxiety, low self-esteem, anger management, bereavement, friendship difficulties, and transition-related stress.

BOSCOMBE CENTRE UPDATE

Kerry Pedder

The time seems to have gone in the blink of an eye since the last newsletter and there's been lots going on.

The construction work that continues on the site to build flats on the upper floor has had a few problems which have caused some leaks that have damaged a couple of the rooms. However, it's given us a great excuse to spruce them up and create different environments for people to enjoy depending on their mood!

We now have a games/break out room with a pool table and plenty of board games to occupy the learners in their down time. Another is café-style with a drinks station and some tables. And finally, we have a chill-out room with books, bean bags and a quiet seating area.

As well as focussing on wellbeing, with lots of exercise and cooking healthy meals, we also had a company called Colour Works come in and do a project to combat anxiety.

They facilitated numerous discussions and activities with the post-16 vocational studies group looking at their role in society. This involved personality tests and how to change perceptions to help people in difference life situations.

On the Prepare for Work course, the learners have been working on a social action project with the National Citizens Service around fundraising. This has involved making items that were then sold at the Well Cafe, raising money for Margaret Green Animal Rescue and Dorset Children's Foundation.



The Absolute Music project has sadly come to an end for now, but the students created two amazing tracks that can be listened to [HERE](#) on Facebook.

We have lots of open days at local colleges and workplaces coming up, which will hopefully include a visit to the RNLI, as well as the Careers and Apprenticeship Show at the Bournemouth International Centre this month.

Over at Project Search, the interns have gone into their second work experience rotation with fantastic focus, enthusiasm and confidence. Everyone has chosen their own placements this time, and have really positive work mindsets, communicating directly with their managers rather than SWRAC support staff.

We have seven interns currently working across a range of services within Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch council, including sports centres, mail tooms and admin roles.

LEARNER'S VOICE



Since joining SWRAC in September, James has successfully navigated all courses, overcoming social anxiety to become a massive character with lots of friends.

Extremely articulate, intelligent and creative, James began writing his own stories, and has now written three amazing supernatural books. He is also part of a local drama group.

Following work experience at the Well Cafe in Boscombe, the staff were so impressed with his reliability, customer service and motivation that James is now on the first paid apprenticeship there!

He left SWRAC in November 2023, and we wish him all the best!

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When I first went to SWRAC, I was a very different person I'd say.

Whilst I did have friends, I was actually far more secluded and my shell was closed. I more or less kept to myself.

However, as time got on, I became more open and more confident.

An example is that I started to share my stories with people!

One of the things I personally loved about being in SWRAC was the interactions with the staff. They were always helpful to me and supported me.

Because of SWRAC, I ended up working a cafe which I am now on an apprenticeship with.

This was one of my biggest achievements and I am happy that this opportunity came to me.

My future ambitions involve me getting my books published and also finding an amazing partner to share my life with.

”

**JAMES,
BOSCOMBE**





DORCHESTER UPDATE

TracyPerren

After a fantastic Christmas period, which included a visit to the pantomime at Weymouth Pavilion and what will now hopefully become an annual fundraiser at the Dorchester Christmas Cracker, we've been busy.

Our newly promoted tutor, Archie, ran a wellbeing workout a couple of weeks ago, during which we all got very muddy and wet. But everyone had such fun, pushing themselves outside of their comfort zones, and have asked for it to be repeated!

There has been a lot going on with placements and work experience too.

Our Prepare for Work learners have started work experience at The Potting Shed, which is a charity that looks at the medicinal side of plants.

The students are involved in many projects including helping to build a barn and seeding and potting plants in polytunnels and greenhouses. They are finally getting used to compostable toilets too!

Another learner, Dana, has started working in a record shop in Dorchester called Vinyl Vans, which has really brought them out of their shell and they get on extremely well with the team there.

On the THRIVE programme, the guys have been helping a local pet shop owner to tidy up the grounds. She saw us on Facebook and reached out, so it's great to see people are noticing us on social media! We hope to arrange some more formal work experience there too.

The big news (aside from the fact that we have now have lovely new heating installed), is our upcoming residential trip in Devon this month which the National Citizens Service is hosting.

This will be the first of its kind and we're so excited to have around 20 people from Dorchester, Boscombe and THRIVE attending.

We also hope to arrange another camp out on site in May following the success of our October event and would love to go back to Brenscombe when the weather gets better too.

In other news, we are delighted to have welcomed Irene Smith to the CIAG team and Emma Rice as an LSA on the Prepare for Work course.

We've also made much better use of the space in the main building by installing another wooden cabin as an office, meaning my previous office can be used as an ICT suite.

LIVERPOOL CENTRE UPDATE

Bev Kennedy

Liverpool continues to grow at a rate that none of us expected. We now have over 50 students and 17 staff and have created new classrooms in unused spaces of the centre to accommodate everyone.

They are looking fantastic with plenty of colourful displays thanks to the learners' creativity.

The residential trip to North Wales at the end of last year was fantastic. A total of 11 students came in the end, and every single one of them took part in all of the activities, which included wall climbing, archery, camp fires and night walks.

The social element of mixing the groups was great for boosting confidence and the next trip is now in high demand, particularly from those who were unsure before. So we need to start work on planning the next trip!

From a work experience perspective, we've now got quite a few people on placements as part of a 12-month programme. The learners are rotating across several businesses and organisations once a week and these currently include the local library and a hairdressers.

Our two Prepare for Work students at Bootle Library, Joshua and Charlie, have been working very hard with the team organising books, scanning them into the main system and checking stock. They are also preparing activities for children's classes over Easter and carrying out general customer service duties.

They have already shown huge progress in their communication, social skills, confidence and work ability. We are very proud of these two very motivated, willing and well-mannered students.

Our supported internships are now up and running, with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) partnership being very successful.

Another exciting development is a partnership with Alder Hey Children's Hospital. We are in the final stages of arranging work experience and placements there in non-clinical roles, such as maintenance, cleaning, kitchen and reception work. We hope these will begin after Easter.

We've been busy with visits too. Last month, we went bowling and the students have been attending lots of career events, including NHS workshops, at local hotels, John Lennon Airport and Anfield Stadium, talking to potential employers about opportunities.

Attending these events has given our students the confidence to start up conversations and ask questions to help with their career choices.

As the weather gets warmer, we are looking to get involved in more outdoor community projects and work on local farms. We also have very exciting opportunities in the pipeline with coaching experience at local football clubs, career days at a recycling centre and John Lewis!





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THRIVE UPDATE

Rachel Rainsbury

Despite only being a quarter of the way through the year, there's already been tonnes of referrals for the September intake of THRIVE.

This is largely thanks to the huge success of the adult social care provision, THRIVE+, and the new site in Winton, which many of the current learners will move onto.

The start of the year saw the roll out of a new three tier system which breaks the course down into levels, starting with the social tier at Merley House and then the skills and independence tiers over at Winton.

Being able to tailor learning to group ability levels is working really well and acts as a great incentive for people to grow and work their way up.

Many learners have already advanced which has given them a great sense of achievement and there are several out on community placements too.

Part of this has involved changing the layout at Merley House to accommodate a more social space where learners will complete more hands-on sessions and have more movement breaks to help with their learning. With the THRIVE café in the same room, it's also great to role play activities.

We've also created 'The Studio', which has replaced our 'Snack Shack'. This was repainted and refreshed as part of the first project week we ran in February.

The new space has been laid out as a studio apartment and a space for one-to-one sessions to work on those important life skills.

Over at Winton, the project was reflecting on the history of the town, which everyone thoroughly enjoyed, especially when they created their own stain glass windows.

We've also launched a topic of the month for more focussed learning. Last month was transport, which involved sessions on the history of vehicles and pollution, a visit to the Tank Museum and creative lessons which saw the learners design the car of the future and build a race track at Merley House.

This month we are talking money, discussing job roles in banks, how to use cash points, budgeting and physically making THRIVE money to use in the café.



SAFEGUARDING UPDATE

BevGowman



In this issue's safeguarding update, we wanted to remind you about some useful online websites and resources.

Remember, in the safeguarding world, children are up to the age of 18.

General support

This website has lots of family-related support pages including family relationships, understanding emotions and behaviour, safety and wellbeing. They also offer a one to one service too.

- <https://parents.actionforchildren.org.uk>

Child Exploitation and Gangs

The following websites have lots of information on gangs, knife crime, staying safe online, healthy relationships, sexual exploitation and substance abuse. There are often sections for young people as well as parents.

- <https://livesafe.org.uk>
- <https://talktofrank.com>
- <https://nspcc.org.uk>

Prevent and radicalisation

This website has lots of use resources for parents around the prevention of radicalisation, how to spot the warning signs and discuss sensitive topics such as ongoing conflicts as well as fake news.

- <https://educateagainsthate.com/parents>

Modern day slavery and trafficking

The Barnardo's website has lots of useful information on child trafficking and how to make a referral, amongst other useful topics.

- <https://barnardos.org.uk/getsupport>

Private fostering

Private fostering is when a child is living with someone who is not their parent or "connected person", for example a grandparent. This site explains what it and what is required by the Childrens Act.

- <https://childlawadvice.org.uk/privatefostering>

Mental Health

This is a big area that young people need help and support in and there are lots of supporting websites available via Mind.

- <https://mind.org.uk>
- <https://dorsetmind.org.uk>
- <https://wirralmind.org.uk>

WAYS TO CONTACT US



In person

Speak to your tutor, one of the safeguarding team or any member of staff who you trust.



Whisper

Use the anonymous text service by messaging 07860 021 323 and type SWR1 before your message.

<https://swgfl.org.uk/whisper/swr1/>



Post it

Put a message in the red post box or suggestion box.



Email us

Send your message to us via email at safeguarding@swrac.ac.uk



Call us

Dial the following number:
07720 737 876

Visit us

Remember, you are always welcome to drop in at your local SWRAC centre below.



MERLEY HOUSE

Merley House Lane, Wimborne, Dorset, BH21 3AA

BOSCOMBE

22 Sea Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH5 1DD

WINTON

91 Wimborne Road, Bournemouth, Dorset. BH3 7AN

DORCHESTER

Poundbury Road, Bradford Peverell, Dorchester, DT2 9SL

LIVERPOOL

Sefton Investment Centre, 375 Stanley Road, Bootle, L20 3EF