

Project SEARCH Supported Internship

In 2019 the Local Authority became a host for a Project SEARCH supported Internship Programme that offers young people with a disability, including learning disability and autism, the opportunity to experience a full academic year of work placements within the LA, supported by a wraparound team. This work has been led by the Work Inclusion Partnerships team.

People with disabilities, and in particular learning disability and autism, have historically missed out on employment opportunities. Nationally, approximately only 5% of people with a learning disability known to a local authority are in employment. It was identified that the local authority needed to respond to this disparity and a decision was made that a Project SEARCH programme would be delivered within the council.

The council has now been a business host for the Project SEARCH programme for three years and more than 30 young people with a learning disability and/or autism have accessed a one year supported internship. Young people have developed the skills, knowledge, and experience to then apply for paid employment. Approximately 75% of young people who have graduated from the programme have achieved paid employment. There are currently four Technical Administration apprentices at the council who are graduates of the Project SEARCH programme and paid jobs have also been achieved in Libraries and Harefield Recycling team. Beyond this a variety of paid roles have been achieved outside the council in organisations including the British Library, Sustainable2, the RAF Museum, Premier Inn, SELCO warehouse, Orchard Hill College, and Harrow Council. All young people are offered ongoing support to ensure they are best able to successfully maintain employment.

The programme has been embraced by the council and more 27 teams across the council have hosted an internship or are exploring hosting an intern in coming months. This has allowed interns to be matched with work placements that meet their interests, skills and career goals. These teams have in turn benefitted from hosting an intern and successes have been shared through internal communications such as the All Staff Email, Team Hillingdon, and the Chief Executive's weekly 'Jottings'. Externally successes have also been shared in Hillingdon People magazine, promoting the benefits of employing young people with disabilities to businesses in the local area.

A variety of teams, senior staff and Members not directly providing an internship placement have also supported the programme through giving talks to the interns, seeking assistance with projects, or providing practical support such as ICT or Coms assistance to the programme. An example of this work is that the interns have assisted in community engagement events such as the Older People's Assembly, not only providing interns with customer service experience but also helping to break down barriers and raise the profile of the council's commitment to inclusion to Hillingdon residents.