

FURTHER EDUCATION & TRAINING

FET Guidance Programme

The full development of the FET Information and Guidance Strategy is currently deferred until the completion and outcome of the DES 'Review of Guidance'. It is the continuing role of NCGE to inform the development of this strategy and to maintain the support and development of DES lifelong guidance policy in the Further Education and Training sector in general. This sector incorporates; PLCs, Adult Education, Community Education, Training Centres, Youth services, CTCs and Youthreach, Prison Services and more.

One method by which NCGE achieves this is through building relationships and developing an understanding of guidance provision across the FET sector. The recent appointment of the NCGE FET Guidance Coordinator (see NCGE News 47) has enabled NCGE to engage with these stakeholders alongside DES, SOLAS, ETBI and others.

In line with the above and NCGE's stated strategic objective to provide quality information, resources and materials to support guidance provision and practice, in this issue we have published 'A Day in the life of a Youthreach/CTC (Community Training Centre) Advocate.

In Youthreach, guidance is currently provided under the guidelines of the DES and the **Guidance, Counselling & Psychological Service**. The **Guidance Counselling & Psychological Fund** provides a means to increase the

capacity of Centres to be creative and flexible in their responses.

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/Further-Education-and-Training/Guidance-Counselling-and-Psychological-Services-fund.pdf>



The overall role of the Youthreach / CTC Advocate is to support participants on the Youthreach / CTC programme in decision-making, referral, progression and placement. Advocates are also directly involved in organising work experience and monitoring students while on work experience.

One ETB states that the Advocate "offers pre-entry guidance and on-going one to one support for early school leavers as they progress from Youthreach to further education, training or employment"

A Day in the Life of a CTC Advocate



Anne Fitzpatrick is an Advocate for Early School Leavers who attend the Community Training Centre (CTC) in Newbridge, Co. Kildare (trading as the Youth Training and Development Centre). Anne also provides a service one half day a week to Learners attending Youthreach in Naas.

"I got kicked out of my house, can you help me?"; "I think I'd like to do childcare, what do I need to do?"; "I got the job"; "My girlfriend is pregnant"; "I didn't get my training allowance last week, why not?"; "I couldn't care less about getting a job"; "I don't have a problem with weed, Jacko does (not a real name), he's spending all his FÁS wages on it every week"; "Will you give me a reference for me court case next Thursday?"; "I loved the work placement, getting

to work with real cars was really great, the people were all real cool, I definitely want to be a mechanic"; "I walked out at 11 cos I just couldn't take it anymore, they were all looking down their noses at me"; "Anne, do you think you can help me sort out my tax, I got screwed last week in my pay?"; "My daughter is getting bullied in school and wants to leave"; "I'd love to do that beauty course but how will I get to the college, there are no buses where I live?"

FURTHER EDUCATION & TRAINING: A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A CTC ADVOCATE *continued*

As an Advocate for Early School Leavers, any or all of the above are some examples of the questions that I get asked in any given week. Sometimes, I could get all of the above on the one day!

The role of the Advocacy Service within Youthreach is to provide clients, who are early school leavers, with a confidential, individual career path planning, guidance and counselling service, on a case load basis. Confidentiality and the interests of the clients must be paramount at all times.

No two days as an Advocate are ever the same. Some days, I absolutely love my job - the Learners are turning in on time and are calm, they are attending their work placements, they are actually interested in completing the application form for college, they are actually listening to me. Other days, I wonder what good I am doing at all for these young people, - one has dropped out of his work placement, another told the employer to stuff his job, another went back on the weed after being clean for 6 weeks. The challenges that face the client group I deal with, 16 – 21 year olds who left school before completing the Leaving Certificate are diverse and in some cases dire. Young people leave school for a myriad of reasons – bullying, can't cope, "school just not for me", learning difficulties, pregnancy, mental health issues, court, illegal drugs etc. For some, the desire to get a qualification and/or a job is non-existent. Basic skills like attendance and punctuality don't exist for some of them. Some of them excel when out of the formal education system and attending a Youthreach centre or a CTC and go on to complete the equivalent of a Leaving Certificate in the form of a QQI Level 4 and then progress to a 3rd level college. Some are motivated to complete their QQI level 3 and seek and obtain an apprenticeship.

Paperwork is sometimes far from easy – completing medical form applications; student card applications; SUSI forms, college applications, job seekers allowance applications – is both time consuming and hard for some Learners. They need the assistance of the Advocate. They may have moved house 5 or 6 times since birth so this poses lots of administration challenges for the various Departments and Intreo offices. For some, even keeping their birth certificate in a safe place is tough. Remembering where to find their PPS number doesn't compete with making sure that they constantly update their social media!

I meet with all the new Learners both in a group setting and on a one to one basis and explain the Advocacy service to them. After the first year on the programme, the Learners go on a two week work placement in an area in which they possess an interest. Work placements are key factors in helping the young people decide what area they would like to work in. Some Learners have never worked before so this first ever hands on experience of how the 'real world of work' functions is a great eye opener for them. Realising that their best friend named "Phone" cannot be used or looked at or held onto while in the work place is probably the greatest learning for them! Employers always say that showing up on time and being fit and willing to work are the only criteria they require. Learners can be apprehensive and unsure on the first day. I remember once a lovely young girl saying to me "but Anne what will I be able to talk about at the tea break, I don't use big words like big people do".

This is one of the many nuggets that I have uncovered from working with young people – they need to be constantly reassured that their voice is just as, if not more, important as that of Tutors, Teachers, Advocates, employers and all the people that work in service provision.

During the last six months of their time on the programme, I work intensively with the Learners regarding their progression path. That may involve looking and applying for work; getting an apprenticeship; applying for college; moving abroad; not doing anything; going onto a Post Leaving Certificate course. In addition, CV preparation and interview techniques are covered with all of the Learners. Attending Open Days in colleges is of interest to some Learners and again it is a great learning curve for them to travel to Dublin or Carlow or Portlaoise and push them out of their comfort zones.

For me the hardest part of my job is getting some of the Learners motivated. One of the best parts is when I am served by a former Learner who is pleasant, efficient and well dressed in her Dunnes Stores uniform saying "only for you guys in the CTC, I wouldn't be here".

My door is always open and I love when they wander in of their own volition and ask for help or advice. 17 years later, I still do my best to assist each and every Learner to make the first step on their path towards progression.

It is part of the NCGE FET Guidance Coordinator role to promote understanding, cooperation, communication and collaboration within the range of remarkable guidance and support services available through FET. These include those who are managing the challenges and barriers to education and the opportunities available within education and training, alongside unemployment and underemployment. An integrated FET Information & Guidance Strategy should facilitate positive and productive engagement within FET, supporting learners to achieve skills and qualifications in useful, caring and meaningful ways.
