

City Bridge Trust – Monitoring Visit Report

Organisation: Ambitious about Autism	Grant ref: 11078	Programme area: Positive Transitions to Independent Living\b) Young disabled people in transition into adulthood
Amount, date and purpose of grant: 18/07/2012: £117,000 over three years (£38,000; £39,000; £40,000) towards the salary of an Employment Specialist to help young people with severe autism into employment.		
Visiting Grants Officer: Tim Wilson	Date of meeting: 4 March 2014	
Met with: Sibeal Nic Ginnea (Employment Specialist), Stephen Parr (Consultant) and Julia Lampard (Project and Funding Manager)		
1. Introduction to the organisation: Ambitious About Autism (AAA) was established in 1997 to help children and young people on the autistic spectrum achieve their full potential. It runs the TreeHouse School, a non-maintained special school for children and young people aged between 3 and 19 years who have severe and complex autism; provides information, training and consultancy for parents, professionals and service providers; and works at the policy level, both locally and nationally. More recently, it has begun to develop services for those aged 19 years and above, for whom there is very little provision. This latter activity was the focus of AAA's 2012 application to City Bridge Trust.		
2. The project funded: City Bridge Trust funds a new post (an Employment Specialist) who works to help young people with severe autism access employment opportunities. The Employment Specialist's activities are part of AAA's <i>Ambitious Support</i> programme for post-19 year olds. The work has been developed in response to the very high rates of unemployment amongst adults on the autistic spectrum (only 15% in full-time employment). The programme provides a structured approach to learning employment skills based on each young person's interests and aptitude. The project is based at Barnet Further Education College where a specialist team, including the Employment Specialist, support young people in gaining the independent living skills and the vocational training they need to gain meaningful employment. AAA engages prospective employers to secure good training and development opportunities for its students. These include Paul (the French bakery chain), leaflet distribution firms and opportunities to undertake practical work at the college's own cafe. AAA proposed four objectives at time of application: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people with severe autism remain within their community post school • Families supported to achieve this • Promote equality of access to employment • Creation of a replicable model 		
3. Work delivered to date: Four young people benefitted from the programme in the first year, and a further nine in the second year. Whilst the beneficiary numbers appear low, it is important to note that the programme works with young people who have very high needs (sometime two full-time support workers) and require a high-intensity, bespoke package of support. Beneficiary numbers were understood by the Trust at the point of funding.		

All young people involved in the programme to date have received a needs assessment and a personalised discovery plan (which also has the input of their families). The process highlights interests and abilities and, AAA reports, is often helpful in enabling care-givers to see the potential their child has.

The charity has engaged with over 60 possible employers and already placed one young person in paid employment. The working model delivered at Barnet College is attracting significant interest from other providers, an indicator that AAA is on course to develop a replicable model.

4. Difference made:

Preliminary feedback gathered from the families of the young people involved in the programme is positive. One challenge facing AAA is parents' perception of what their young people are capable of. Parents often assume that employment is completely beyond the capacity of their child, based on their own experience of open labour markets. In addition, and where children exhibit challenging behaviour, AAA report that some parents seek to 'shield' their child from the outside world. This can, inadvertently, limit their potential. AAA's work (gently) challenges these assumptions and, in time, brings wider benefit to the young people's families.

5. Grants Administration:

AAA submitted its first monitoring report on 19th December 2013 and this was rated as 'good' by the Trust. The report gave a comprehensive account of work delivered and provided a good summary of the outcomes achieved in the first twelve months as well as plans for the work ahead. There was also a 'photo story' illustrating the work done by one young person through the Ambitious Support programme. City Bridge Trust's support was appropriately acknowledged in the 2012/13 accounts.

6. Concluding comments:

This is significant work addressing a pressing social issue. Since the grant was awarded the Children and Families Bill was introduced to Parliament and it is likely there will be legislative change ensuring that young people with autism can receive educational support up the age of 25. This has generated considerable interest in AAA's *Ambitious Support* programme from families seeking a place, and local authorities seeking to replicate the model.

AAA (working in partnership with Social Finance) has been awarded a grant under the Investment and Contract Readiness Fund (ICRF) to develop their new post-16 college to help young people with autism make the transition to adulthood. This may help the charity to establish a sustainable funding model to cover the costs of the transition support. AAA staff were very positive about City Bridge Trust's grant helping them to demonstrate proof of concept as part of their proposal to secure this business development finance.