

My Working Day



Pictured above: 'Stepping Out' Co-ordinator, Jim McNamee (second left), with programme participants (left to right) Shona Murray, Haley McDonagh, William Shine and Martin Judge.

TO BE HONEST, THERE REALLY ISN'T A TYPICAL day when it comes to my job. As Co-ordinator of the 'Stepping Out' programme, no day is ever the same. The programme is run in conjunction with the Probation Service and is specifically designed to assist people who have left the prison service to rebuild their lives. The aim of the programme is to work with participants to prevent them from re-offending, to enhance their employment opportunities and to increase access to further education.

The programme was initially run as a pilot but was put on a more permanent footing in 2003, following positive feedback from participants and an external evaluation which showed that the programme was effective in achieving its aims.

Jim McNamee is Co-ordinator with National Learning Network's unique 'Stepping Out' programme in Athlone, Co. Westmeath.

At the moment, 14 people are undertaking the year-long course, and we have a further 23 people preparing to take it up. Tutors from the local Vocational Education Committee also provide a number of course modules, but I deliver many myself, including modules in conflict resolution, confidence-building and effective change, which basically means working on changing the mindsets of individuals and the community at large. As part of that, we recently held an art exhibition in Athlone Castle that was open to the public. It was a great success. The offending behaviour module is a particular favourite of mine as the discussions can often be very animated – everyone has an opinion on why an offence happened.

All of the participants on the programme have their own battles to fight, so it's important that they get as much support as possible. I work very closely with the local alcohol and drug service and, of course, our partners in the Probation Service. I have formal meetings with the Probation Service on a monthly basis and informal chats almost daily. I also regularly visit the Midlands Prison, as well as St Patrick's Institution for Young Offenders and the Women's Prison in Dublin to talk about 'Stepping Out'. Our catchment area is very large and we have participants on the course from all over the midlands region.

It can definitely be a demanding job, but I love every minute of it. It's good to see people moving on positively after completing the programme and not letting their past mistakes hold them back. ■



Louise Woolener is a Senior Business Development Executive with TBG Learning, Colchester.

HAVING BEEN WITH TBG LEARNING FOR THREE years, I can honestly say that I love my job and that every day is different. Essentially my role within the company is to recruit learners onto our apprenticeship and National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) programmes.

I'd start a typical day by contacting or visiting various companies to see if they have any staff who would like to undertake one of our qualifications. We offer courses in customer service, business administration, health and social care, and management and team leading. I would then speak with interested employees to explain the benefits and how the qualification works – visiting them at work over a six-to-nine-month period and carrying out observations and recording “guided discussions”.

For those who want to go ahead, I assist them in completing the forms and, as our qualifications are Government-funded, you can just imagine the amount of paperwork! Following this, we carry out an initial

assessment. No-one seems to like this part because it reminds them of being back at school but when we explain that we can help them to improve their skills and to achieve their adult numeracy and literacy certificates, they are more than willing and often surprise themselves at how well they do, considering that they may have left school 20-30 years ago!

Generally, all it takes is for one member of staff to do a qualification and the rest of that company's employees are motivated to do the same. This is the best bit about my job as it means I can see people progress and it's great to keep in contact with them afterwards to find out how they're getting on. On many occasions we have learners completing two or three qualifications with us.

My job can be a real challenge at times and, believe it or not, it's sometimes difficult to convince companies that having their staff complete qualifications benefits their business. However, I believe in our services and can be very persistent! ■