



# HEAD OF ADVOCACY AND ENGAGEMENT

Appointment Brief

February 2023

## Introduction

Employing people with special educational needs and disabilities is not just a matter of doing an honourable thing. With many sectors struggling with a skills gap, it makes simple business sense to explore this ocean of untapped potential.

Everyone deserves the right to aspire to the very best future – yet nationally only 5.1 % of people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) go on to secure full-time paid employment. There is now a pressing need for change and intervention to ultimately improve the life outcomes of young people with learning difficulties and autism.

At DFN Project SEARCH we work hard to challenge and change cultures, demonstrating how young people with learning difficulties can enrich the workforce, bring incredible skills and talent, encourage greater diversity and meet a real business need.

Our vision and ambitions are simple; to eradicate the postcode lottery and ensure that everyone with an Education, Health and Care Plan has the opportunity to access high-quality transition to work support and training in their local area.

Our business partners often tell us that working with us can dramatically improve performance and retention, whilst also improving skill level across their business. Further benefits include enhanced local, regional, national and international engagement and recognition through partnering with this unique programme.

We really believe that the valuable work we are doing at DFN Project SEARCH is having a positive impact on society. It is widely agreed that employment improves health and wellbeing. Transitioning people from education straight into competitive employment saves money for health and social care by around £2 million per person. Our graduates become net contributors rather than recipients of adult social care and health services.

We are on the journey to achieving social justice for people who have been frequently marginalised from the world of work, communities are becoming more inclusive and people with learning disabilities more visible. We still have a big job ahead of us though and we need an exceptional team to tackle it. We now need diverse and adaptable people with a positive can-do attitude to help us address the root causes of the disability employment.

The young people we aim to serve – and the challenges they face - are all unique. We are looking to build a team that reflects this diversity. Our commitment to inclusion across disability, race, gender, age, class, religion, identity, and experience forms the cornerstone of our work.

If you are driven by a desire to help young people improve their life chances and are willing to go the extra mile every day to achieve our aims, we want to hear from you. In return we can offer you a supportive working environment, the reward of working to support an incredible talent pool of young people, and the opportunity to play a transformational role in the labour market for young people at a critical moment in time.

Claire Cookson



CEO DFN Project SEARCH

## Who We are

DFN Project SEARCH is an international transition to work programme, committed to transforming the lives of young people with learning disabilities and autism. The programme started in 1996 and today Project SEARCH has over 500 licensed programmes spanning 47 US states, 9 countries and in multiple public and private sector industries.

DFN Project SEARCH holds the Master Franchise Agreement for Project SEARCH programmes in the UK, Ireland and Iberia and our unique programmes include those that have been established in England, Ireland, Portugal, Scotland and Wales in various prestigious employers such as Hospitals, Local Authorities, Universities, Laboratories and a variety of Private Sector Businesses. In 2017 over 61 % of our European Graduates moved into paid employment of more than 16 hours per week compared to the UK average of just 6% for people with learning disabilities and autism in employment of any kind.

DFN Project SEARCH is delivering transformative change, supporting, and helping young people with learning disabilities and autism into the world of work. Nationally only **5.1%** of people with special educational needs and disabilities gain permanent paid employment in the UK yet 70% of DFN Project SEARCH graduates gain jobs, 60% of them achieving **full-time permanent roles**.

### The DFN Project SEARCH offer:

- A pathway that can lead to sustainable paid employment for people with an Education EHCP
- Full-time supported internship at a host business - 800 hours of marketable skills acquisition
- A focused employability curriculum delivered from the workplace
- Ground-breaking opportunities to learn with prestigious employer partners
- Combination of tutors and trained job coach support

## A Team of Teams:

We believe that a collaborative approach between businesses, local authorities, colleges and schools and supported employment providers; partnered with our evidenced-based DFN Project SEARCH supported internship programme, can be a force for transformative change in the lives of thousands of young people with learning disabilities and autism. Learners with an EHCP remain on roll at their school or college but are based full-time with a host business. They are supported through three 10-week rotations across the host business whilst also studying for an employability qualification.

## Our Origins

The DFN Charitable Foundation was established by city financier David Forbes-Nixon who has a son with learning disabilities. He became aware of the lack of effective provision to meet his son's needs and that of other young people like him and was determined to try and make a positive difference. He initially launched the DFN Charitable Foundation to create significantly improved provision at Stepping Stones School in Surrey. However, his research into best practice led him to discover the appalling lack of employment opportunities for young people with special needs. With the full support of the Board, David committed the DFN Charitable Foundation to developing and sharing best practice to positively improve the problem of employability training for young adults with special needs.

The DFN Charitable Foundation carefully invests in programmes and projects which deliver clear, measurable outcomes that create positive change. Ultimately, we work through partnerships, enabling and

supporting others to make a real difference. Two significant investments have been in DFN MoveForward in collaboration with ThinkForward and DFN Project SEARCH.

Project SEARCH was established in 1996 at Cincinnati Children's Hospital to help young people with learning disabilities obtain paid employment. Today the US programme is the biggest of its kind with over 600 sites across the globe. After spending a year researching best practice, the DFN Charitable Foundation concluded that Project SEARCH was the most effective supported internship programme in the world and became its partner when they secured the master franchise agreement for DFN Project SEARCH in 2018. DFN Project SEARCH now has 69 sites across the UK, Eire and Iberia. In 2019 DFN Project SEARCH became a registered charity and is now independent of DFN Foundation. We have a highly driven Board of Trustees, an ambitious business plan and audacious targets for growth. As initial investors, we also have the full support and backing of the DFN Charitable Foundation Trustees who are committed to supporting DFN Project SEARCH to reach financial independence.

## **Our Vision**

To help reduce the employment gap between those with learning disabilities and autism and the rest of the population. All people with learning disabilities and autism should have the opportunity to access evidenced based, high quality transition to work support and training, in their local community, in order to secure full time paid employment.

## **Our Mission**

To support 20,000 people into full-time paid employment in the next 15 years. By getting full-time jobs in real businesses, young people with learning disabilities and autism will become economically independent and make choices about their future while gaining the opportunity to socialise with peers and form lasting relationships.

## **Our Values**

Uncompromising aspirations and ambitions for young people with learning disabilities and autism, enabling systems change in disability inclusion by collaboration across the eco-system: local authorities, educators, employers, supported employment and parents. We are deeply committed to delivering transformative change that will bring equality of opportunity for all.

## Role Description

Job Title: Head of Advocacy and Engagement

Salary: £35,000-£43,000 depending on experience

Work pattern: Full Time (permanent)- 9am to 5.30pm, Monday to Friday  
(some evening and weekend working will be required)

Location: National role

Benefits: 25 days holiday (plus bank holidays), pension, company mobile phone and laptop and travel budget.

Reporting to: Chief Executive Officer in the first instance

### Overall responsibility:

We are growing our Engagement and Advocacy Team and are looking for an enthusiastic, motivated, strategic and creative person who has outstanding skills to engage and work with young adults with a learning disability, autism spectrum condition or both. This is a new role that will lead the development and growth of our Youth Advisory and Alumni offer, embedding it as part of our intern and graduate experience.

### Job Summary:

We are looking for someone to set a clear strategy and then develop, grow and successfully manage our Youth Advisory (YAG) and Alumni groups, as well as lead the engagement of families / support networks. The ideal candidate is someone who will ensure interns accessing the DFN Project SEARCH model are at the heart of decision making and who will champion their rights and their participation. We are looking for someone who has a strong understanding of advocacy and the rights and entitlements of young adults with special educational needs and disabilities.

We are in the second year of running our YAG and yet to launch our Alumni offer. This role will therefore involve leading the implementation, development, and growth of the membership of both DFN Project SEARCH YAG and Alumni group. This will include planning and facilitating a programme of activities throughout the year for YAG and Alumni members, which we hope will be a mix of in person and online events.

This post holder will also provide ongoing training to YAG, Alumni and parent/carer members and facilitate their participation in our advocacy work. There will also be opportunities to deliver training to our central and partner teams alongside members of these groups.

Our current YAG and Alumni members are a brilliantly diverse group. They vary between the ages of 16 to 28, have a variety of skills and abilities and come from a multitude of cultural backgrounds. They have a lot to say and want to grow and expand their reach, whilst enabling and encouraging more learners with SEND to get involved and access our provision.

- Ownership of Youth Advisory and Alumni provision, formalising the network and embedding them as an integral part of our programme offer
- Line management our Youth Advisory and Co-Production Assistant and our Alumni Relationship Assistant ensuring the Engagement & Advocacy team feel supported and encouraged to be the best they can be, in line with DFN Project SEARCH values
- Oversight of joined up planning, delivery and impact evaluation for YAG and Alumni network activity

- Anticipate, support and respond to the needs of vulnerable young adults in the planning and leading of events out of hours and in the community ensuring their safety and wellbeing at all times and reporting back to key professionals, family and carers any matters which require follow up
- Establish and co-deliver a training offer for parents/carers, education, supported employment and employer partners
- Working with social media and public affairs team to advocate on behalf of these groups
- Relationship management with key stakeholders such as Senior Leadership Team, Board members, employer partners and partner organisations (e.g., external partners and commissioners/funders)
- Maintenance and enhancement of YAG/Alumni community database
- Oversee and report on YAG/Alumni communications, including the newsletter, social media, and case studies, working with other delivery and media team members
- Establish and oversee a LinkedIn/App Alumni group, pushing content to Alumni and reporting on activity
- Manage queries that come into the YAG/Alumni inbox and the online Alumni platform, and updating our CRM with data, ensuring consistent reporting
- Support with surveying and getting feedback from YAG/Alumni
- Share ideas and insights that feed into the broader strategy and long-term vision for YAG/Alumni
- As required, provide support to the Delivery team more widely, for example in drafting copy or supporting events and other activities
- Managing budget and project timelines

## **Profile raising**

- Contribute to the corporate work of DFN Project SEARCH
- In conjunction with senior staff and the communications team, work to raise the profile of DFN Project SEARCH and its key stakeholders in the regional and local media, business, and education communities
- Undertake public speaking and media engagements as required to promote the work of DFN Project SEARCH

## **General**

- Attend meetings and All Staff training days with the national team

## **Person Specification**

- Ideally at least two years' experience of working with young people with SEND
- Has an interest in either youth engagement, alumni relations or relationship management within the charity or education sectors
- Has an awareness and commitment to implement and deliver robust safeguarding procedures
- Has experience of co-producing projects with young adults with LD/ASC.
- Has experience of listening to families, parents and carers and enabling them to be empowered and supported to create change
- Has experience of working with all stakeholders involved in supported internship and has the desire to influence to create change.
- Can prioritise when working to multiple deadlines in a fast-paced environment

- Has excellent verbal and written communication and strong analytical skills
- Has a high degree of initiative and the ability to take responsibility for projects, with support
- Forward planner with excellent time management skills
- Able to deliver targets and objectives, often alone, but also to rise above the detail and take a strategic perspective
- Able to communicate effectively in a wide variety of situations, including formal speaking engagements
- Able to reach, network with and communicate to a wide range of stakeholders and potential stakeholders
- Ability to use databases, Word, excel, PowerPoint and other 'Office' packages
- Demonstrates excellent attention to detail
- Can adapt to different situations and is eligible to work in the UK

## **Experience**

- (i) Evidence of planning and implementing successful strategies/ campaigns/advocacy
- (ii) Evidence of Event Management
- (iii) Working with and engaging young people with SEND
- (iv) Knowledge of digital marketing/content creation
- (v) Training and facilitation

## **Desirable**

- (vi) Experience in a not-for-profit organisation involved with young people
- (vii) Experience in a community development or Corporate Social Responsibility role in a company

DFN Project SEARCH are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and adults and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. This post is subject to an enhanced DBS disclosure.

This role is primarily home based / remote working. Some travel across the UK is to be expected with some infrequent weekend work.

We particularly welcome applications from black, Asian and minority ethnic candidates, LGBTQ+ candidates, disabled candidates, and from men, because we would like to increase the representation of these groups at this level at DFN Project SEARCH

**How to Apply:** Please request an application form from [admin@dfnprojectsearch.org](mailto:admin@dfnprojectsearch.org)

## **Recruitment Timetable**

- Deadline for applications: Close of business Friday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2023.