**Innovator of the Year Award - Access Generation CIC**

**Introduction**

Access Generation is a social enterprise and a partner with Movement to Work. We launched in 2016 to empower employers to attract the next generation and give young people a platform to have a voice to share their views on recruitment with employers.

But then a global pandemic and a national recession changed the world of work in 2020. From remote working to job losses, employment was and still is in crisis for many.

Prior to covid, our work included externally assessing the job application process on employer websites and giving recommendations on how to become an employer of choice.

We recognised that it was not the right time to discuss these changes whilst jobs were insecure, furlough was being introduced and remote working was becoming the norm.

We also recognised that disadvantaged young people who already struggled to get into work would face increased competition with more candidates looking for work.

This is when our peer panel of young people designed and created a new programme - Gen @ Work.

**What is Gen @ Work?**

Gen @ Work is a peer-led training, development and paid work experience programme. We partnered with a charity, Leicestershire Cares, to engage young care leavers and estranged young people in order to build up their confidence, employability and skills in a highly competitive labour market post-Covid19.

Young care leavers often lack the support, opportunities and social networks that their peers may have access to through their families and wider networks. In addition, they are more likely than their peers to experience mental health problems, be living independently and have experienced a disrupted education due to moves while in care. As a result, they face many more barriers to employment than other young people and, in the current economic context, are going to find it even more of a challenge getting into work.

In this context, giving young care leavers a peer-led real-world work experience is an invaluable opportunity that will help them gain an advantage when looking for employment, education and training. Gen @ Work provides training as well as practical experience to build participants’ confidence and skills to compete in a post-covid jobs market.

In addition, the programme provides a straightforward way for employers to have projects fulfilled and managed by a third party, all whilst supporting the future generation and a local community initiative.

This meant that employers who were now operating remotely and did not have the resource to manage an intern or work experience could still meet their corporate social responsibility and talent pipeline activities by outsourcing projects to the Gen @ Work programme.

The Gen @ Work programme is designed and led by and for young people, providing a practical solution to current employment challenges. It involves a virtual work placement, supervised and overseen by Access Generation.

**Approach and progress so far**

One of our values is to co-design our work with young people and our peer panel. The concept for Gen @ Work was designed by young people so it was only right to be led by young people too.

We have two youngpeer assistants who manage and facilitate the activity of participants on the programme. Having two peer assistants leading the recruitment, supervision and support for the participants on the programme has been very effective in enabling young people to feel comfortable on the project. The peer assistants have been key in ensuring that participants feel well-supported and able to share any issues they are experiencing which may hinder their engagement.

The programme itself is designed to incorporate both training and development and mimic a real-world work experience. This includes everything from applying, interview through to induction and completing in-work project briefs.

We worked with employers such as East Midlands Chamber, Fujitsu, Leicester City in the Community, the Prince’s Trust and Neovia. These businesses have provided live project briefs that young people have been able to carry out paid work on, including market research projects, creative video briefs and delivery of diversity and inclusion training to employers.

**Outcomes**

The programme has already created some strong outcomes for participants, particularly in terms of using their initiative and working independently, their understanding of the workplace and their skills and confidence for work. Our evaluation and monitoring have found some significant improvements in participants' confidence, skills and motivation.

One of the first participants to complete the programme has now joined our peer panel. We anticipate that this will be a natural next step for many of our participants who will want to continue to engage with Access Generation.

Participants have also been trained on how to create a Linkedin profile and use their personal branding to attract contacts and potential job opportunities.

“I really enjoyed the CV workshop offered by Afra and Kate who advised me on how to format my CV. Also, I liked the Linkedin session offered by the director Jemma which gave me more confidence to create my own profile to help me connect with companies I am interested to join and build my future professional brand. Overall, this is definitely an experience that I will showcase in my CV and during interviews.” - Martin, Gen @ Work participants

*The table below shows the level at which participants scored themselves at the beginning of the programme compared to most recently. They were asked to rate themselves 1 to 4, 1 being poor or no experience and 4 being expert or excellent.*

| **Skills** | **Participants self-assessment** |
| --- | --- |
| **Before:****Poor or reasonable** | **During:****Good or excellent** |
| **Confidence** | 67% | 100% |
| **Communication & presentation** | 33% | 100% |
| **Teamwork**  | 67% | 100% |
| **Problem-solving** | 67% | 83% |
| **Digital skills** | 67% | 83% |
| **Career goals** | 50% | 100% |

Our learnings from these outcomes so far is that their confidence builds very quickly and that teamworking is a very positive experience. In the first instance, communication is poor and participants tend to be introverted but soon learn that by working together positive things happen.

This is a skill that is highly sought by employers and will help the participants to progress into work after the programme.

“We’ve seen a big improvement in their confidence and their ability to write reports, which is something they did not know how to do previously. The young people showed us how capable they were when given tasks to complete for employers.” Kate - marketing and research peer assistant for Access Generation

**Conclusion and next steps**

The pilot programme proved the concept that a young-person centred approach is key to success. The combination of external pastoral support and the opportunity to work onreal live project briefs from employers has given participants a boost in confidence, a sense of achievement as well as evidence to use within their CVs.

Our top three learnings expressed by our young peer assistants are as follows;

* “It is important to have employers on board and toprovide paid opportunities to attract cohorts to the programme”
* “Care leavers have the potential to grow in the workplace, so we should not limit the time invested in their development”
* “Employers should accommodate the cohort’s needs by being flexible and maintaining good communication”

The strong engagement from young people and employers alike suggests that this is a viable programme that can be built on and scaled up. We are currently seeking follow-on funding to build on our success in the pilot and engage more care leavers and businesses in Gen @ Work.

**Participant comments**

*“I joined the Gen @ Work programme so I could improve some of my weaknesses and learn new skills” - Martin*

*“I feel like this internship will help me to branch out and explore different opportunities. One of the many things I learnt from our training session was the importance of using different methods to find out information.” - Caprice*

*“What Gen @ Work does is great. I think employers will value the opportunity to work with young people” - Sal*

**Employer comments**

*“I am really pleased to be able to support the Gen @ Work programme. We want more young voices to influence our offering at the chambers so this project is timely” - Lucy, Operations Director at East Midlands Chamber of Commerce*

*“For me, it sits nicely with my values and it’s about practising a little of what I preach. The win-win for DPI is we can tap into generational talent as they are the clients and employees of the future and I am all about succession planning” - Sandra, Director at DPi*