FISHING FOR EMERGING TALENT

A project to recruit school pupils into mental health nursing has proven to be a great success, as Karen Murrell and Kathy Swanzy-Asante report

A mental health nursing awareness project set up by the Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust (CNWL) to attract talented and motivated people into mental health nursing at Thames Valley University (TVU) is producing excellent results.

The project began in August last year and falls into two parts. The first part involves a visit to local sixth form schools and colleges by the mental health awareness lead, where pupils hear a talk about career opportunities in mental health nursing and learn how to apply to the university. After the talk, pupils are invited to visit the trust’s acute wards and to attend a taster session at the university.

Between November 2009 and March 2010, a total of ten schools and colleges were visited and 175 students completed the evaluation form. Overall, 91 per cent of the pupils rated the school session as excellent or good, 72 per cent said the session offered sufficient information for them to make an informed decision about mental health nursing as a career, and 40 per cent said they would consider undertaking a mental health nursing course.

Of the 175 students, 103 expressed an interest in visiting the wards and the university.

During the subsequent five month period, 31 school pupils visited the wards at St Charles Mental Health Unit, Park Royal Mental Health Centre and the Riverside Centre (all part of CNWL), with 26 students going on to visit the university.

Generating interest

Subsequent evaluation revealed that most students thought visiting the wards helped them to develop an interest in mental health nursing, and 40 per cent said they would consider applying for the mental health nursing programme.

Of the 26 students who attended the taster session at the university, 19 said they were interested in pursuing nursing as a career, with the most popular branches being mental health and children’s nursing.

As the project has been so successful in raising the profile of mental health nursing as a career option, more dates have been arranged to continue with the project. In addition, a work placement initiative for local sixth form pupils and college students is now being developed with CNWL.

A robust follow-up arrangement has been established by the university to ensure that students who have expressed interest in mental health nursing do not fall through the net and receive appropriate follow-up support to enable them to apply for nursing programmes at TVU.

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