

## **NOMINATION**

Plymouth City Council, Customer Service Improvement Team

The Service Improvement Team within the Customer Services Team Plymouth City Council in 2013 undertook a pledge to donate an amount of their working week to support organisations and individuals who were less fortunate than themselves in an attempt to make a difference.

This pledge has manifested itself into a number of events and schemes over the past 12 months, these include the following

- Job Coaching for ex-offenders (Shekinah Mission)
- Mentoring for long term unemployed (Job Centre)
- Work placements for long term conditions (Remploy)
- Work placements for ex-offenders and those with a history of substance abuse (Shekinah)
- Support for Local Charities (Dartmoor Search & Rescue) raised over £2500
- Organising 'Service Fest' to celebrate National Customer Service Week
- Job Club for long term unemployed (Careers South West)
- Work experience for people with learning difficulties (Remploy)
- Supporting Apprentices into work
- Supporting Vulnerable Families.

The Service improvement Team consists of 9 team members and are responsible for the provision of IT support to the Corporate Contact Centre and Face to Face reception, the provision of statistical analysis for all Customer Service Departments, the co-ordination of the re-accreditation of Customer Service Excellence Award, Data Cleansing of Customer Records, Scanning of documents for the Revenues & Benefits department along with an integral part of the Customer Transformation Programme.

In September 2012 the team made their first contact with Shekinah Mission a homeless hostel in Plymouth to discuss a volunteering opportunity, this ignited the passion within the team and they set out on a campaign to make a difference to the local community, particularly those people who are vulnerable or in need to engage with.

The team undertook an active role in each of the projects above with the sole aim to make a difference to someone's life.

### **Job Coaching for ex-offenders (Shekinah Mission)**

The current team leader (Darren Stoneman) is a trained job coach working with a local service provider he meets with ex-offenders or ex-substance abusers to assist them into work. This involves a weekly 1-2 hour meeting whereby the candidate and coach talk about work opportunities, discuss issues that may be affecting the candidate, the job seeking routine, opportunities for training, opportunities for work experience, assisting with applications, preparation for interviews. This has proven to be an extremely valuable scheme which has resulted in over 30% of the attendees finding work.

[http://www.shekinahmission.co.uk/images/shekinah/documents/job\\_coaching\\_flyer\\_plymouth\\_2012.pdf](http://www.shekinahmission.co.uk/images/shekinah/documents/job_coaching_flyer_plymouth_2012.pdf)

The link above explains the scheme in more depth.

### **Mentoring for long term unemployed (Job Centre)**

Following the success of the job coaching the team were eager to expand their influence and worked with a local job centre to offer long term unemployed young people the opportunity to come into the team to gain experience of working life. This experience programme required the young person to attend an interview, have a full induction and then undertake a position within the team for a period of 6 to 8 weeks, the feedback from the young people and Job Centre / Scheme administrators has been excellent, over the past 12 months 3 young people have taken time to join the scheme, Phil & James have both know been offered an apprenticeship with Plymouth City Council, Alisha the 3<sup>rd</sup> candidate has completed over 6 months as a temporary member of staff within Plymouth City Council and the team will be supporting her over the coming months in an attempt to secure a permanent position within the Authority.

### **Work experience for people with learning difficulties & long term conditions (Remploy)**

The team were really enthusiastic about working with people with learning difficulties, the Team were contacted by a local support group Remploy to seek opportunities for their candidates to sample life in the work place, these people were often out of work for a long period of time and due to their special needs required additional support, The team really embraced this opportunity and have welcomed 4 candidates to the team over the past 12 months, 2 had mild learning difficulties, one was profoundly deaf and the fourth was struggling with stress & depression, the team worked with the individuals overcoming their difficulties to integrate them into the work place. The work experience directly led to the deaf lady gaining employment. The feedback from the service provider has been very positive. The team have now commenced their 5<sup>th</sup> programme and have welcomed a young lady with a Bi-Polar condition to the team to undertake an extended work placement to give her experience of telephony and project work..

<http://www.rempoy.co.uk/jobseekers/how-we-can-help.ashx>

### **Work placements for ex-offenders and those with a history of substance abuse (Shekinah)**

Following on from the team leaders role as a Job Coach the team have offered work experience placements to ex-offenders to some into the workplace and develop new skills and help their transition into the community and into main stream employment. These placements have allowed the individuals to feel valued and see that there is a life outside of crime and that society will embrace with them. The team have learnt so much form these individuals seeing how poor life choices can affect someone. The team currently have 2 placements working with them, giving them an opportunity to have frontline experience dealing with the public both on a face to face and telephone basis.

### **Support for Local Charities (Dartmoor Search & Rescue) raised over £2500**

As well as supporting vulnerable individuals the team have spent 12 months working extremely hard raising money for local and national charities, whether this is a cake sale in aid of Comic Relief or a series of events for Dartmoor Search & Rescue the team give their time and money freely and have raised in excess of £2900 in the past 12 months. A fabulous effort for a small team.



### **Job Club for long Term unemployed (Careers South West)**

In January 2013 the team were asked by the Library Service to support some IT training for elderly people in Plymouth, an evening was held at a local library and 2 of the team members attended and trained 6 older people how to use a basic computer. This led to a request to support a weekly job club at a local Library, each week 2 member of the team spent half a day working with members of the public to increase their PC skills, help with looking for work, giving presentations on careers in Customer Services, Interview techniques, CV writing, confidence building.

<http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/newsreleases?newsid%3D310666>

This scheme has now run for nearly a year and has proven to be a big success, the feedback has been included in the attachments / evidence.

### **Organising National Customer Service Week Celebrations**

As a part of celebrating national Customer Services week in Oct 2013 the team suggested that we host an event in our Civic Centre building to allow local service providers and charities to meet our customers to seek feedback on their service provision, seek volunteers or raise awareness of services that were on offer, Over 20 organisations exhibited for the week and feedback from customers and exhibitors was very positive with the event. The event featured in the local press and gained cross party political support

<http://www.plymouthherald.co.uk/council-asking-ndash-really/story-19915967-detail/story.html>

<http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/textonly/newsreleases?newsid%3D322118>



Service providers that attended the event included Shelter, Mind, FirstBus Group, Plymouth City Bus, Devon & Cornwall Police, Devon & Somerset Fire Brigade, Plymouth City Council Waste, Plymouth Sports Development Unit, Sunshine Care Homes, Shekinah Mission, Citizens Advice Bureau, Plymouth Volunteer Guild, Stepping Stones to Nature, Plymouth Adult Community Learning Service, Plymotion and Plymouth Energy Community.

This work has now been taken forward and the team have hosted regular exhibitors including Dartmoor Search & Rescue, Money Advice Service and hosted mental health Week. This will continue over the coming twelve months and is an integral part of the teams' engagement plan.

### **Supporting Apprentices into work**

The team have worked closely with 3 apprentices to help them achieve their NVQ in Customer Services and secure permanent employment, they have also worked with one unemployed young person and coached him through a recruitment campaign to become a Customer Service Apprentice, this was very successful and the candidate is due to commence his apprenticeship in early February.

The team currently have one apprentice working with them and they are supporting the young person in developing his working skills and actively taking part in his participation in the national apprentice competition (Brethey Challenge). The team are also providing development opportunities for another 2 apprentices from the authority.

### **Supporting Vulnerable Adults**

Leading up to Christmas the team felt that they would like to do something that would help a disadvantaged family at Christmas to put a smile on someone's face, during the run up to Christmas the team put together a food hamper worth over £200. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> December this was handed to the Shekinah Probation Service and the hamper was passed to a family in crisis.

### **Benefit to Team Members & the community**

The work undertaken in the community has had a massive benefit to the team members; they have had the opportunity to work with disadvantaged people, to see how life choices can affect individuals and their futures and to see why individuals behave in certain ways. The work with unemployed people has taught them skills in empathy and a good understanding of how we should design our services to meet the needs of people less fortunate than ourselves.

The team have learned skills in training and mentoring and have increased their customer service skills through their extended dialogue.

None of the activities listed above are a part of our core business but have had a massive impact on the local community, all of this achieved with a team of 9 officers.

In 2014 the team plan to continue this level of engagement and are planning to increase their association with Remploy and Shekinah to provide a more hands on approach to delivering courses for unemployed people, offering mock interviews, CV writing, skills assessments and additional work placement opportunities.

The team will continue to support Dartmoor Search & Rescue and will be holding a number of fundraising events over the coming months.

The team continue to support their community out of the office with members undertaking roles in the community such as School Governor, Music Club volunteer and the Secretary of Plymouth Table Tennis Association.

As a team we feel that we have made a real difference to the lives of people less fortunate than ourselves and we are extremely proud of our achievements and delighted to be submitting this evidence to support our nomination for "Best Community Engagement" The following pages show the evidence and testimonials for the work undertaken,

## GOOD DEED WILL HELP FAMILY IN NEED



Staff in the Customer Services Improvement Team have been collecting food goodies over the last two weeks to provide a hamper for a family in need this Christmas.

The team presented the Shekinah Mission with the hamper yesterday who will then issue the hamper onto a family.

20 December 2013



Mr D Staneman  
Team Leader  
Customer Services  
Plymouth City Council  
Civic Centre  
Plymouth  
PL1 2AA

Shekinah Mission (Plymouth) Limited  
24 Stonehouse Street  
Plymouth PL1 3PE

E-mail: [Reception@shekinahmission.co.uk](mailto:Reception@shekinahmission.co.uk)  
Website: [www.shekinahmission.co.uk](http://www.shekinahmission.co.uk)

10<sup>th</sup> January 2014

Dear Darren,

Prior to Christmas, I understand that you and your team at Plymouth City Council put together a fabulous food hamper which you kindly donated to us at Shekinah. This hamper was in turn given to a family in crisis and was most gratefully received and brought timely relief.

We would like to thank you for your kindness and your most valued support to ourselves and those we seek to serve.

May we take this opportunity of wishing you all a healthy, prosperous and peaceful New Year.

With thanks and kind regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'J Pearce'.

## Evidence Crown Hill Job Club

Hi,

Here is the document that I have been using to record work club attendance and the feedback I got from the email blast I sent out in June (you are mentioned by name!). It has not been updated for the last couple of months but numbers were fairly consistent at 4.

I hope this helps. You have been a wonderful asset to the Crownhill work club and have help many people. Also thank you for arranging for volunteers from your department to continue helping. We couldn't have done it without you.

Kind Regards

Chris

**Chris Hunnings**

Learning & Information Services Manager

Customer Services

Plymouth City Council

Central Library

Plymouth

PL4 8AL

T +441752305925

E [chris.hunnings@plymouth.gov.uk](mailto:chris.hunnings@plymouth.gov.uk)

### **Outcomes**

Lee attended 4<sup>th</sup> April club and just over a week later he had an interview.

18 Apr another member has an interview and one person got a job.

Neal (June) has had an interview and got the job.

Joanne gone for 3 interviews

### **Feedback**

SB: I found the work club helpful, as I had worked in the same job for 38 years.

So for me it was daunting to have to compose a C.V for the first time.

I would like to thank Darren Stoneman of Plymouth City Council who was extremely helpful and gave me lots of tips on what to include in my CV.

SC: I enjoyed my morning at the library and am very pleased I now have a cv

The man who helped me was very helpful and it's great these services are here to help people. I think I could of done with a little more help with wording my cv bit had good advice. I have had an interview but the hours weren't suitable so I am still unemployed

JD: I am still job hunting. I am getting some help from Remploy. I found the job club very helpful. I am still searching for a volunteer job for admin/clerical. I have some numbers to ring this week. I am hoping to start a course with achievement training soon. I have to do a bit of study at the crownhill library to improve my level. Then they will test me again to see if I am suitable to do the ECDL course with them. The Job club is brilliant, I would like to say a special thank you to all the staff at the library. They are very welcoming/helpful.

## **SUPPORT FOR DARTMOOR SEARCH AND RESCUE**

On Friday 13 December we are planning the following events to raise funds for Dartmoor Search and Rescue:

- Staff dress down day (staff will make a donation to dress down)
- Cake sale
- Guess the sweets in the jar
- Raffle

At Christmas many staff make a charity donation in lieu of sending Christmas Cards and we are also asking that they consider Dartmoor Search and Rescue this year.

We plan to add more events in the coming weeks if possible.

Contact Robert Batten on 4244 or Darren Stoneman on 4194 if you wish to discuss further or if you have any questions.

25 November 2013

Darren, Rob

That is an amazing result, looks like taking the Dog for a walk around the Civic was extremely affective. Congratulation to your team and the Brathay apprentices who helped out, this is an amazing achievement and you should be very proud of what you have done and the difference that this amount of money can make. As DS said that is about £1000 with gift aid what a result.

Great work and Merry Christmas

Ken

**Kenneth Holder**

Apprentice Co-ordinator

### Shekinah Mission

Shekinah is a local charity working to support people with complex needs achieve positive lifestyle changes which include gaining sustainable employment. Many of our clients have experienced homelessness, addiction, mental health issues and the criminal justice system.

As the local delivery partner for the national Ready for Work programme, Plymouth City Council are one of our key placement providers.

Darren Stoneman as a Senior Manager with the Council has proved to be a valuable asset and Ambassador for Shekinah within the Council. Within the last 12 months Darren has been instrumental in maximising engagement and impact of PCC regarding engagement with Shekinah which ultimately creates wider community impact.

Recent activity includes:

i. Darren's role as a job coach for Shekinah, in which, as an employee volunteer he:

- Commits to meet clients for 1 hour per week
- Supports the client to gain and sustain employment or further training.
- Assists with the journey into employment utilising personal and professional skills and experience
- Provides appropriate signposting for the client to maximise their potential

Darren has job coached 4 clients who have collectively secured a more stable employment (Client A), secured interviews with a large recruitment agency and will start work once his operation has taken place (Client B), taken major steps in addressing a serious health issue which was a significant barrier to sustainable employment (Client C) and also secured a place at the local college to gain a qualification in further education following successful completion of the construction course at Shekinah (Client D)

ii. Darren has also used his experience at Plymouth City Council and his knowledge and understanding of Shekinah clients to facilitate work placements across his team

- We have had a total of 4 work placements in the last 12 months and of those 2 have secured employment and 2 upon completion in Feb2014 have a high probability of securing employment post placement.

iii. In November 2013 Darren supported Shekinah and the University of Plymouth with student-led research focussing on the impact of Shekinah across the local community from a socio-economic perspective as well as from the perspective of value-added to PCC as an employer.

iv. In December 2013 Darren and his team kindly donated a luxury hamper which was presented to a Shekinah client on Christmas Eve who had young children and a partner who had recently been released from prison. The food they received transformed their Christmas.

Darren's support for Shekinah and employability work enables us to have a voice within Plymouth City Council, a voice which then assists Shekinah's clients in the area of work placements, job coaching and one-off donations. Darren is reliable and his integrity as a Shekinah Ambassador is faultless. We can make an approach for information or support and Darren will always do his best to help us despite the pressures of his workload, he is responsive, dynamic and genuine in his support for us and he has changed the lives of those clients he has worked with and supported. The Employability team really appreciate his commitment and determination and hope that the partnership continues for many years to come.

Regards

Soo

Soo Brizell-Hogg

Head of Employability

Our objective as an organisation is to find sustainable employment for those whose main barrier to work is a disability or health condition. We are very pleased to have built a successful partnership with Darren Stoneman's team at Plymouth City Council over the last few months which has given us some great long term options for some of our candidates. We have placed candidates into PCC over the last 12 months in order for them to experience first-hand what it's like working for a large organisation. For one candidate, it was a case of getting back to work after several years of being unable to work at all. The placement gave him a gentle introduction back into work and he left with the confidence in himself to be able to search actively and productively for work. A more recent candidate had been on placement for only 2 weeks when they were introduced to and interviewed by another PCC department for a long term position. Darren and his team have been hugely supportive of Remploy. They have worked closely with our candidates to ensure they are comfortable in the work place and to explore what skills they may like to strengthen and utilise at PCC, thus giving the candidates more confidence in their choice of work. We hope to build further on our successful partnership with PCC. As a one of the largest 'local' employers in Plymouth, we feel it is a vital link for our candidates to help with their journey back to sustainable employment.

Sarah Williams  
Remploy Plymouth