

Making connexions

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Issue 1 - November 2009



Making Connexions is back!!

Welcome to the first issue of our **NEW** 'Making Connexions' magazine.

Making Connexions is our company magazine for partners and stakeholders, which will be issued twice a year, November and May. This first issue features a range of articles from across the whole organisation and is intended to keep you up-to-date with what we do. We hope it will inform those that are new to working with us as well as reminding those who are familiar with our work.

We've split this issue into three sections (**Strategic, Development and Delivery**) to highlight the different roles and teams at Connexions and how we all contribute to our vision - **the best start in life for every young person.**

A bright future for young people in Northamptonshire - "the best start in life for every young person."

At times of economic downturn, with fewer financial resources available to support young people's progress, predicting a bright future for them is both optimistic and challenging; Connexions is up for the challenge. For every generation of young people their start happens once and we do everything we can to ensure it is the best.

We are committed to raising the aspirations, participation and achievement of young people. The number and proportion of young people not in education, employment and training has reduced year on year since 2002 (to 5.4% in 2008-2009). Our role in this achievement has been supported by many partner organisations as well as the direct involvement of young people.

We are proud to have been one of the first organisations in the county to have achieved the silver Charter Mark for involving young people and are working hard on "going for gold" in 2010.

We have keenly supported the Every Child Matters outcomes framework for two reasons. Firstly it provides a common language for all those working together on improving things for children and young people. Secondly it focuses our efforts clearly on outcomes.

As a not-for-profit company, our role is to organise and deliver all possible resources which help to improve outcomes. We work to maximise these resources from all sectors (statutory, voluntary and community and commercial) and also recognise the powerful role of young people themselves, their parents and carers and their employers.

Effective education is one of the most important factors in young people making progress. Our role in helping to provide information, advice, guidance and support (IAGS) is critical. It is vital to make sure that young people make the most of the opportunities of the four new curriculum pathways and from 2013 the raising of the participation age. Our contribution to work with more vulnerable groups (through Targeted Youth Support – TYS), and ensuring they continue to have the opportunity of learning despite significant barriers is our other major role. We are committed to integrated working (through area-based teams) as a way to realise our goals.

We can be confident of a bright future for young people in Northamptonshire by delivering on our commitments to them, developing our role and skills, and encouraging others to bring their resources to bear and working jointly with them.

Adrian Bell, Chief Executive



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FINANCIAL CONTROL

Helen Aird, Senior Co-ordinating Manager



Making sure we spend our money wisely and are able to provide the best possible service to young people with the funding we receive is an important part of the work of the Connexions Finance Team.

As well as processing income and expenditure (and making sure we are not charged too much!), we ensure that plans for spending money are in line with plans for providing our service and we closely track the actual spend of each department against budget. This means we can quickly take action to limit any potential overspending and re-direct money from areas underspending to areas of highest priority.

Regular management reports are produced to help managers plan the delivery of their service and quarterly reports are sent to the Connexions Board, the membership of which has representation from a range of partner organisations for example Northamptonshire County Council, voluntary sector, learning providers and employers.

Our Board plays a key role in helping to ensure the Connexions service is integrated with a range of services to young people – preventing duplication of effort and supporting the planning of effective services across the county.

NEET STATISTICS

Paula Turley, Senior Co-ordinating Manager



Connexions Northamptonshire has a unique database which provides accurate data on how many young people are in education, employment and training (EET) and how many are NEET.

The database is maintained by Connexions staff to nationally set standards. This has enabled us to achieve one of the lowest levels of "current situation not known" in the country, with less than 3.5% of young people in this category.

Reducing the percentage of 16-18 year olds who are NEET is a key Government and Local Authority target. Since 2005/6 the rate has reduced year on year as more people have entered learning, particularly full time education. Numbers of young people entering employment have declined over the same period. This has accelerated since May as the impact of the recession has hit young people entering the labour market after leaving education. This has pushed the NEET trend upwards for the first time.

In these labour market conditions, Connexions is working with partners to ensure young people have an offer of learning for September 2009. At the time of going to press over 90% of 16 and 17 year olds had an offer of a place in learning (school, college or work based learning) for the next academic year.

CONNEXIONS DIRECT STATISTICS

Statistics from September 2009

As part of the continuing Connexions strategy, Connexions Direct is provided nationally using telephone, text and email to offer young people information, advice and guidance both in and out of normal hours.

Each month we receive statistics from Connexions Direct on the number of contacts handled and a breakdown of information both nationally and for Northamptonshire. The following statistics offer an interesting insight into this work from Northamptonshire and national perspectives:

Connexions Direct stats nationally

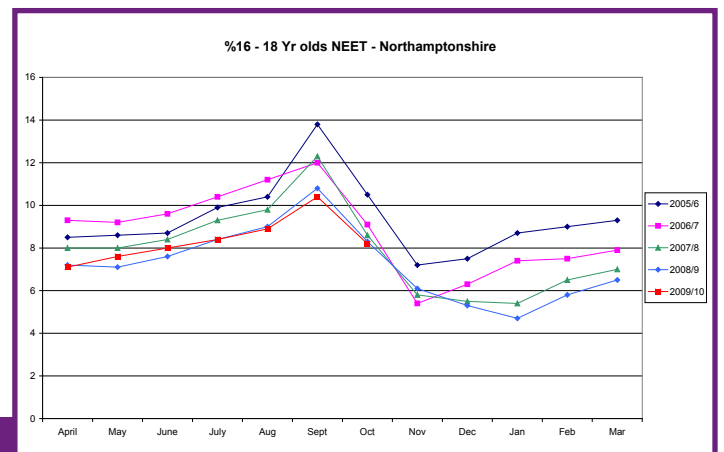
Contacts handled	27,437
Gender	69% Female 31% Male
Current Status	51% Full Time Education
Contact Type – Most Popular	54% Web-chat 32% Telephone
Reason for call –Most Popular	25% Learning 21% Careers Advice 11% Money 11% Employment

Connexions Direct stats for Northamptonshire

Contacts handled	196
Gender	71% Female 29% Male
Current Status	46% Full Time Education
Contact Type – Most Popular	57% Web-chat 27% Telephone
Reason for call –Most Popular	25% Learning 22% Careers Advice 13% Employment

For more detailed information visit:

www.connexions-northamptonshire.org.uk



The chart opposite shows annual NEET percentages for the county >>>

The **delivery** teams are based in our six Access Points in Corby, Kettering, Wellingborough, Rushden, Northampton and Daventry. Our services can also be accessed in Brackley and Towcester. Each geographical area is managed by an Area Operational Manager and includes a number of frontline staff who provide services directly to young people. Connexions Personal Advisers also work in schools and colleges and other community venues throughout the county.

DELIVERY

POSITIVE PROGRAMMES

Julian Elkington, Positive Programmes Team Leader



Connexions' Positive Programmes are building on the success of their current targeted youth support programme 'Corby Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP)' and have now expanded the availability of the PAYP project to Wellingborough. Further expansion plans to start Northampton PAYP are due in summer 2010.

Additionally Connexions Positive Programmes will expand the availability of a year-round personalised provision in Corby for the most disengaged young people. By increasing PAYP to include term time activities we will sustain outcomes and support progression. PAYP is aimed at young people who are at risk of social exclusion, community crime and other negative outcomes. The aim of PAYP is to provide targeted youth support provision, enabling young people to:

- participate in positive activities during the school holidays;
- access out of school activities throughout the year; and
- engage in learning and/or employment with Key Worker support for those most at risk.

Quote from Young Person

"PAYP has been really good for me. It stopped me drinking because it gave me something to look forward to and kept me occupied doing good things. I also feel much fitter and healthier and I'm more likely to accept help now because the help I've received so far has been really good for me. I'm not so angry anymore and I don't self harm as much. I've just been on the U-Project and it was so excellent I didn't want to come home, and I want to go again next year if I can. I'm going to work with all the support on offer from my key worker so I can keep getting better."

Quote from Agency

"As W's social worker I am able to report notable improvements in relation to his individual development needs since attending PAYP. W has been

identified by professionals as unhappy, isolated from peers and absent from the educational arena. Participating in a range of activities that contributed to his physical and emotional well-being have proved to boost his sense of self-worth, confidence and esteem. Through PAYP, W is able to benefit from positive relationships with peers and adults. PAYP has given him the opportunity to benefit from positive male role models in whom he can confide and perhaps aspire to. W is now in full time education and attending school at an acceptable level. His offending behaviour has been reduced as he engages in positive community activities (no new offences). He and his mother are getting on much better since engaging in activities he finds interesting."

Quote from Parent

"Since W has been at Connexions PAYP his self esteem has improved, he is more confident, happy, attentive and has learned valuable social skills. Before he attended PAYP he was withdrawn, aggressive and moody. I am not saying he doesn't still have these qualities, but now he can manage them easier. PAYP has helped not only him but the whole family, because I always knew there was a good boy inside. And they have helped others to see the good in him. Our family dynamics are much improved because of the activities and key worker, and W's hard work. I hope to see further improvements in my son's behavior and self esteem over the coming months. Connexions PAYP has been a big help to us all. Thank you."



CONNEXIONS DAVENTRY ON EMPLOYER VISIT DAYS

Kala Chauhan, Personal Adviser, Connexions Daventry



A project chosen by the Daventry team to benefit young people was to update our knowledge of local employers. Industry has changed over the last 10 years; we require current and projected labour market information when offering information, advice and guidance (IAG) to our young people.

The event was a great team builder and we engaged Connexions Central Vacancy Unit (CVU) in the planning and visits. In June, armed with maps and information for employers, the team set off. Following the visits employers requiring further information on recruitment were referred to CVU. Further marketing of our vacancy service took place at the Employer Breakfast Club and the Council's Business Theme group.

We visited employers to:

- generate vacancies;
- create mentoring opportunities; and
- market work experience and apprenticeships.

We were made welcome by all employers as they shared their views on the business world with us. The visits to local business parks opened our eyes to the diversity of employers including a mini traction engine workshop and a company manufacturing Formula 3 racing cars.

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We now have current knowledge of our employers and are able to advise our clients on employers in their local area. Our aim is to update our employer knowledge on an annual basis by face to face contact.

It was great to see some apprentices placed in work by Connexions; one in particular, Jenny, tells her story...

Jenny

"I was 17 when my mum decided to move back to our hometown Liverpool. As I grew up in Daventry I did not want to lose my life and everyone in it so I took a decision to stay. This meant having to quit college and finding a job as well as some place to live. But employers just didn't really seem to want to take on an inexperienced 17 year old and people judging me by my image made it impossible to find anything.

"Feeling frustrated, a friend advised me to seek help from Connexions. I was really surprised by the reaction I got when I walked in because I didn't really think they would give me a chance and I thought that I will be brushed off but the PA I spoke to was warm and helpful. She advised me on what would be the best kind of thing for me and what would suit my personality. And even though I didn't have much experience she still had faith that I would soon be able to pick up any skills needed. So, I applied for the Connexions vacancy.

"The interview was scary and quite official but the employer just wanted somebody with the right attitude. Luckily for me I was suitable and it saved me from becoming homeless. The employer also offered me training and I have passed my level 2 Customer Service and now am progressing onto my level 2 Administration. This was such a fantastic opportunity for me so thank you again."

OBSERVATION OF PRACTICE

Mary Hilliard, Area Operational Manager



Observation of Practice forms an important part of Connexions Northamptonshire's Quality and Performance Management systems. It measures whether Personal Advisers (PAs) are reaching the required standards of practice, in terms of providing a service that listens to and meets the needs of young people. It also contributes to ensuring that PAs continue to develop awareness of, and improve their own practice.

Each PA is observed in an intervention with a young person twice a year. This is usually with their own Operational Manager, but each year twenty per cent of PAs are observed by a manager from a different operational area. This means that around 200 interventions with young people are observed each year.

During the Observation, the PA is "scored" from 1 to 4 in the three areas of Learning, Achievement and Quality of Practice. A score of 1 is excellent; 2 is Good; 3 is Satisfactory

and 4 is Unsatisfactory. After the Observation feedback and discussion takes place between the PA and the Observing Manager; a development plan, training needs and further assessment are devised as needed.

The benefits of Observation of Practice are numerous, as well as the PA getting feedback and the company being able to monitor quality, the Operational Manager is kept up-to-date with the variety of issues that young people present at their meeting. Observations may take place in school, in the Access Points, on home visits or in other community venues.

Fortunately for our young people, the majority of the Observations pass the required standards and it's great to see the excellent quality of work and the dedicated help and support that our Connexions Northamptonshire PAs are giving to the young people they meet.

VIEW FROM A YOUNG PERSON

by Lauren Turner

"I first met my Connexions PA when I was in Year 11 at Springboard. I was not sure what I wanted to do after Year 11. My PA was very helpful; she went through all the options that were suitable for me at that time. When I said I didn't want to go to college my PA showed me all the Apprenticeship jobs I could apply for and helped me get my first job.

"I was going through a hard time then and lost my job. I spoke to my PA and she was brilliant, she really seemed to understand, she didn't rush me, she gave me good advice and said she was always there if I needed a chat.

"When I was ready to work my PA introduced me to the 'Max Steps' programme, to help build my confidence and general skills. 'Max Steps' has really helped me to understand my good and bad points, how to change them, and built my confidence up when applying for work.

"My PA has helped me so much since year 11. I now tell everyone about Connexions and about Max Steps because it has helped me and I know it can help many other people."

In addition to frontline staff working directly with young people there are a number of **development** teams who work behind the scenes providing essential services and products to young people, their parents and carers, learning providers, employers and Connexions staff.

DEVELOPMENT

XPLORE

Angie Newitt, XPLORE Project Manager



XPLORE is the 14-19 online prospectus and Common Application Process (CAP) for Northamptonshire.

XPLORE is funded by the Northamptonshire Local Authority, Learning and Skills Council, and Connexions. It provides young people with high quality impartial information and an opportunity for them to find out what opportunities are on offer in Northamptonshire. Currently year 11 students can apply for opportunities online. By 2013, it is expected that all 14-19 year olds will apply online.



Progress in Implementing the Common Application Process (CAP)

Last year, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) carried out a survey of the 87 Prospectus areas. Those which have implemented a CAP have said the benefits include:

- quicker submission and acknowledgement of applications;
- higher quality applications;
- young people's ownership of the process and ability to track the progress of their application;
- the Personal Adviser's overview improves caseload management and allows early intervention with learners at risk of not progressing;
- administrative efficiencies (costs, paper). Application details can be imported into Management Information Systems quickly and efficiently;
- all collaborative partners know what is happening to the application; and
- the potential to gather management information from the 14-19 Prospectus and CAP to ensure that provision meets demand.

For more information on XPLORE visit www.xplore.uk.com or please contact: anewitt@connexions-northamptonshire.org.uk

HIGHER EDUCATION CONFERENCE

Jane Shearer, Information Officer



Annual Higher Education Conference helps students make good decisions about their future.

It has never been more important for Year 12 students to make well informed decisions about their future, especially when it comes to those about Higher Education (HE). Connexions Northamptonshire, with support from Aimhigher, The University of Northampton and UCAS, organises an annual Higher Education Conference to meet this need. Students have the opportunity to meet representatives from over 100 different HE institutions, and to attend a variety of talks on specific subjects as well as on more general topics such as finance and how to make a good application.

Feedback from this year's event, which was held over two days in April and attended by a total of some 4500 students, was very positive. Young people's comments included: 'I think it's great'; 'everything was useful, thank you'; 'a good event'. While comments from Heads of Sixth included: 'The students enjoyed the HE Fair and it made things seem a lot more 'real' to them' and 'Excellent as always. Students made the very most of the day and one or two disaffected/challenging students were turned on!'

Next year's Higher Education conference will be held on 30th March 2010



Photo: Higher Education Conference 2009

COLLABORATIVE WORKING

Gemma Johnston-Smith, Learning Provider Adviser



Collaborative working... The East Northamptonshire Partnership (TENP) and Wellingborough Style!

When asked to write a short piece detailing developments with Career Mark 5 in my area of the county (Wellingborough and East Northants) I was pleased to be able to report the following:

Each of the 10 schools, the Further Education provider and pupil referral unit in this area has agreed to commit to undertake Career Mark 5. Within the consortium areas, each institution has completed the Career Mark 5 audit and compiled action points. The momentum and impetus to continue through this challenging and developmental process is kept going by regular feedback and encouragement at consortium meetings.

In addition to this support, institutions have shared good practice between themselves, this taking the form of the sharing of resources, ideas, experiences and visits. No time has been wasted reinventing the wheel in this area!

As an area, we are ahead of most, not only in terms of consortium wide collaboration, but also inter consortium working. For example the careers co-ordinator at Wrenn (a school that is just starting out on this process), visited The Ferrers (one which has successfully held and maintained achievement of the award for many years) to discuss ideas and how to take things forward.

Watch this space to see where we go next...

DEVELOPMENT

THE ROLE OF AN LPA

Stuart Carr, Learning Provider Adviser



The role of the Learning Provider Adviser is varied and ever evolving.

The key outcome we always strive for is the improvement of Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) provision in the institutions we cover, which will improve the lives of young people by helping them to make better choices.

A recent request for support came from Bishop Stopford School in Kettering. They were looking to recruit someone to a new post of CEIAG leader. They wanted my support to devise a job description, and also suggestions for questions they could ask the candidates during the interview.

After consulting with colleagues in my team I devised a suggested job description, one which I believe encompassed all the different aspects of this role. I also suggested questions and a presentation title which would enable the school to ensure they appointed the most suitable candidate to this important post.

The role of CEIAG leader is a challenging yet also fulfilling one, much like my own job. I look forward to the opportunity of working with the successful candidate, to help her and the school to provide the best possible careers education, information, advice and guidance to their pupils.



TRAINING TEAM

Linda Houston, Training Team Manager



Connexions Northamptonshire's Training Team trains Connexions staff to be able to help young people achieve in education, employment or training (EET). Whether working on the front-line, or supporting those who do, all staff need to be working 'at the top of their game'.

We provide:

- a comprehensive induction;
- essential training to equip staff to do their job; and
- continuous professional development to keep staff up-to-date.

Where possible we support staff to achieve accreditation. We offer NVQ 4 LDSS incorporating Advice and Guidance units; NVQ 4 in Management; and NVQ 2/3 in Business Administration and Customer Service (the latter using Train to Gain funding in partnership with Northampton College).

We support partners. At the recent partners' Teenage Pregnancy Conference, for example, we arranged for a young parent to speak about her experience. One of the comments was: 'wonderful morning ... the parent provided a useful insight ... say well done to the young mum'. We also contribute to the delivery of the multi-agency Common Assessment Framework (CAF) training.

Connexions has signed The Skills Pledge, demonstrating our commitment to training and up-skilling our staff. We are also recognised as an Investor in People (IiP) organisation – in fact we are included on the IiP Roll of Honour marking the Fifteenth Anniversary celebrations of those organisations who have been Investors in People for over 10 years. Next year we are aiming for the newly-extended 'stretch' IiP Bronze, Silver and Gold Award.

HUMAN RESOURCES TEAM

Tracey Shakespeare, Human Resources Manager



We recognise the vital contribution that all of our employees make to the provision of effective services and support for young people.

It is the knowledge, skills and attitude of our staff that make the difference between services and support that are merely satisfactory and those that excel. We are committed to investing in our people so they receive the support needed to continue to make a positive contribution to the lives of young people.

Examples of how the Human Resources Team are contributing are:

- continuous improvement of the health and wellbeing of our staff through the introduction of a 3-year strategy;
- an online facility for staff to map their individual progress against specific health goals such as diet and fitness;
- family friendly policies designed to improve the working conditions of staff by better enabling them to combine their work and personal lives;
- a Job Evaluation scheme created with the help of our staff that helps us to evaluate our grading structure and pay scales; and
- 360 - degree appraisals that evaluates the core skills of managers and enables management development to take place.



Photo: Connexions Well-being Day

WORK EXPERIENCE

Anne-Marie Sutton, Work Experience Team Leader



In a competitive world, work experience may be the additional advantage that sets a young person apart when an employer is seeking to recruit new staff.

Working within the new Northamptonshire Education and Work Service team, the Work Experience Team (WEX) organise the delivery of work experience placements to young people in secondary schools across the county. Work experience is delivered to schools and other learning providers using an internet based computer system – Veryan-Webview. Schools use the directory of opportunities, contact employers and discuss placing their young people.

A good programme of work-related activities, including work experience, is a key factor in improving motivation and raising levels of aspiration and achievement.

It is one of the few 'real life' opportunities offered to learners and is highly valued by them. Work experience enables individuals to begin developing the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed for adult and working life and to recognise the importance of learning to their future lives as employees and as citizens of the world.

Work experience enables young people to:

- experience a 'real life' working environment;
- develop personal and social skills;
- recognise their own skills, strengths and qualities;
- identify what companies do and develop an understanding of different roles; and
- consider career options they may have been unaware of or reconsider their initial ideas.

CVU REPORT

Kerry Senatore, Central Vacancy Unit Team Leader



Connexions' Central Vacancy Unit, works with employers to promote the benefits of employing young people. It has worked with over 1000 employers this year alone, offering a professional service to employers that is greatly valued. 100% of employers say they will use the service again. The comments below, from Sterling Press Ltd, are typical of the views of many employers:

"Having engaged Connexions to help with the recruitment of an IT Apprentice we have found the service invaluable. Having not employed a person in this position previously the advice received from our contacts at Connexions was crucial. This included assistance with constructing the job description and person specification as well as help with the gathering of applicants' details, and indeed finding training partners for the employee following appointment. I do not think we would have been able to find the right person for the position without the assistance of Connexions and would use them again without hesitation for any appropriate roles."

Nigel Fovargue
IT Systems Manager
Sterling



NORTHAMPTONSHIRE EDUCATION AND WORK SERVICE (NEWS) TEAM

Over the summer the County Council have undertaken an open tendering process to appoint a provider of a "one stop shop" for employer engagement and work-related learning support to learning providers and employers. The service will operate from 1 October 2009, under the name of Northamptonshire Education and Work Service (NEWS). This service will be part of a national network of Education Business Partnerships, required by DCSF.

Connexions has been selected as the provider of this new service and we are currently putting in place the staff for the new team. This includes transferring staff from their previous employer and recruiting to additional positions. These vacancies were advertised in the press at the end of September. The Connexions Work Experience Team will become part of the NEWS team and continue to support schools to arrange placements for their pupils.

The priorities of this commissioned team are to:

- increase the involvement of employers in work related learning (WRL);
- target employer involvement to support the new 14-19 learning pathways;
- support schools to deliver the statutory requirement for WRL in Key Stage 4;
- develop and disseminate county strategy, protocols and good practice for employer engagement;
- provide a database of work experience opportunities which satisfy appropriate health, safety and welfare requirements; and
- arrange suitable professional development placements for teachers and other staff.



DEVELOPMENT

IAGS DEVELOPMENT TEAM

Linda Bristow, IAGS Development Team Manager



Maximising young people's potential to become leaders of their own lives

We began this magazine with an article from Adrian, our Chief Executive, 'A bright future for young people in Northamptonshire'. Young people are the future of our country and everything Connexions does is focused on helping them achieve the best possible start in adult life. So I want to finish by describing an important function of the Connexions service that sits behind the work done by its PAs.

In preparation for the reform of 14-19 learning, Connexions reshaped aspects of its development work to create an IAGS Development Team. This team brings together two key objectives of an organisation providing services to young people:

- to ensure that young people have all the **information** they need to make wise choices about their future; and
- to **maximise opportunities for young people** to learn essential skills and attitudes to become leaders of their own lives (what we call 'capacity-building').

Roughly speaking, the IAGS Development Team has two kinds of specialists – those in the team who concentrate on gathering information and turning it into high quality

products, web sites and events; and those who work with practitioners and partners to build their capacity to inform, educate, train and support young people to become independent and successful adults.

- **Our information arm** includes those with expertise in information, event management, marketing, web and graphic design. Almost 100% of our products are produced in-house, following consultation with young people and other users, and demonstrate a high level of skill and commitment. You can view a sample on www.connexions-northamptonshire.org.uk/publications
- **Our capacity-building arm** includes those with in-depth experience of supporting colleagues in education, employment and training. We are the lead organisation in the county for PSHEE Economic Well-Being and Financial Capability and have a Learning Provider Adviser (LPA) supporting every learning provider in the county. This aspect of the team leads Northamptonshire's strategy for Careers

Education and Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAGS). We also support use of the county's tool for excellence in CEIAGS – the regional quality award Career Mark 5. You can find out more about our work and how we report our progress in the IAGS section of the county's 14-19 web site, www.northants14-19.org.uk

And that's not all we do... The IAGS Development Team also includes the Connexions' policy arm of its work with **young people with learning difficulties and disabilities**. A key partner in Northamptonshire's provision for these young people and their families, we work closely with the county's Transitions Co-ordinator within a multi-agency partnership. And we're proud to announce that we are in the process of setting up a specialist team of PAs to work with young people in special schools – more to follow in future publications.



CONTACT DETAILS

You can contact us easily by telephone, email or by visiting our website:

Freephone 0800 73 13 2 19

Email info@connexions-northamptonshire.org.uk

Web www.connexions-northamptonshire.org.uk

We have Access Points in Corby, Daventry, Kettering, Northampton, Rushden, Wellingborough and South Northants (Brackley and Towcester). For up-to-date address details and opening times, please check our website.

INFORMATION XPRESS

Don't miss our termly newsletter - **Information Xpress** - keeping you up-to-date with the latest news, events, resources and publications.

If you would like this information in another format, please telephone 01933 231203.