

Polly Harrow is the Head of Personalised Learning at Barnsley College
For correspondence please e-mail: p.harrow@barnsley.ac.uk

Polly Harrow

Healthy FE : Barnsley College

Barnsley College is a tertiary college, which means it offers a range of qualifications from pre-entry level to level 4. It has a large student population - over 4,000 full time, and 6,000 part-time learners. Barnsley is a deprived area, with higher levels of Teenage Pregnancy (TP) than the national average. The launch of the Health and Wellbeing Centre enables staff and learners at the college to access important information and services to address their health needs.

The challenge

I am the Head of Personalised Learning at Barnsley College, and have helped to create the valuable partnership with the PCT, and introducing health and wellbeing initiatives to learners and staff at the college. However, progress and change are never without challenges. When Barnsley College first started working with the PCT, we all experienced a bit of a culture shock. When the NHS nurses arrived it was quite a tall order for them to get used to being in an educational institution - they have different ways of doing things. This was inevitable - after all, it was about health and education institutions coming together to reach a common goal of improving health and wellbeing for staff and learners - so there were bound to be teething problems. For example, the CASH nurses had never dealt with so many 16-19 year olds before so it took them a while to get used to it.

The activity

Before conversations concerning the Health and Wellbeing Centre began, we

worked on a campaign to encourage staff and learners to stop smoking. The activity led to meetings with Dave Ramsey, Deputy Director of Operations at Barnsley PCT, where we discussed the possibility of having a nurse based at the college full-time. As a result of this partnership, and the proactive support of the College SMT, the PCT provided Barnsley College with the resources we needed to offer staff and students the services they required - including the three full-time nurses.

Tutorials have also taken a more prominent place in education and now offer various kinds of support. By introducing health and wellbeing themes into tutorials, the college has taken a holistic approach to addressing health and wellbeing with learners. Tutorials allow for learner voice, and provide an opportunity to discuss difficult issues such as sexual health and drug misuse in an informal environment. Tutorials also enable tutors to remind learners about the services on offer at the Health and Wellbeing Centre, such as the following:

- ~ Full contraceptive & Sexual Health service
- ~ All general health cover
- ~ Depression, bereavement, anxiety issues
- ~ Healthy eating programmes
- ~ Diet and exercise programmes
- ~ Help to stop smoking
- ~ Alcohol and drug abuse
- ~ Help to stop gambling
- ~ Cervical cancer vaccination

- ~ Blood donation
- ~ Bone density screening
- ~ Anger and stress management

Overcoming challenges

The key to overcoming the challenge of implementing new initiatives and launching the Health and Wellbeing Centre has been perseverance, and a common goal to improve health and wellbeing for learners and staff. The SMT's close involvement and support has also made the process a success.

It was important for everyone to remain committed to changing the culture of health and wellbeing at the college. We accepted that there was a learning curve, and that we would come across difficult moments. We wanted to change the culture, and thanks to the support and commitment from everyone from SMT level, through to tutors, support staff, and learners, it has started to happen. For example, we wanted young people to realise how important it is to use condoms. Now we are inundated with learners - boys and girls - coming to collect condoms with their C-Cards (which entitles them to get free condoms)."

The outcomes

The commitment to improve health and wellbeing services for staff and learners has resulted in a number of important outcomes:

- ~ The student response to the Health and Wellbeing Centre has been overwhelmingly positive, as the college has discovered in surveys and through learner voice
- ~ Students expressed feeling more independent as a result of the accessible advice and support available, and feel they have more autonomy regarding their own health and wellbeing
- ~ Young people said they were more inclined to use the Health and Wellbeing Centre due to its confidential nature

~ Ed Balls officially launched the Health & Wellbeing Centre in October 2009, stating that 'health should be at the core of educational programmes'

~ The Department of Health also visited Barnsley College and described the provision as excellent

~ In September 2009 the college had a target for the year of 500 young people signing up to C-Card - 540 signed up within the first month

~ Since September 2009, 350 learners have had Chlamydia screenings, and over half of those were boys

~ Young people are using their C-Card to collect condoms before the weekend which shows they do not want to have unprotected sex

The impact

These outcomes are measurable success of the work being done by the college to change the culture around health and wellbeing. We believe that these results will translate to new habits and philosophies for young people, which will mean they leave college with an appreciation for their own physical and emotional health.

We are delivering an education, not just a service without meaning. It is critical that young people understand the impact of the decisions they make, and some of the risks involved as they continue to develop into adults. That is why it is so important that we address learner health holistically, and in doing so, young people will gain a greater understanding of how important it is to look after themselves, both physically and emotionally.

I also believe it is our responsibility to bridge the gap for young people between school and either the world of work, or Higher Education. We are teaching them invaluable life skills which will stay with them for the rest of their lives.