

Bridge to Employment Success Story

BTE Success Story

Bracknell, United Kingdom

November 2021



Why BTE?

The BTE Bracknell program was designed to address the key challenges facing youth at East Hampstead School (EHPCS)—low academic outcomes, lack of self-esteem and aspirations, and little parental engagement in student learning. EHPCS is a comprehensive school located in Bracknell for pupils aged 11-18. The program aimed to support EHPCS students from disadvantaged backgrounds to either continue into Further and Higher Education (FE and HE) or into apprenticeships in STEM2D (science, technology, engineering, math, manufacturing, and design) disciplines.

BTE: A Catalyst for College & Careers

BTE Bracknell participants were recruited using a selection process designed by the school and site coordinator. Students were recruited in Year 10 to begin the program in Year 11. The recruitment drive was launched via a presentation at a school assembly, and interested students were encouraged by the school to complete an application. EHPCS then engaged in targeted individual recruitment, categorizing, and selecting students based on key demographics:

- low-income households
- special educational needs
- English as an additional language (EAL); and
- gifted and talented students.

Students whose applications were not successful were monitored as part of the control group. As a result of this process, 56 students were selected.

Despite the effects of COVID-19 on BTE programming in Years 2-3, the BTE students engaged in a range of successful activities all three years. In order to improve students' academic achievement, J&J volunteer speakers shared their stories to demonstrate the connection between academics and careers. To encourage students to consider pursuing higher education/ apprenticeships, the program offered guest lectures from higher education or apprenticeship representatives to share their post-18 opportunities. To assist students in exploring their education or career paths, the program included visits to Johnson & Johnson, where they learned about the different job roles within the company, and job application and workplace skills activities, where they learned interview etiquette and key elements of CVs. Another key activity was a teambuilding trip to the Isle of Wight. During the pandemic, students were quick to utilize online tools to participate in BTE. One program partner explained, "We carried on delivering all of our activities... We used Instagram to communicate with our kids. Obviously email as well. We ran sessions on Zoom, both live and recorded, and we also did a few joined-up sessions with other sites. But we also incorporated digital mentoring in our final year, which was really important because our students were at that point of going on to their next steps, and they needed someone else to speak to outside of their school environment." Parents of BTE students were also able to gain information about the BTE program through Instagram posts.

Program partners discussed the importance of volunteer engagement in the BTE program, and in finding committed volunteers. One described how working with volunteers evolved during the three years: "In Year 1, we would tell volunteers there's this session. This is what you have to do. In year three, we almost kind of treat the volunteers more like consultants and say like, 'What do you think we should run?' And we've had amazing sessions this year which were designed by volunteers and lead fully

SITE PROFILE

Location
Bracknell, UK

Grant Period
2018 - 2021

Sponsor
Johnson & Johnson
Medical

Coordinator
MyKindaFuture

Community Partners
East Hampstead Park
Community School
(EHPCS)

Volunteers
48 volunteers
3600 total hours

Students Directly Served
56 students

by them.” Partners also expressed the importance of knowing the students well, and understanding their needs, in order to inform and prepare volunteers.

Impact of BTE

Of the 56 students who started BTE in 2018, 20 (36%) completed the program in 2021. In an exit interview, the BTE Bracknell partners reflected on the program’s high attrition and explained that after Year 11 in the UK education system, many students go on to college or different sixth forms. They suggested that a better fit for UK sites may be to focus on Years 12 and 13. In Bracknell, the remaining 20 students were committed and all (100%) graduated from EHPCS. The majority (83%) were accepted to colleges of their choice.

The majority of BTE students (75%) rated themselves as good or very good on nearly every item in a list of work-readiness skills. One-third of BTE students were accepted on a STEM course in higher education.

While focus groups were not conducted due to COVID-19, the BTE partners obtained regular feedback from the students to ensure their voices were heard and considered in designing activities. Final-year interviews were conducted virtually with the students to gather reflections of their experiences and feedback for consideration in future programming.

One BTE partner explained that BTE students described becoming more confident. He explained, “It’s nice to hear the students talk about how much BTE boosted their confidence and just got them ready for the world of work, which is really important.” He went on to say that the BTE program aimed to provide a safe space to push them out of their comfort zones in order to grow.

“I think confidence is one of the major things that I’ve seen come from Bridge to Employment.”

- BTE partner

J&J employees volunteered an average of 75 hours per year on the BTE Bracknell program and engaged in a total of 3600 hours. BTE partners mentioned that volunteers sharing their career journeys made an impact on students—and helped

STUDENT OUTCOMES

100% of BTE students who completed the three-year BTE program graduated from EHPCS

83% of BTE students were accepted to a college of their choice

33% of BTE graduates have been accepted to a STEM course in higher education

75% of BTE graduates rated themselves as good or very good on the majority of work-readiness skills

them see that J&J employees are professionals, but also real people like them. One J&J employee talked about how rewarding his time on the BTE program was: “I don't necessarily see the impact in what I do on a day-to-day basis. But you go to [BTE sessions]... you watch the students' progress. And it's always really rewarding when you know you've got them hooked on something and engaged. It's a great feeling.” Partners pointed out that the proximity of the J&J office to the school made frequent visits possible.

Sustainability

MyKindaFuture (now Connectr), the organization in charge of BTE Bracknell's site coordination, is committed to supporting the J&J Pinewood site. The partners have mapped out a calendar which aligns with the school's expectations of the program and MyKindaFuture/Connectr will share relevant documents, templates and guidance with the site. The J&J site has many willing volunteers who want to continue to work on the program, so the school plans to schedule out next year's events much like the High Wycombe BTE site sustained its program. The partners see the Alliance Building & Training Session (ABTS) as a critical component to the program and are figuring out how to allocate monies to incorporate it.

“One of our key drivers was to give students the tools and the capability to believe. Not just to go [to university], but to believe that they could do it. That kind of belief became very, very strong. And at one point we had every student pushed forward to go to University, which is incredible. We've never had that in the school before.”

- BTE partner