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A summer programme for young people in Cambridgeshire with special educational needs and disabilities has won a top national award.

Cambridgeshire County Council's NCS SEND Summer programme won the National Citizen Service Award at the Children & Young People Now Awards 2018 last week.

The National Citizen Service (NCS) programme is a once-in-a-lifetime experience for all 15 – 17 year olds and up to 25 years for young people with SEND that builds skills and confidence and helps to get ahead in work and life. It also helps young people connect to their local community through social action projects designed and delivered by the young people themselves.

Now in its sixth year in Cambridgeshire, there are a number of programmes being delivered during the summer period across the county which consist of young people living together over a number of weeks, excluding weekends, in residential centres.

The County Council's programme was recognised for its work in reaching 24 young people with special educational needs and disabilities who would not otherwise be able to take part in the NCS as well as their support workers, teachers, and parents and carers.

Most of the young people required one-to-one support day and night. The challenge was to gain the trust and support of parents and to encourage four SEND schools/colleges Castle School, Granta, School, The Phoenix School and Cambridge Regional College (Huntingdon Campus) to take part so the young people could mix in a residential setting for 5 days and four nights.

Crucial to its success was the way it engaged with school staff and put in place detailed planning, meaning that every need was understood and each activity adapted to ensure everyone took part.

Each young person, of which many had never been away from home before, developed physically, emotionally and socially due to the diversity of experience and the residential aspect. Young people and school colleagues identified positive changes in their behaviour through engagement in outdoor learning in challenging environments such as caving which was one of the most memorable.

Communication skills improved and confidence rose across the group with some young people who were not usually verbal found their voices, while others with complex medical needs saw a decline in symptoms during the residential phase.

Liz Morris, County Youth and Community Manager and NCS Contract Manager, said: "We are absolutely thrilled to have won this award. We couldn't have done it without the hard work and dedication of all the staff especially Kim Jeffries and Natalie Taylor who led and planned the entirety of the project and engaged with the schools, young people and parents. Thanks to our special school partners who have worked tirelessly to engage with us to ensure we can include their young people in the NCS offer".

Cllr Simon Bywater, Children and Young People Committee chairman and Local Authority National Citizen Service (NCS) Champion, said: "I am really pleased with the success of the NCS programme in Cambridgeshire this year. It is the Council's ambition to ensure as many of our vulnerable and marginalised young people as possible regardless of their background, ability or ambitions, get the chance to experience and reap the rewards of NCS."

Run nationally across the UK, the County Council is a local delivery partner which runs the programme in Cambridge city, Fenland, Huntingdonshire and East Cambs for around 3,000 young people each year.

The first two weeks include outdoor activities and workshops such as first aid, food hygiene and money matters followed by planning a social action project and carrying it out. This could be things like fundraising for Magpas or making packages for the homeless.

On completion, the young people are invited to a celebration event where they will graduate and receive a certificate signed by the Prime Minister.

Last year, 169 young people across Cambridgeshire completed 4,725 hours of Social Action in their communities through participating in Cambridgeshire County Council's NCS programmes.



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