

Yiorgos pursues his career goals with help from Project SEARCH

22 year-old Yiorgos Perris lives in South Queensferry. He was part of the last cohort of Edinburgh Project SEARCH and recently took part in Duo Day when two members of the group were invited to spend the day at Holyrood with MSPs Jamie Hepburn, Jeane Freeman and First Minister Nicola Sturgeon.

Following that day Yiorgos took the initiative to write a follow up letter to Mr Hepburn and Ms Sturgeon telling them of his new employment secured after graduating from the programme. He wanted to update them of his success and the impact the programme has had on his life. He had 'a lovely response' from Jamie Hepburn who arranged for him to meet with the young person's MP, Christine Jardine. He and Ms Jardine met last Friday.



Yiorgos meeting Christine Jardine MP at her office
Yiorgos attended St Thomas of Aquins High School and, knowing

he wanted to move into employment after leaving school, he completed a national progression award in Enterprise and Employability. He did some work placements as part of this course and volunteered at SAM Radio upon completion of the course but none of this led to employment.

He engaged with Into Work who referred Yiorgos to Edinburgh Project SEARCH. He has now completed the programme at the council site and is currently working for Amey as a business administrator. Yiorgos has autism and because of that he qualified for the programme.

Project SEARCH is an employability programme for young people with a recognised disability. Developed in Cincinnati, USA, there are now nearly 400 sites across America, Canada and Europe with more in development. Edinburgh Project Search was introduced in Edinburgh in 2014 and we now have sites within the [City of Edinburgh Council](#) and NHS Lothian. It is run in partnership with the council, NHS Lothian, Edinburgh College and Into Work. In 2018 the [DFN Foundation](#) obtained the rights to deliver Project SEARCH in the UK.

There are currently 50 Project Search sites within the UK and was introduced in Edinburgh in 2014. The two sites which are called 'host businesses' include one within the City of Edinburgh Council's Waverley Court and surrounding CEC premises and one within NHS Lothian's Western General hospital.

The programme runs for a full academic year during which time the young people complete 3 full time work experience placements within the host business, gaining over 800 hours of practical work place learning while developing the skills and experience to secure meaningful employment.

Two full time Job Coaches provide on-site daily support to the interns and the departments in which they are working. The Job Coaches learn the role and assist in teaching this to the

interns using Systematic Instruction, breaking down the job and introducing a task at a time until the intern is fully competent in the role. The interns begin and end their day in a designated training room where a full-time Tutor is based on-site to deliver a Project SEARCH curriculum and SQA Employability Award.

The young people learn the skills required for work but also learn how to be an employee. They learn and follow the host business's policies and procedures and are supported to learn the 'unwritten rules' of a work place, which many of our young people struggle with due to their disability. They are expected to complete a real job within the organisation. As the young person becomes more independent in the role, the job coaches reduce the level of support they provide and by the end of the ten-week period the aim is that the young person is working fully independently.

The programme works with young people who have any form of disability but the disabilities presented most frequently are young people on the autistic spectrum or who have a form of a learning disability. We also have supported young people who have a hearing or visual impairment or disability as well as some with a physical disability.

There is also a desire to ensure a variety of internships throughout both organisations to include office based roles and more physical/active roles. Types of internships on offer to the young people within the City of Edinburgh Council vary but have included Park Rangers, Hospitality, Catering, Facilities Management, Business Support, School Support Assistants, Homelessness Wardens, Street Cleansing Officers and many others. Types of internships on offer at NHS Lothian's Western General Hospital include Porters, Domestic Assistants, Catering, Retail, Administration and Stores Officer.

The goal of the programme is to secure employment for each of

the young people.

Eligibility criteria for the programme :

- Have a recognised disability
- Want to secure full time, meaningful employment
- Aged 16 – 29 years old
- Live within Edinburgh or the Lothians
- Be able to self-travel by the time the programme starts