



Making IT
good for society

I-STEPS

GIVING DISENGAGED PUPILS A FIRST STEP TO A CAREER IN IT



'BEFORE THIS PROGRAMME, I WAS SO ISOLATED AT SCHOOL'

Some schools face educational challenges, teaching children who display emotional and social difficulties, such as ADHD and autism, with many leaving mainstream school without any direction on what their next step may be.

BCS spoke to an educator in Plymouth, BluescreenIT that has been offering IT training, certification and digital IT apprenticeships for over 13 years and have created a programme called iSteps This has had phenomenal results, transforming the lives of many young individuals and helping the industry identify talent for the future.

This programme was set up to address the digital skills crisis. They have been working closely with local schools and their local authority to provide children from different socio-economic backgrounds an opportunity to access, learn and immersed themselves in technology in a different environment.

This project provides these young people who normally appear uninterested and disengaged when they arrive, an exposure to a real working life outside a school environment and they also help them develop simple soft skills in communication.

The youngsters are trained and mentored by other young people, aged 20-21 yrs old who are also undergoing a level 3 Digital Apprenticeship themselves. The combination of all the above helps these young people build confidence and understand their options on leaving school, to explore a career within the digital sector.

The results - one programme participant shared their story with us.

'Before this programme, I was so isolated at school and the school's career advisor suggested that I attend this programme.

The programme has got me working as part of a team, which has been so good for me and over the last 9 months has built up my confidence. My family has noticed a massive change in me and any confidence issues I had previously, has pretty much disappeared.

The difference between this environment and the classroom is that there are only a few of us and it's a chilled friendly environment. Although I was interested in digital and coding, this programme has broadened my knowledge and taught me so much more to do with IT. I have learnt how to strip PC's, build virtual servers and now realise that I would like to place my future focus more on networking and go onto a network security role.'

'Building confidence, improving skills for young people who have previously been disengaged with traditional methods of learning, has been so rewarding'

Trainer, Mike Willcocks explains how himself and other trainers on the programme have seen a complete transformation within the group attending the workshop. 'The environment we create is relaxed and less formal than school and we gradually introduce them to lots of different exercises, we build up their knowledge and their confidence. Over time we found that they started to interact as a group, when they first start they normally are less inclined to join in, with patience we have seen astounding results.

The exercises we run vary depending on the students' knowledge and their interest, from stripping and building PCs, setting up network wired and wireless, building servers, and an introduction to decimal to binary as well as sub netting. To help them prepare outside of school, we involve the students with everyday business tasks as a basic introduction to the world of work.

This isn't just an IT experience, this is a life changing experience for many young people.

Top tips for teachers to enthuse your pupils

- Get your children involved in something they enjoy
- Take it to the next level and encourage them to make a career out of it
- A lot of the children that come to this project enjoy gaming. The experience provided in the centre takes it to another level, so that they start to understand the mechanisms that go beneath the development of a game, over time immersing them in other technologies taking their learning to a different level

More about iSteps:

Industry experience days are held at the training centre and applies for ages 11–18. This programme is for anyone wanting to know and experience more about the digital technologies and potentially a career in IT.

The centre also provides an opportunity to recognise and develop underlying talent and introduces young people to alternative options post school to higher education and a career through their apprenticeship programme.

