

PRACTICE LEARNING PROJECT

This report is based on evaluations completed by students, service users and university tutors. Evaluations completed by staff at our Staff Development Days (SDDs) are also referred to.

AIM OF PROJECT

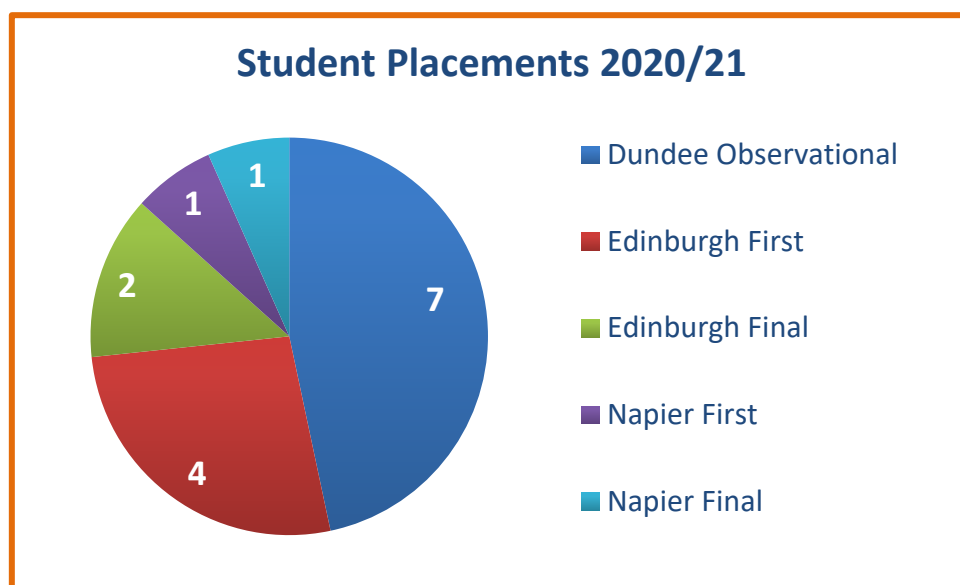
The project's aims are:

- to provide high quality placements to students from a range of academic institutions;
- to develop effective relationships with partner agencies including universities, local authority social work teams, other third sector providers and the wider learning community;
- to contribute towards a culture of learning and continuous development within the organisation through the facilitation of practice teacher forums, solution focussed induction, SDDs, and the annual lecture; and
- to offer support to candidates undertaking the Link Worker/PDA training

The project is funded by the revenue raised from invoicing the universities for each of the individual placements.

BENEFICIARIES

We offered 15 student placements this reporting period. The number of students is slightly reduced from the previous year due to the impact of the global pandemic. In March 2020 all student placements were suspended, and the Practice Learning and Development Manager was furloughed for a period of three months. Our placement numbers were boosted by offering seven virtual observational placements to Dundee University students.



SUMMARY OF YEAR'S ACTIVITIES

- *Positive links with all universities maintained*
- *Continued links with Learning Network West*
- *Continued partnership with Sunflower Garden offering students direct work with children*
- *Supporting marginal students or those with additional needs*
- *We adapted our service and were creative in our approach to facilitate student placements during the global pandemic*
- *Three SDDs covering a range of themes:*
 - *Wellbeing*
 - *Organisational update/staff Christmas quiz*
 - *Digital Safeguarding*

Due to the global pandemic we had to be creative in our approach to student placements and SDDs. We offered a 3-week virtual observational placement to seven Dundee University students and our SDDs were delivered via the online platform Zoom. Our event planning and organisation was well supported by Quensley in our Admin team and we continue to be most grateful for her expertise in this area, ensuring that our events run smoothly.

Feedback from the SDDs included the following:

“Whilst we would prefer the face-to-face contact and being able to connect with each other as we previously have done, this has been a positive experience. As 'today's environment' is likely to continue for many more days, connecting with the whole staff team in this way more regularly would be positive. The breakout rooms were great and would be something to take forward in future giving people across the different teams an opportunity to check in and chat.”

“All of it was really good. It was great to see so many colleagues at the same time, and to get the input from Mark. I look forward to all staff having access to the Employee Assistance Programme. Amanda's input acted as a great reminder for us all to be kind to ourselves! I hope to implement the different techniques that she introduced to us, as I can see how they can help to alleviate the day to day stresses.”

“I found the interactive element useful in terms of engaging and adapting to a virtual setting, therefore, it allowed for a more fun and informative session.”

OUTCOMES

The primary outcome of the Practice Learning Project is satisfactory completion of placements by students, during which they will have had the opportunity to develop the necessary knowledge, skills and values required to evidence the Standards and Key Capabilities. Where there are issues of difficulty achieving this outcome, Circle seeks to manage these in a supportive and sensitive manner.

There is an evaluation system in place and there has been a good return on student feedback forms. However, feedback from tutors remains poor.

Student feedback

<p>Regarding supervision</p> <p><i>“Supervision was superior to any that I have had before. My Practice Teacher was excellent about challenging me while also guiding and assisting should questions or concerns arise. She was familiar with the SSSC standards, and she used supervision to help me link theory to practice.”</i></p> <p>First placement student</p>	<p>Regarding the induction period</p> <p><i>“The induction period in the beginning of my placement was beneficial, I had opportunities to meet staff, and understand the ethos of the organisation. The induction timetable was helpful and allowed me to have those initial two weeks to get to know my role and responsibilities. I also had plenty of shadowing opportunities in the team, which was great for observing the work and getting to know staff.”</i></p> <p>First placement student</p> <p>Regarding learning experiences that have been offered</p> <p><i>“The learning opportunities were truly diverse, and I was able to learn more about both child protection and criminal justice systems. I was able to do a lot of work within child protection, attending core group meetings and child protection case conferences.”</i></p> <p>First placement student</p>
<p>Regarding whole team approach to Practice Learning</p> <p><i>“I received lots of support from circle staff members when required throughout placement and they were all willing to arrange time with me to support my learning and discuss any queries I had in relation to my cases.”</i></p> <p>Final placement student</p>	
<p>Regarding support from the Link Worker</p> <p><i>“My link worker provided support and was very welcoming in the beginning of placement and my re-introduction to placement in September.”</i></p> <p>First placement student</p>	<p>Other comments</p> <p><i>“I really enjoyed my time with Circle and felt a part of the Circle (staff) family very much, especially during an uncertain time within a global pandemic. My PE gave me the supports I needed that enabled me to develop as a practitioner on a platform that encouraged me to become autonomous within my decision-making, research and personal development.”</i></p> <p>Final placement student</p>

Tutor feedback

There has been limited feedback from tutors however what has been received continues to be positive.

Regarding range of learning opportunities

“Students have spoken so enthusiastically about the opportunities they have had and how well supported they have felt by the team at Circle. It is truly amazing how flexible you have all been in accommodating these placements and ensuring such valuable learning for our students.”

Placement Coordinator

Regarding overall quality of placement

“This is a good quality placement which offers a range of learning experiences which would be suitable for both first and final placement students. Some of the opportunities are challenging and require a level of competence that not all first placement students would have.”

Practice Assessment Board

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR YEAR AHEAD

The coming year will be a challenging one, trying to reduce the impact of COVID-19. The impact of the pandemic will continue for the near future as universities across Scotland endeavour to fulfil the backlog of placements which has developed. The numbers of placements next year will be lower due to the knock-on effect of the suspended placements. Multiple universities will be looking to secure placements at the same time to fulfil their obligations to students. A small practice learning unit such as ours will struggle to offer placements to all our usual partners. The Project Manager has been liaising closely with university representatives to reduce the impact on future placements.



Intake of students, March 2021

It has been an ambition of the organisation to increase the number of practice teachers, unfortunately this has not been possible due to the pandemic. Napier University is currently awaiting approval for their course; we have one member of staff who will hopefully undertake this course beginning January 2022.

We are kicking off 2021/22 by sponsoring Care Experienced History Month which will recognise the contribution of care experienced individuals across society. The

sponsorship will give five members of staff the opportunity to attend training delivered by *Who Cares? Scotland*. *Who Cares? Scotland* will also deliver a bespoke training session to the whole organisation; it is hoped this will be delivered as part of a SDD later in the year when it is hoped we can meet in person.

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