

Lichfield Community Mentoring - Bridge Builders

In September 2016, 12 volunteers worked with students at Nether Stowe School in Lichfield. The majority of the volunteers came from local churches.

The point of the exercise was to help Sixth Form students prepare for their lives after school by giving them employability hints and tips. The sessions were led by Rick Hill from Wade Street church. He has extensive experience in delivering employability sessions for students through the use of experienced volunteers.

So what actually took place? Do you know how long it takes to make a first impression - not very long! Working with the volunteers the students practiced very simple, but crucial skills like, a good handshake, eye contact and all the intricacies of body language. They also had the chance to develop some team skills - a boys team won. How good are you at listening? We had a go at that as well. The day included the opportunity for all of Year 13 to have a mock job interview.

They are the raw facts for the day, but what impact did it have? It's a bit early to say for the students, but the head of the Sixth Form said *'I certainly enjoyed, and was impressed by, the sessions I saw'*.

The impact on the volunteers was profound. They were able to share skills they had taken for granted, they saw how committed the students were and they learnt some new skills.

One of the volunteers, Diane Baker, has taken the time to put her thoughts down on paper *'When I explained to family members that I was really looking forward to taking part in the day at Nether Stowe they seemed surprised. This is probably because after over 40 years working for the Civil Service, with the majority of time working in or with Jobcentres, I couldn't wait to take early retirement last year. When the aims of the day were outlined (employability skills), I saw an opportunity to use my previous training and experience to hopefully support the students. I'm really glad that I was able to be involved because it was a great day and I really enjoyed being there.'*

The day reinforced how important this area is for us all in our daily lives as members of Wade Street Church and the wider community.

There is a saying that "you can't teach an old dog new tricks" but I came away from the day with a brand new team building exercise to share with my ex colleagues and I now know why we use our right hand for that all important handshake. Ask a member of the group if you are intrigued!

I found the day extremely rewarding and left the school with a real buzz. I met some really wonderful youngsters and the sense of satisfaction of a day well spent is something that I am looking forward to repeating.

More sessions have been planned at Nether Stowe school on 2nd November and at King Edward VI school on 21st November and 5th December. Would you like to take part as a volunteer? The experience you need is that you work, have worked or had similar responsibilities in any role - that's a pretty broad definition! You may well find you come away from the day feeling you have received more than you gave - the real joys of Christian giving.

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