Partnership Impact Story

PERTH AUTISM SUPPORT

Digital Skills Programme for Autistic Young Adults: Partnering with UHI Perth

Introduction	Perth Autism Support and UHI Perth began working in partnership to deliver a Digital Skills Pilot Programme for 10 autistic young people either still in education in S5 or S6 or who are not currently engaging in education or for whom the school environment is a barrier to learning. The aims for the partnership were to support autistic young people to: - Increase confidence - Decrease social isolation - Move into further/higher education in Computing at UHI Perth or into Employment supported by the Perth Autism Support employability team - Have a positive experience Young people accessing the course will be supported by Perth Autism Support Staff and their level of support will be individual to their needs.
The Challenge	Establishing the Digital Skills Programme for Autistic Young Adults required careful coordination and clear role definitions between Perth Autism Support (PAS) and UHI Perth. Representatives from both organisations had to navigate several challenges to ensure the programme's success. PAS took on the responsibility of maintaining constant communication with families and schools, advertising the programme, and providing lecturers with profiles of the young participants. This required regular updates and a proactive approach to keep all stakeholders informed and engaged. UHI Perth faced the challenge of integrating the programme into their existing timetable, ensuring that the young participants had access to a quiet room and the necessary resources. Securing rooms equipped with computers and creating a conducive learning environment were critical to the programme's success. Additionally, PAS had to identify and recruit 10 young people who were interested in digital skills and willing to engage in the programme. This was particularly challenging as attending a new location and adapting to an educational setting can be overwhelming for many autistic individuals.
The Intervention	Despite these challenges, the collaboration between PAS and UHI Perth has laid a strong foundation for a programme that makes a significant impact on the lives of autistic young adults. Through the collaborative efforts, our partnership has successfully designed and implemented a Digital Skills Programme tailored to the unique needs of autistic young adults. PAS successfully identified the participants and set up an induction process to ensure a smooth transition into the university environment. UHI lecturers designed the programme content, ensuring it was both relevant and engaging, the designed content includes: - Programming Foundations in Python - Academic skills and information literacy - Personal Development Planning and Group Project - Personal Cyber Security - Applied Cyber Security

	To provide continuous support, two PAS staff members attend sessions every Friday, acting as liaisons between the young participants and the UHI programme facilitators. Parents also play an integral part by ensuring their children's attendance and contributing to the overall supportive atmosphere. The sessions were designed to be fun and interactive, making learning more engaging for the young people. PAS and UHI Perth have taken an individualised approach, catering to the specific needs and current situations of each autistic young person. This method allows for varying levels of engagement, ensuring that each young person can benefit from the programme at their own pace.
The Transformation	The partnership has led to significant transformations in the relationship between our organisation, the programme's delivery and its impact on the participants. Regular monthly meetings ensure a strong relationship between PAS and UHI lecturers, ensuring effective communication and collaboration. This close partnership allowed lecturers to witness firsthand the positive outcomes of the programme and the knowledge gained by the young participants. UHI staff also attended training sessions with us to better understand autism, demonstrating their commitment to creating an inclusive learning environment. Both organisations have kept the young people at the forefront of this programme, ensuring that their needs are met. By providing different options for success through the programme content, we have mitigated the risk of young people not achieving, building on strengths and providing an opportunity for young people to continue their learning journey after the programme and at a pace and level that suits them.
The Outcome	The continued collaboration between Perth Autism Support and UHI Perth has yielded numerous positive outcomes. By delivering the Digital Skills Programme, we have provided a valuable pathway for young people, offering them a relaxed and informal learning environment. This approach has allowed participants to learn at their own pace, with the content broken down into manageable chunks, making the learning process less overwhelming and more successful. UHI Lecturers have adapted their feedback methods, creating a supportive atmosphere where young people feel comfortable and encouraged. This has resulted in high attendance rates, with participants not missing any sessions, unlike their experiences in traditional school settings. The individualised support has catered to different learning levels, ensuring that each young person receives the assistance they need to thrive. The programme has also served as a taster for young people to explore further education opportunities, particularly in computer and digital skills courses. Successful completion of the programme will provide access to either NQ Applied Computing, or HNC Computing for academic year 2025/26. Depending on everyone, partial completion of the programme (Programming Foundations in Python, Personal Cyber Security and Applied Cyber Security) would provide access to the NQ with completion of all areas access to HNC Computing. By providing different options for success this will mitigate the risk of young people not achieving within the programme, building on strengths and allowing young people to continue their learning journey after the programme at a pace and level that suits them.

> " Perth Autism Support already had a relationship with the young people and knew them well, which allowed us to have confidence in the support we could give them in the delivery of the programme and we were able to gauge the level and speed of delivery. Delivering a person centred approach has led to positive experiences for both the young people and the staff. We hope to continue to work in partnership on future programmes - Lecturer, UHI Perth "

IMPACT

- Improved understanding of autism at UHI Perth
- Increased opportunities for autistic young adults through the partnership
- Increase in confidence in partnership working
- Increase in number of autistic young people looking to explore further education opportunities

STATUS QUO & FIRST STEPS

- Establishing roles and responsibilities
- Providing training for UHI staff on understanding autism
- Ensuring a supportive space for our young people
- Looking to engage with schools and parents

Social Impact Story Map

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BREAKTHROUGH

- Successful design and implementation of Digital Skills Programme
- 9 autistic young adults engaged
- Support of parents and schools
- PAS staff able to support young people during the sessions
- Access to a quiet space at UHI Perth

OBSTACLES & ALLIES

- Supporting 10 autistic young people to take part in the programme
- Creating the curriculum
- Finding a suitable time for the programme to take place
- Coordination once roles established