



SWRAC
Specialist Independent College

NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2023

WELCOME

As I reflect on summer, firstly it strikes me what a miserable time we had weather wise and secondly, how busy the last few weeks have been for us at SWRAC. One day, there will be a period when all is peaceful and steady, but for now, we continue the process of growing and introducing new programmes and locations!

Since the last update, we have taken on another premises in Winton to accommodate more THRIVE students. It is a lovely Victorian era building with gardens, terrace area, teaching rooms and a self-contained apartment, which we will use to help with our independence training.

Safeguarding is a subject that is very important to all of society but has special importance to the education sector and, of course, to those of us who are responsible for children and/or vulnerable young adults. We will be providing you with information on any current issues in our operational areas in these newsletters, so that you can be aware and better informed. Our Safeguarding lead is Bev Gowman. Please take time to read her update as it could give you information which may help protect those in your care.

We are aware that there are many groups for parents of SEND young people, such as on Facebook, which can be a great place to get the information and advice they need in a timely manner and speak with other people in similar circumstances. We would like to offer all our premises to any SEND support groups who may find it useful to get together face to face sometimes. There's no charge for this - we'll just need to try and arrange it around building availability, probably evenings and weekends. If you might be interested in running such a group, please let us know.

Finally. Sometimes I wonder if anyone actually reads this newsletter so, this time, I thought I would set a little test as a way of measuring how it is received. After all, we spend quite a lot of time & effort in preparing it!

I have in my possession, five large and really lovely boxes of chocolates. If you'd like the chance of winning one of these, please email me at adriangunner@swrac.ac.uk with the word 'Chocolates' in the subject heading.

We will select the lucky winners at random at 12:00 on 30th November. Apologies though, students and anyone connected with any employee of SWRAC aren't allowed to enter!!!

Till next time...

Adrian Gunner

ADRIAN GUNNER
MANAGING DIRECTOR

WIN CHOCOLATE!



Spotlight on...

ADVISORY BOARD

With an extensive background in education provision, Rosie Knapper makes a valuable addition to our Advisory Board.



Now the Chair of the Board and SEND lead, Rosie has been with SWRAC since June last year, but like most members of the team, that's not where her involvement with the organisation started.

She'd worked with Adrian and Bev through her time with Dorset Council leading Post-16 education.

"I've always been passionate about enhancing life opportunities for young people with special educational needs and finding ways to give them the skills to lead a meaningful life and gain employment where possible," said Rosie.

"I liked the SWRAC principles and ways of working. What made them different is their individual approach and how we care about the needs of each and every learner and do all they can to support them in achieving their goals. It really is transformational for young adults and their families."

Part of Rosie's role is to challenge the leadership of the organisation but in a friendly and collaborative way to make sure everyone is aiming towards the same objectives.

Rosie added: "Whilst the Board is there for accountability, we all care passionately and it is a very supportive, friendly and approachable environment to be in, with all the staff working together to make the organisation the best it can be."

Rosie enjoys visiting a centre once a term and recently attended a major SWRAC celebration event for those who had completed the first Project Search internship.

"The internship with BCP council has been a huge success and everyone should be very proud of it," said Rosie. "The Chief Executive and Lead Councillor were in attendance at the event too, which is testament to how well run the programme is."

BOSCOMBE CENTRE UPDATE

Kerry Pedder

We've had an awesome summer here at the Boscombe centre, with our sports day being a particular highlight.

Around 60 staff, learners from across all courses and some new starters that were due to join us competed in fun games and activities. It was a very hot day at Kings Park and we could have probably had another competition for who consumed the most water too!

The event was used as an opportunity to raise money for a local sports charity too, The Steve Bernard Foundation. A total of £300 was raised, which is a great team effort.



During some of the health and wellbeing sessions arranged by Samir, the learners were also given the chance to raise funds that will go towards a treat for themselves. They made cakes and washed cars and are currently deciding what to do with the money!

On site, it's a little bit crazy, with building work going on to build another floor of flats above the centre. We decided this was a great way to teach the learners about health and safety, so they have been completing risk assessments and gaining a useful insight into construction.

With the start of the new academic year, we sadly said goodbye to a few learners but welcomed a slightly larger number back, including those moving on to other courses and new joiners, so it's been a really health start.



Over at Project Search, there's also been an intake of new interns. They have just completed their induction and have moved into their first rotation across various areas of BCP Council, including Arcades, Tourist Information, Bournemouth Library and Beryl Bikes.

We're now looking ahead to the next intake for SEND, Prepare for Work and Prepare for Life courses. There's still a handful of places left, so if you know anyone who would like to join us, please get in contact with Dom Weir - domweir@swrac.ac.uk.

LEARNER'S VOICE



Back in August 2022, James joined the Prepare for Life course with low self-esteem, low mood and anxiety about his ticks caused by Tourettes Syndrome.

He didn't like to engage at all and so had some sessions with one of our ELSAs (Emotional Literacy Support Assistants) to try and improve his confidence.

Those sessions, along with successfully completing the first course and moving on to Prepare for Work, has led to him being an inclusive member of the centre.

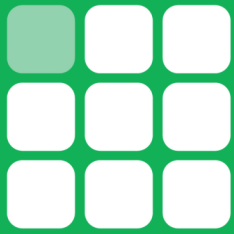
He has a great social group here, and he spends time with these friends outside SWRAC, and as a result, his ticks have become less severe and his confidence has soared.

James is very intellectual, detail-oriented and very into science. As well as now engaging in work experience, passing several exams and working as part of a team, he has expertly communicated his ELSA sessions in a presentation!

JAMES, BOSCOMBE

How Jon's ELSA sessions have improved my life.

Since my ELSA sessions with Jon, I have noticed many improvements and achievements that have been acquired in my life because of Jon's help. I would not be the person I am today without Jon's ELSA sessions. Jon has incentivised me outside of ELSA to look more into the ego and my emotions which have greatly helped me. So, to put it in one whole sentence, Jon's ELSA sessions have improved my life greatly, and I am forever grateful for what Jon has taught me and how he has changed my life as a result.



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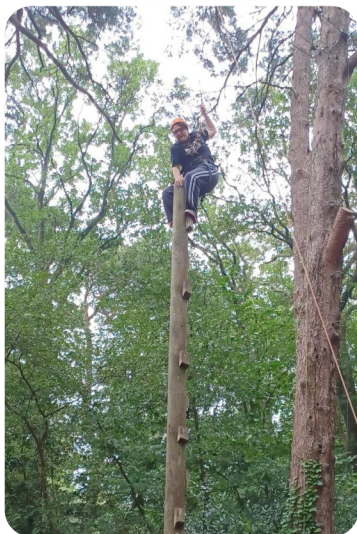
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DORCHESTER UPDATE

Tracy Perren

It's been extremely busy at Dorchester since the last update.

In August, we had our open day, which was very well-attended with over 70 people coming along over the four hours to meet the staff and talk to tutors. The learners were great as always, helping with parking and meet and greet as well as answering any parent/care questions.

The same week, learners were really pushed out of their comfort zone at Brenscombe Outdoor Centre in Corfe Castle. The whole centre attended and climbed the high ropes, which felt like being 100ft up! The young people were so pleased with their achievement that some of them cried with happiness at the adrenalin rush it gave them.

We also had a visit from Muntsey's, which provides a day service for adults with additional needs. A group came over to do some gardening and feed the animals, and it was nice to see other people benefiting from our amazing centre.

Now the new term has started, it's a very lively place to be with around 50 people on site most days. Our intake was double compared to last year, and it's nice to experience a constant buzz around the place.

We've taken on four new staff too, including a former student, Phebe.

As you can see, we've already started creating some lovely autumn crafts!

Looking ahead, those on the THRIVE and Prepare for Life courses will head over to RSPB for a community event to help them construct the raised beds outside the discovery centre and fill them with soil.



FRIDAY 8TH DECEMBER

Informal mince pie and carolling evening



SUNDAY 10TH DECEMBER

Dorchester Christmas Cracker

LEARNER'S VOICE



Phebe, Dorchester

Three years ago, Phebe joined SWRAC and completed several courses including Prepare for Life and Prepare for Work before becoming our very own supported intern and now employee!

Having overcome severe mental health issues, she now brings her experience and skills, including sign language and patience, to the centre as an Activity and Educational Support Assistant.

“When I started at SWRAC, I was shy and anxious and wouldn’t talk to anyone I didn’t know. But I have been helped in so many ways and came out my shell a lot.

My job here now involves arranging activities, running some lessons and helping the learners to understand how to be safe in the community.

I feel like I have a good connection with the learners because I can understand how they are feeling. I’m now looking forward to a staff training day.

It’s honestly been amazing and everyone is so understanding, not pushy and working around your needs.”



Abdul, Liverpool

In February 2023, Abdul joined us on the Prepare for Work course with the dream of being a chef.

At the time, he struggled a lot with communication and confidence, but has come on leaps and bounds. So much so, that he started a work placement in the summer with a local café called Harrisons.

Abdul spends every Friday there cooking, cleaning, taking orders and delivering food locally and is so comfortable in the environment, confident and settled.

When in the centre, he’s always in the kitchen making everyone food and is now working towards paid employment early next year.

“I love working in Harrison’s Tea Room for my work experience. The manager and staff are very kind and supportive and we work together as a team.

I have been cooking, cleaning, taking orders and making tea and coffee. I have been learning lots of new skills to help me get a job at the end of college.”



LIVERPOOL CENTRE UPDATE

Bev Kennedy

As we edge closer to our one-year anniversary, we are thrilled to report that the Liverpool centre has doubled in size in terms of both learners and staff, and that's just since the last newsletter in May.

We now have around 40 learners being supported by 10, but soon to be 12, staff members, which is fantastic, and the November enrolment is already looking quite busy.

The summer was the first opportunity for us to hold a sports day, which took place at a local primary school who let us use their field while they were closed for the holidays. It was a great turnout and even better weather.

With the sun shining, we also spent a lot of time out and about on educational trips to museums and galleries, as well as holding health and wellbeing sessions in the local park. Some learners even got the chance to have their picture taken with the Beatles (statue kind though).

This month, we're off on a three-day residential trip to Colomendy in Wales with 15 learners, which has been funded by Sefton Local Authority. Everyone is keen to get involved in the very exciting activities planned, including kayaking and zip wires. We hope to get some fabulous pictures which we can share in the next newsletter.

For later in the year, we are hoping that the staff will be able to get involved in a kind of Santa Splash event in the canals to raise money that we can put towards some Christmas themed treats and activities.

A particularly exciting development has been the new supported internships we have arranged within the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), within the Independent Case Examiner (ICE) department.

This will give our interns hands-on experience in an office environment, helping them to develop crucial computer and customer service skills. They will take on the role of case workers, reviewing complaints, setting up cases, analysing data and filtering them to the right people. They may also need to speak with the public and create PowerPoint presentations.

This relationship has huge potential to open doors into other government departments, so we can't wait to get started.



SPOTLIGHT ON JOB COACHES

Leanne Cook

One of the key outcomes for our learners is to achieve meaningful paid employment, and this is where our amazing job coaches come in.



The nine job coaches, including myself, who work across Boscombe and Dorchester run the Supported Internship programme. They are responsible for identifying learner interests and abilities, sourcing suitable employers to work in partnership with and then supporting both the interns and the businesses through a successful placement.

From helping interns with interview techniques, travel training and accompanying them to placements to aiding the employers in carving out appropriate roles and supporting them throughout, the role of a job coach can vary hugely from one day to the next.

One day they could be knee deep in a pond at a local country park alongside an intern or supporting someone in a busy 4-star beachside hotel and the next, they could be in meetings with new potential employers or hosting intern training days.

Current employers we work with include McDonalds, Golf Catcher, The Carlton Hotel, The Well Café, Henry Brown Community Centre and New Milton Memorial Hall. Within these placements there is the opportunity to work in different areas of the business on a rotational basis, which gives the interns maximum exposure to different working environments and the chance to gain a vast range of experience and skills.

This year, a new format was introduced for the Supported Internship programme, putting more of a focus on time in the workplace versus time in the classroom. This enables students to gain more practical experience and transferrable skills and build strong relationships with the employers. Where possible, the job coaches will arrange education on site.

The success rate of Supported Interns who go on to achieve paid work is fantastic, with many of them securing jobs before the programme has even finished.





THRIVE UPDATE

Rachel Rainsbury

It's only right to start this latest update with news of the incredible celebration event we hosted at Merley House for all SWRAC leavers in July. With a BBQ and inflatables to keep everyone full and active, it really was a fun day. The learners really enjoyed receiving their SWRAC water bottles and certificates in the presentation too.

We also held our own sports day, with learners visiting from other centres and being divided into teams. AFC Bournemouth were in attendance running a goal shooting game, football drills and even a water race. They also brought a van with an X-Box set up inside so people could escape from the shade.

The big news, however, is the opening of our new THRIVE site in Winton. The three-storey building benefits from a flat on the top floor and classrooms on the other two floors which are each designed to focus on a different area - independence, community, employment, and health.

Nine THRIVE students have moved there, while we have welcomed 10 new learners at Merley. The great thing is that it's enabled us to launch THRIVE+, which caters for adult social care and people up to 30.

At the Merley site, existing students helped us to strip down the main room in preparation for our next intake, which has gone really well.

The focus now is to make sure students from both sites come together regularly and so we have been practising residential lunches with our Merley staff, in preparation to host for the caravan park residents in 2024. We are also planning a group community trip every month.

We've also recently been bowling, followed by Pizza Hut, and back out and about on shopping trips, during which two students take on extra responsibility and become the 'leaders' of the group. They have been wearing high-vis jackets to give them a sense of responsibility, which has really helped to boost their confidence.

On World Mental Health Day, our Merley and Winton stood united at the Winton premises, wearing yellow to support the #helloyellow campaign. This was a fun packed day filled with games, a buffet prepared by the learners and discussions regarding what Mental Health means to them, as well as how to seek support for those who need it. This has opened a door to help them recognise they are not alone, and that we can help each other.

Every quarter, during a five-week month, we are going to be hosting a project week too. The next one will be spent creating Christmas crafts and hampers. And of course, the Christmas lunch is set to be a good one, with a total of 19 THRIVE students now being involved in the preparation, cooking and serving.



PARENT'S VOICE



Mum of Sophie, THRIVE

Sophie was one of our first ever THRIVE students in 2020. When she first started, she wouldn't engage or speak to anyone and was always very unsettled. She has now become one of the first to transition to the adult social care THRIVE+ programme in Winton.

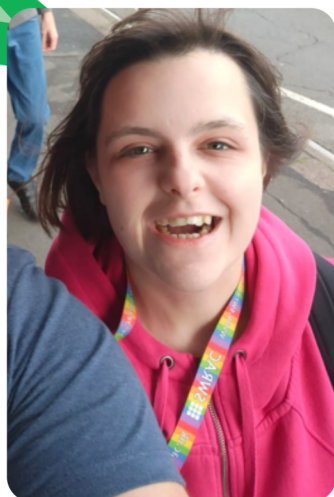
Having totally transformed, she now greets people she doesn't know, is getting a taxi by herself, engaging in sessions and self-regulating her emotions.

"Thrive has been the best provision for Sophie. She enjoys going and is so happy there. At first, Sophie was reluctant to join in and had trouble with her behaviours, e.g. - biting, spitting, shouting and screaming.

Over the three years and with lots of patience, timetables being sent out the week before so that she can look at it and process what is happening for the next week, she has become a lot more calmer.

Sophie has become more sociable, has made friends with other learners and will now sit and play games with them. Her behaviours have become few and far between because of the consistency and structure of Thrive.

The staff are very approachable and have always taken the time to ask about Sophie's ways so they can understand her more."



SAFEGUARDING UPDATE

Bev Gowman

One area that our students sometimes need help with is online safety.

It is taught in our curriculum and for parents/carers, it can be challenging because it is forever changing.



To keep young people safe online, Childline4 encourages young people to:

- Think before you post – don't upload or share anything that you don't want parent, tutors or further employers to see.
- Not share personal details – keep your address, phone number, name and date of birth private and check your privacy settings.
- Phishing and Scams – phishing is when someone tries to trick you into giving them information like your password or bank details. They may also trick you by saying they can make you famous. Never click links from emails or messages that ask you to log in or share your details.
- Think about who you are talking to – there are lots of ways that people try to trick you into trusting them online. Even if you like and trust someone you have met online, never share personal information with them.
- Secure your device and never give out your password.
- Cover your webcam – computer viruses can let someone access your webcam with you knowing.
- Sexting – this is when you send or receive a sexual message, photo or video. It is not okay for someone to pressurise you into sending a nude photo. If you are under 18 it is against the law to send or receive a nude photo.
- Fake news, fake followers – the people you meet online may not be who they say they are and the news you see online or on social media isn't always going to be accurate. Be mindful of fake news and people who might want to scare you, or make you do something.

If you have concerns or something goes wrong, you can:

- 1 Talk to a trusted person – a tutor, your parents/carers or a friend or Childline.
- 2 Report bullying and abuse – email safeguarding@swrac.ac.uk or use Whispr if inside the organisation, or report it via the Childline website.
- 3 Tell the police - make a report to CEOP if someone is threatening or blackmailing you.
- 4 Change your privacy settings.



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Specialist Independent College

MAY 2023 NEWSLETTER

CONTACT INFORMATION

DESIGNATED SAFEGUARDING LEAD

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ONLINE SAFETY RESOURCES



WEBSITE

www.childline.org

www.saferinternet.org.net

www.parentsprotect.co.uk

www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/

www.getsafeonline.org

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THANK YOU!