

Working Assets and the Peterborough Foyer Community Garden Project

On Thursday 12th March Peterborough Foyer staff and residents proudly opened their new community garden with a celebration event showcasing the hard work and achievements of Foyer residents who have worked together to build an amazing garden at the Foyer over the past six months.

Funded by the Tenant Services Authority (TSA), the garden project is an innovative pilot which aims to explore a range of positive new approaches to engage young people in developing the skills, resource and opportunity 'assets' they need to survive and thrive in their local community.

This programme, entitled, 'Working Assets'; which is being led by the Foyer Federation, is all about empowering young people to take on leadership roles to implement their own enterprising initiatives to make a difference within their local communities, and Peterborough Foyer is the first project for the programme to be piloted in.

"It all began when Axiom's Housing Director approached me to arrange a Dragon's Den style competition for Axiom's Supported Housing projects." said Peterborough Foyer Manager, Angela Smallwood (Woody). With funding from the Foyer Federation and TSA, four Axiom Foyers and three other Axiom run Supported Housing Projects put forward teams to prepare and present a creative pitch to a panel of judges on 7th August 2008 at Dragon's Den style event hosted at the Met Lounge in Peterborough.

The brief was for young people to present ideas for projects which would benefit the well-being of their local communities. Young people were encouraged to draw on their experiences to identify project ideas which can impact on the range of skills, resources and opportunities available to them. Each group of young people had five minutes to make their pitch.

The Dragon's Den event brings young people together with their wider community and helps to build connections between the Foyer and local stakeholders. It reinforces the vision that young people's experiences can be turned into social solutions with the right support.

Young people pitched their ideas for community arts projects, bike recycling, and Christmas parties for young people with disabilities. Wisbech Foyer pitched their idea for a fruit fridge in the Foyer, where young people would prepare bags of fruit to be kept in the fridge at the Foyer and sold cheaply to residents and Market Rasen Foyer residents pitched their idea for a party to get young people off of the streets at Halloween.

With £4000 up for grabs, the Dragons deliberated over which of the ideas best met the brief and would offer something valuable to the local community and to the young people involved in the presentations. Eventually, the panel, made up of Colin Falconer, Director of Innovation at the Foyer Federation, Nicki Tulloch and Counsellor Fran Benton, made their decision to split the prize money between the pitches, so as everybody left with something to kick start their



project. Peterborough Foyer was chosen as the pilot project due to the size and location of the Foyer and so work on the Peterborough Foyer Community Garden commenced!

A project team was selected, and Support Worker, Fiona Baverstock, began rallying the troops and getting the residents involved in putting together an action plan.

A lifecoaching training session was set up for Fiona, focusing on how the support worker role can adapt a coaching methodology to empower young people to develop an asset base and achieve future goals through the project. The lifecoaching model has been developed by the Foyer Federation. To help the residents build their confidence and stay motivated, the Foyer Federation arranged for a team building and mentoring session in early November so that the project team could develop the confidence and leadership skills required for the project, to harness their collective resources and identify support within the community, and to develop a delivery plan to realise the project. A team building model was developed by Future Foundations and they facilitated the training day. (www.future-foundations.co.uk)

The Foyer Federation worked with Woody and the team at Peterborough Foyer to develop new ways of tailoring the support, assessment and training processes for residents through the pilot.

Peterborough Foyer are now able to ensure that each young person on the project has the required documentation and knowledge to be better prepared for future employment, from CV writing, to job search and interview preparation.

A work-readiness template has been developed by Prospectus through consultation with residents involved in the Community Garden/ Working Assets Pilot.

A training session was undertaken to help review existing assessment and support procedures and provide practical ways for the Foyer to integrate a positive, asset building focus across its work.

This has enabled the Foyer's management team to question how far its environment can empower young people to understand and build their skills, resources and opportunities, and to make amendments to relevant assessment, support and resettlement processes. An asset training model has been developed by the Foyer Federation.

The young people who led the project got involved for all different reasons, Dane because he had a resident visitor ban and hoped that by showing some commitment to volunteering in the Foyer, it would be lifted, Mark because he is interested in gardening and labouring and Lauren because she has a passion for business and hopes to run her own business one day.

All of the residents involved in the pilot kept a diary log, capturing learning from the project and reflecting on skills development. The template for this was developed by Peterborough Foyer.

Foyer resident, Nicola, said, "I know I need a job, I want to work, but people keep pressurising me into jobs that I'm not interested in. I can learn skills in this project and take them into a job."

The reason the project worked so well was down to team work and commitment from everyone involved. Despite periods of bad weather, issues with funding and access to equipment and resources to get the job done on a very tight timescale.

“Being involved in the gardening project will keep me out of trouble,” said Mark, resident at Peterborough Foyer since February 2008. “It’ll be a great sense of achievement because I have some experience and I’ll be putting my experience into practice.”

“At the beginning of the garden project many of the residents were sceptical that it would be completed within the timescale set,” said Matt Richardson, Deputy Manager at Peterborough Foyer. “By the end they had discovered that by working as a team they would achieve much more than they could as individuals.”

Woody, Peterborough Foyer Manager, said: “The majority of the skills that the residents gained were already there, they just weren’t aware of it because they had never needed to use them before.”

The main challenges with the gardening project were sustaining motivation throughout, especially when the residents were met with challenges like bad weather, team disagreements and lack of funding.

“The residents had to take ownership from the beginning of the project which helped to ensure its success. They had to obtain the funding themselves through the Dragon’s Den pitch and by identifying areas where more money would be needed and then going out and finding it. This was a motivational tool in itself.” said Woody.

Colin Falconer, Director of Innovation at the Foyer Federation said “This flagship project demonstrates our commitment to innovation through partnership. We want to develop transformational models that shape a thriving asset base for young people, the services that support them, and the communities in which they live. We hope that the roll out of this project, at a time of economic downturn, will help position Foyers as beacons of opportunity for young people.”

Well done to the garden project team who worked to complete the garden on time: Lauren Russell, Mark Britchford, Dane Clitheroe, Ben Coulson, Nicola Bilverstone, Phillipe Flectcher, Jake Bowker, Jennifer Galloway, Danny Wagner, Rebecca Martin, Nigel Wallace-Edwards, Lauren Tague, Nicola Vaughan, Stacey Thompson, Danielle Wagner and Josh Mc Namara.

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