



PARTICIPATION IN ACTION

Car mechanics scheme sparks drive for learning



Participants on the MechaniX programme gain new skills, achieve qualifications and build up their self-esteem

Provider MechaniX programme

Name Haynes Publishing, London Youth, Draper Tools and Prospex Youth Club

Summary Youth organisations, a publisher and toolmaker joined forces to run a car mechanics programme for a group of young people that had previously struggled in education

The challenge for the young people who enrolled on the Haynes MechaniX programme last year was to get “Percy the Polo”, a 1996 1.6 CL model of the Volkswagen hatchback, to pass “his” MOT.

The scheme, launched by Haynes Publishing together with London Youth, Prospex Youth Club and Draper Tools in April last year, saw a dozen 15- to 25-year-olds undertake 60 hours of mechanics training over seven weeks.

By completing the programme, which was funded by Haynes Publishing and supported by a donation of £4,000 worth of equipment from Draper Tools, the young participants gained a Level 3 City & Guilds qualification in employability and personal development.

As a result of the project, two of the graduates are now considering a career in car mechanics, but for Richard Frankland, manager of Prospex Youth Club in Islington, the real benefit of the programme was the impact it had on the lives of the young people involved.

“I have never been involved in a project where I’ve seen young people engage so clearly,” he says.

“One of the girls on the course had been really struggling at school but, since completing the programme, her grades have gone up.

“She now brings her homework along to club night and asks for help – it’s really positive stuff.”

But he is not surprised. As a former carpenter and joiner, Frankland was already aware of the value of involving disengaged young people in something practical.

“It can be quite life changing,” he says.

“It brings young people out of their shells – you can see your achievements in a really tangible way.”

Testament to its success is that last month Haynes Publishing, together with The Hyde Group, decided to launch a second intake of the Haynes MechaniX project.

Under the guidance of two qualified mechanics, nine 13- to 19-year-olds will spend 60 hours, spread across 10 weeks, repairing a 1969 MG Midget, donated to the programme by Frankland, with the aim of helping it to pass its MOT.

“It was given to me by someone that was emigrating,” he explains.

“I was never going to do anything with it. It’s a

bit rusty but it’s a lovely car to work on because you can get nine people round the front and show them what to do.

“It will be satisfying when they’ve completed it and it will be a really nice car to show off.”

A slight change to the programme means that the young people involved are now working towards two Edexcel certificates – one in personal development and another in car mechanics – rather than the City & Guilds qualification.

“It was a lot more cost effective and it allows you to accredit every bit of work you do on the car – everything from spark plugs and brake lights,” Frankland explains.

“They’re loving it. You get there, you get your boots and your overalls on and you get stuck in straight away.”

Gaining momentum

He hopes that the project will become embedded within the youth club’s offer and says that youth club members not involved with the scheme are already asking when the next programme will be run.

“The course has just got a momentum of its own,” says Frankland.

“Obviously it’s down to funding but we’re talking to some other companies that are interested in sponsorship so hopefully it will roll.

“There are lots of possibilities about how it [the project] could serve young people.”

Rosie Ferguson, chief executive of London Youth, who says she was “truly inspired” by the pilot phase of the programme, shares his hopes for the project.

“When given the opportunity and right levels of support to try something new and participate in a project that they are passionate about, young people can really flourish,” she says.

John Haynes, chairman of Haynes Publishing, says the aim of the programme is to help young people develop a sense of confidence and self-esteem.

“The primary purpose is to give young people belief in themselves,” he explains.

“Participants achieve this by developing an understanding of mechanics, and then applying that knowledge in a practical way.”

The young people taking part in the future programmes have much to live up to – “Percy the Polo” passed his MOT with flying colours.

By Laura McCardle



Young people learn the skills needed to get a car fit for the road