

# Contribution to the Sector

## David Winter

**Portland College** is a leading independent specialist college and registered care home for young adults with disabilities. Our Further Education provision is available for learners aged 16-25 who have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Our Care services are for adults of any age from 18 upwards, but generally attracts younger adults.

Our vision is for all people with disabilities to have a lifetime of opportunity, and we strive to achieve this vision by delivering excellent programmes to inspire and empower young people to lead more fulfilling, independent lives.

Originally purpose-built 70 years ago as a residential college for disabled minors and WWII soldiers, we have developed our provision, facilities and expertise over the years to cater for a much more diverse learner base with a wider curriculum offer. Our learners all have very different needs emotionally, physically and medically, and our specialist staff support them to improve their independence, health & well-being and employability so they can look forward to brighter futures.

As a Centre of Excellence for Autism, with advanced accreditation from the National Autistic Society, we are seeing continual growth in learners with Autism accessing our provision.

We support approximately 400 learners and citizens each year and employ 430 staff members. We offer a range of services, including day and residential further education programmes, Day Service, Independent Living, Short Breaks and Respite Care.

Based in the heart of Sherwood Forest on a 32-acre woodland estate, our vibrant campus provides the perfect sensory rich and varied environment that enables all of our learners to thrive.

The passion and commitment our staff show on a daily basis is incredible and that is what makes us the truly wonderful place we are. Our staff are inspired by our ethos of going above and beyond for all our young people, which, in turn, inspires our

learners to push themselves outside of their own comfort zone to achieve great things.

Although we are really proud of the whole team, there is one staff member who we feel deserves real recognition for his outstanding contribution to Portland for the last 23 years – Dave Winter, who champions our vision every day both in and outside of his working life.

As a teenager and a highly skilled sportsman, Dave aspired to be a professional footballer. He thought his dream had come true when he signed a contract with Mansfield Town Football Club youth team. Sadly, this dream was shattered abruptly when he was severely injured in an accident where a driver fell asleep at the wheel and ran him over.

Dave had to endure a long and gruelling recovery both physically and emotionally, faced with the fact that at such a young age, his career aspirations had been so cruelly taken away from him.

In 1998, Dave first visited Portland in the hope of securing a temporary job while he searched for a longer-term career path elsewhere. Dave was offered a role as part time carer, this was the first job he had held and a huge contrast to professional football. Little did he know then, that he had found his calling and would spend the next few decades literally transforming the lives of thousands of young people with disabilities while helping to shape Portland into the nationally renowned specialist provider it is today. Over the years, Dave has progressed into various roles and is now Curriculum Manager.

In another heart-breaking setback for Dave and after lots of medical interrogations, he and his wife found out they were unable to have children naturally. They opted for IVF and spent thousands and thousands on trying for children, but it wasn't to be.

Although devastated, instead of feeling sorry for himself, Dave chose to see these life-changing experiences as positives and from a different perspective. He takes his inspiration from his learners, who overcome challenges every single day as they go about improving their lives in the best way they can while dealing with profound and multiple disabilities.

### **Evidence of going above and beyond**

Unable to have children of his own, Dave uses his paternal instinct and energy to teach and empower his learners to seize every opportunity to develop and work towards brighter futures.

Since the start of his career with Portland, he too has embraced every learning opportunity possible, whether through formal or self-directed training, experiential learning or mentoring and ultimately leading to Dave becoming a fully qualified teacher.

This has really helped him progress through Portland and has led to him being an excellent educator and role-model for his learners and colleagues.

Dave is an incredibly humble and kind staff member who does not understand the full and lasting impact he has had on Portland, his colleagues and his many learners; past and present.

He is well known and well respected among the Portland community, and regardless of how busy he is, he will always make time for everyone with words of praise and encouragement.

Dave has helped his learners to achieve many successes throughout his career and as he has developed, he has been able to have an even bigger impact on more people.

In 2006 he had the idea of offering sports qualifications, including Sports Leaders Awards to our learners, recognising the physical and mental benefits of active lifestyles as well as the potential career opportunities that would result.

He led on designing and introducing a sports curriculum which, due to the nature of our learners, takes a different format to regular PE classes.

There is more emphasis on health, safety and well-being and the use of specialist equipment. The programme builds learners' confidence and empowers them to take on major roles in the sessions such as leading exercises or officiating games. This teaches valuable skills such as timekeeping, scoring and managing a team.

Learners have the opportunity to compete in local, regional and national events, and Dave has led many successes with learners representing England in Boccia squads and the Table Cricket team have won the Lord Taverner's national title several times.

He has introduced a comprehensive evening enrichment programme for learners which he has opened up to others in the community.

And earlier this year he recognised the need for a Nottinghamshire branch of the Special Olympics. Dave created and Chairs this brand-new committee which gives our own learners and community members a fantastic opportunity to compete in local, national and even international games. This is also a wonderful tool for recruiting more learners to benefit from the Portland experience.

Dave is also in the process of rolling out a new initiative; the Be Healthy, Active and Courageous project, which involves a 12-week training programme for staff to provide the knowledge tools and techniques for staff to support learners with self-awareness, self-regulation, goal setting, achievement habits, self-compassion and resilience.

Dave is also Manager of Ollerton Town Football Club, where he uses his skill and passion for the sport to help young footballers to improve their game, compete as a team and ultimately work towards their dream of football careers, something Dave was unable to continue.

All of this is alongside Dave's busy role of managing a complex curriculum and large team of specialist staff to ensure our learning programmes are delivered to the highest quality and in line with learner aspirations.

### **Evidence of innovation**

Dave is continually looking for ways to improve both his own performance and our offer for our young people.

In a previous role he introduced successful enrichment programmes where he created a timetable of fun and challenging activities for learners. Due to its success, he was promoted to Enrichment Coordinator.

As we emerge from lockdowns, Dave has reintroduced a comprehensive evening enrichment programme that will enable young people with disabilities to participate in a range of different sports and competitions. The programme so far includes basketball, football, archery and boccia, with more activities and sports planned. He is also introducing a Motor Activity Training Programme (MATP) for people with PMLD and complex autism. Meaning there is a programme for everyone, regardless of their athletic abilities. All enrichment clubs will be a mix of Portland and

non-Portland members which is a great opportunity for more young people to come onto campus and benefit from our state-of-the-art facilities and specialist provision. The Be Healthy, Active and Courageous project has been designed to support a curriculum step change by moving health and well-being to the centre of the learner journey. This project recognises that by providing learners with the fundamental tools of self-awareness, self-regulation, goal setting, achievement habits, self-compassion and resilience, learners will be much better prepared to excel in their studies, leading to greater opportunities for them longer term.

It will also help them to ensure they manage their own health and well-being in everything they do, not just while they're in college.

By creating a Special Olympics Nottinghamshire branch, Dave is enabling much wider participation from our local communities, as well as providing our own learners with opportunities to compete on a world stage. This is also a great recruitment opportunity for Portland as community members will see first-hand the fantastic facilities, staff and provision we have, and ultimately many will likely apply to join us as a learner.

Dave is prepared to take positive risks, to demonstrate courage and to act as a role model for his learners and peers. Over the years, he has had many promotions and been part of organisational development, he adapts extremely well to change and can inspire his team and learners to follow in his footsteps.

### **Evidence of sustainment**

Dave's career with Portland has spanned over 23 years, first starting as a carer, then as Care Coordinator, before moving into learning support and teaching roles and ultimately management.

As he has progressed through Portland, Dave has continually pushed himself, his team and his learners. He has taken huge career risks which have proved to be extremely positive. Moving onto management meant he would be leaving a job he loved, he found easy and he had really moulded into a successful contributor to learner outcomes. Aside from his football management experience, he had never experienced a management role within a business and he was worried about leaving a well-oiled machine. He was concerned about not being around learners as much and he was anxious about how, as a new manager, he would be perceived by his team.

Dave was supported to access the training and mentoring to help him in his role. Although he is not directly teaching learners, he still builds strong relationships with each learner and understands their needs and fully supports their outcomes. In the last couple of years in his new post, Dave has really shone, he has introduced and been part of many innovations and he continually pushes himself and his colleagues to be the best they can be.

Under Dave's curriculum management, learner achievement rates continue to be high, and working alongside colleagues in the Positive Behaviour Support team, behavioural incidents have reduced significantly over the last few years, with a year on year improvement.

Dave continues to measure and improve quality and success within his teams through observations, mentoring and goal setting.

Throughout COVID, Dave was instrumental in ensuring the safety of our learners and staff. He introduced one-way systems and learning zones and led a blended curriculum which was (at short notice) delivered both on and offline, depending on the learner needs. The blended model was hugely successful and gives Portland an opportunity to further diversity if it offers longer-term and reach more people with disabilities through new technology and delivery methods.

Dave has always been a highly valued member of the team and the commitment he has shown to his teams and his learners is truly commendable.

Many of his initiatives are now firmly embedded into Portland, and we are looking forward to seeing the positive impact from the projects he is running now.

Further education college for young people aged from 16 to 25. We currently have 143 residential and day students with a wide variety of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), including autism, communication difficulties and challenging behaviours.

Our strapline is 'a place of possibility' – the mission is to enable students to achieve goals and aspirations for the future. For the majority, the ambition is employability and development of skills to live a more independent life.

Students are based at the college's main site in Gobowen, near Oswestry, and at three smaller satellite sites at Walford, Ludlow and Telford. Learners follow vocational pathways in Hospitality and Food, Horticulture, Retail & Enterprise and Performing Arts. Those not yet ready for vocational pathways, can follow a Learning

for Life pathway which builds confidence and teambuilding skills as a foundation to work-based learning.

There are very few traditional classrooms at Derwen. Students learn vocational skills in work environments with teaching support staff. The Gobowen College campus boasts a customer 'Marketplace' which includes the Walled Garden Café, Orangery Restaurant, Garden Centre & Gift Shop, Vintage Advantage Charity Shop and training hotel Hotel 751.

As students progress in their skills and confidence, our Work Experience team support them to work at weekly work placements outside of College. Students learn work skills, as well as travel training, to help them get to work safely. In 2020, the College used our expertise in work experience to add to further our programme of support into employment. We launched an additional Supported Internships scheme, designed specifically to direct a small group of former students into work. This bespoke programme, was created for specific students and tailored to support them into their chosen career choices.

2021 saw the completion of our first two internship programmes. For 2021-22 we have two further interns who are working towards careers in Horticulture and Floristry.

### **Evidence of going above and beyond**

To support our interns to reach their goals, it is imperative that they are receiving personalised learning and work experience whilst also accessing the travel training and independence skills needed to get to future employment and enjoy a fulfilling life.

Students K and O, both aged 20, are current Supported Interns. K wants to combine her horticulture and artistic skills in future employment with a florist. Student O would like to work in a Garden Centre.

The College launched a campaign to find suitable work placements for the students, to offer them the very best training towards their career ambitions.

The purpose of an internship is to progress into paid employment, ideally with the employer offering the internship, or by transferring skills to a new employer.

Both O and K were involved in approaching businesses, demonstrating skills, and meeting employers face to face – important skills for any young person seeking employment.

We also launched a media campaign in newspapers, local radio and on social media which explained to employers the importance of internships, and helped them to understand how an intern could fit into their business.

Our campaign gleaned exciting results. We were approached by two independent Shropshire florists offering weekly placements to K. We were also contacted by national garden centre chain Dobbies who met with O, and offered a weekly placement.

Both now have full five-day week timetables with relevant work placements which they attend with the support of job coaches with appropriate support. They also complete work skills as part of their internship undertaking employability skills, work portfolios and functional skills.

We are very proud that K recently passed her driving test and is now able to drive to work placements independently.

### **Innovation**

Derwen College has long recognised that work placements are the best possible preparation for future employment. Work experience is a far cry from the one-week of often meaningless work experience that schools and some colleges achieve. Work placements for our interns take place over many sessions a week, every week. Interns get to know and develop their role in an organisation. It must be work relevant to their future aspirations.

It is also vital that the work placement team support employers in the process. Job coaches attend work experience sessions with the intern, gradually withdrawing support where appropriate.

By working side by side with employers, we feel we have changed attitudes and apprehensions toward employing people with SEND.

For example, an employer who works with 'K', says:

"K is such a wonderful engaging individual who fits into any role given to her at Agri-cation CIC. Her approach to challenges is very constructive, and she is keen to ask questions to make sure she understands the task at hand so that she can apply her knowledge and skills to get a desirable outcome. I am impressed with her creative abilities and each week she uses this talent to create beautiful recycled items to help develop our sensory garden. She is a joy to work with and I would recommend that

people engage in this programme to create opportunity not only for the student, but the employer themselves.”

Getting to work is also a vital skill. Students and interns learn to use buses, trains or taxis, or to walk safely to work where that is possible. It is a detailed and focused on each individual’s needs.

We are proud that we have graduates who are now capable of travelling independently to work or internships. Some even travelling across London by foot, tube or train.

### **Evidence of Sustainment over two years**

Derwen College is working with local authorities to identify students who would most benefit from an internship to progress them into employment.

We feel that once a business sees for themselves how capable a person with SEND is, and what they can bring to a business, the possibilities are endless. We work hard to build and maintain a sustainable relationship, which would offer further opportunities to future interns.

Our Work Experience team work to forge and maintain relationships with both local and national businesses. We have a strong bond with Premier Inn hotels, which has now seen more than 20 students progress to paid employment with the Whitbread-owned hotel chain.

We were particularly excited to build a new partnership with Dobbies starting with intern O.

We currently work with 27 businesses to provide external work placements for students and supported interns, as well as providing internal work experience in our on-site ‘Marketplace’.

Supported Internships that started at Derwen College in September 2020 were successful, despite the challenges of COVID. Interns completed their programmes and have secured both paid hours and voluntary work, and are continuing to build up robust CVs.

Our current interns are achieving wonderful results, progressing towards employment next year.

‘K’s job coach says:

“Progression for ‘K’ is the start of a new placement at a florist in Telford in March, and increasing her independent working hours at Agri-cation. She is an incredible young lady who has flourished on the Supported Internship programme and will progress into employment with ease.”

Derwen College looks forward to forward to an incredibly bright future for ‘K’ and ‘O’, and to supporting our next intake for 2022-23.