

For immediate release. With two images.

Ground-breaking programme is strengthening futures

A Dorset-based programme aimed at helping autistic young people and those with learning disabilities enter employment, has seen its numbers more than quadruple in a year.

Futures, based in Manor Road, Christchurch, seeks to enable young people aged 18-25 to realise their full potential and to become active members of their local communities by offering them bespoke learning opportunities, work placements, employability skills and supported housing practice.

The programme is funded by BCP Council and operated by Dorset-based Autism Unlimited, the leading regional charity providing specialist education, care and support to autistic children and young adults.

Futures Development Lead Lynn Reddick said: "Futures started with four young people last November and this September we have 17 learners. Seven of our earliest students are now in successful work placements with one having just secured a permanent job.

"Unfortunately, there is currently a huge hole in the education system to support young people with additional needs to transition into adulthood safely.

"As a result, many young people come to us feeling disengaged, having left-school or college where they may have struggled, without a clear plan for their next steps in adult life.

"Their parents want them to be successful, but choices are limited. These could be sending them away to an expensive residential college or risk them just not engaging in work or community activities."

Every Futures learner has a person-centred plan that addresses their needs and aspirations. This links to their education, health and care plan and ensures that their targets are relevant, considered and met.

Futures works closely with employers to ensure success and Futures Coaches serve as enablers, supporting the young people to make their own decisions.

Graham Whitehead, Futures Consultant said: "We recognise that enabling young people to find successful employment is not about employers offering them 'special treatment', it's more often about small, but very effective adaptations being made to enable them to enter and succeed in the workplace – such as a smaller working team, closer supervision, a slightly slower rate of training or just quieter surroundings."

Learners are also offered an independent living experience, staying 1-2 nights on site at Manor Road, going to a work experience placement, preparing their own meals and even booking a table at the pub over the road together.

Emily Randall, 21, said: I went to college before Futures, but everything changed when I came here. My one-to-one coach Matt helps me manage my learning and I hope to start a work placement soon, hopefully working with animals.”

Judy, whose son Michael attends Futures said: “Everyone is so impressed with how different Michael is and how much progress he has made in the past year.”

Vicki, Anya’s mum said: “Anya is much more outgoing and confident since joining Futures.”

The growth of Futures has led to BCP Council offering Autism Unlimited extra space at Highcliffe Castle with students following a three-day timetable split between the Castle, Manor Road and their workplace.

Lara Merredew, Commercial Manager at Highcliffe Castle said: “It has been a pleasure hosting Futures at Highcliffe Castle. We understood a new location for the group could be a daunting prospect for them, but we have worked hard to ensure that the young learners feel welcome and comfortable in their new surroundings. The staff team have learnt a great deal working alongside Futures and we are very proud of this new partnership.”

Interest is now being shown in Futures from local authorities outside of the area.

“Futures is giving young people more choice and the tools they need to get where they want to be,” said Lynn.

“Even the most disengaged students find their smiles again at Futures.”

For more information about Autism Unlimited and Futures please visit:
futures@autism-unlimited.org

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Picture captions:

BRIGHTER FUTURES – Autism Unlimited’s Futures, based at Manor Road, Christchurch and Highcliffe Castle is helping autistic young people and those with learning disabilities realise their full potential. Back left to right – Futures Lead Kate Barrall, Futures coach Matt Egan, Lara Merredew, Commercial Manager at Highcliffe Castle and Futures Development Lead Lynn Reddick. Front left to right – Futures learners Joshua, John, Bella and Emily.

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