

GREATER MANCHESTER MENTALLY HEALTHY COLLEGES

School to college transition

CONNELL COOP COLLEGE
JANUARY 2020



Connell Co-Op college is part of a newly created Free school sixth form centre at the heart of the Beswick Hub development, Manchester. Run by the Co-op Academies Trust and formerly the Bright Futures Educational Trust.

The population of East Manchester is approx. 31,500 inhabitants. Unemployment in the area, measured in terms of benefit claimants, is around 10%.

The proportion of students achieving GCSEs in English and mathematics at grades 9 to 4 in the local authority of Manchester are below the national rates.

<https://www.connell.ac.uk/>

School to college transition

This is part of the Greater Manchester Mentally Healthy Schools and Colleges programme. Due to the concentration of student numbers in a relatively small number of education settings and the short timeframes involved we recognised that a more bespoke approach to further Education colleges would be needed.

The aim of this project was to:

- Develop the capacity of further education and sixth form colleges in Greater Manchester to collaborate in support of the mental health and wellbeing of their staff and students
- Identify good practice that can be shared across the system

There are 21 colleges in Greater Manchester (9 general further education colleges and 12 sixth form Colleges) and approximately 90% of 16 to 18yr olds in Greater Manchester are in colleges. During an academic year approximately 51,000 out of 56,000 16-18-year olds will study at these further education and sixth-form colleges.

The Association of Colleges (North) was awarded funding for 12 months in March 2019 to deliver a project to raise awareness and support development of the mental health agenda within individual colleges. Two main providers are supporting the project, Charlie Waller Memorial Trust and British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapists.

Our aim was to provide the most vulnerable Year 12 students who were new to the college with an activity that would raise self-esteem and create a community bond and sense of belonging. We hoped that this in turn would ensure a positive transition to college life, promote wellbeing and hopefully healthy retention rates.

Identifying students

- We identified students partly through working with catchment schools but our main tool was a wellbeing questionnaire that was designed by our existing students
- Students were also identified during enrolment - we invited prospective students to discuss any previous or existing needs via the interview process and enrolment form
- Having identified students who had self-disclosed a feeling of low mood, depression, anxiety and fear at transitioning to college and becoming a full-time college students we contacted their parents/carers

What we did next

We arranged a transition day aiming to help the most vulnerable students with the transition into college. The main issue we faced was recruiting students to attend. Students were unwilling to give up their Saturday. They were unwilling to get up early and many didn't have the confidence to attend.

We re-worked the invitation to the day by looking at the benefits of such an activity. Concentrating on leadership and communication skills meant that students were keener to join. We also spoke to a large number of staff members of staff to ensure they were promoting the activity. We also rang home and tried to get parents/carers on board. This certainly helped in a couple of cases.



Team building

2 students with confidence and esteem issues.

After the team building trip they support each other on a daily basis.

“I didn't know anybody in college or on the trip and I didn't know if I would be confident enough to speak to anyone else. I was! I loved it. I am proud of myself!”



Another positive result of the day was that students have led separate wellness activities that have included a large proportion of the student body. This had further built community, relationships and self-esteem.



Impact on the College

A range of wellbeing events led by the students who were part of the transition project have been completed including:

- “Lonely not Alone” event
- 2nd mental health awareness day
- Raising money for Children in Need with an exercise competition

All events captured a large cohort of students who engaged in expressing emotions and promoting universal wellbeing.



Benefits

All students benefited hugely and all are still part of the college. As a result of the team building day students reported feeling happier and more comfortable in college. Parental/carer feedback also demonstrated that students felt confident in their role at college.

Next steps

- We aim to do this again next year and we hope it will be bigger and better
- We want to work with students and catchment schools to ensure that the transition happens early and is effective

GET IN TOUCH

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<https://hub.gmhsc.org.uk/mental-health>

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