



Welcome



Happy new year to all our readers! ASPIRENorth has had a really productive first term with activities up to Christmas already engaging with over 2000 pupils. Spring and summer 2008 will see the rest of our commitments

fulfilled in line with our original Business Plan targets. We will also be running our very first

residential for around 60 eager Highlands & Islands pupils. This is a thoroughly exciting prospect for all concerned and in March the S4 pupils will visit and experience taster sessions in a variety of different city institutions to give them an insight into student life.

Partner institutions the length and breadth of the entire North Forum area have joined forces to give tremendous support to the ASPIRENorth programme and our S2 pupils are already in the midst of a wealth of on-campus activity days courtesy of Aberdeen College, Banff & Buchan College, Moray College, SAC and the University of Aberdeen. Negotiations are currently underway to offer activities through North Highland College, Orkney College,

Shetland College, NAFC Marine Centre, Inverness College, Lochaber College and the Robert Gordon University. I'd like to thank our partner institutions for their kind support in offering these activities.

With sustainability in mind the project is in the process of commissioning some exciting interactive web material aimed at pupils and teachers – so we can build capacity and ensure that not only the pupils we interact with personally, but also those we don't, can benefit from ASPIRENorth's work.

My sincere thanks goes once again to all concerned. Partnership is a word often loosely used in widening participation work – but I believe that ASPIRENorth is an example of true partnership really working. Given continued support from the Scottish Funding Council, we aim to keep it that way.

Janet Rougvie, *Director*

New faces at ASPIRENorth

A number of new faces have joined the ASPIRENorth team since the last newsletter. Elsbeth Neil took up her post as Development Worker in the Highlands & Islands office in October of last year. Elsbeth has extensive experience in a variety of youth work settings and has established a number of highly successful initiatives, including the GOYODA Highland Youth Information Service and the Without Walls Project.

Two new members of staff have also taken up posts to develop the new Young Employee Volunteer Scheme. Pat Richard is the new Volunteer



L-R: Pat Richard, Elsbeth Neil and Johanne McBean have recently joined the project team

Development Worker in the Grampian office and Johanne McBean is her equivalent in the Highlands & Islands office. Pat has gained experience in the voluntary sector, secondary education and adult education. She also embraces lifelong learning, most recently through completion of an HND in Accountancy at college.

Johanne also has a variety of experience, including 5 years working with schools in the east end of Glasgow where she implemented and developed projects focused on employability supported by the business community.

Sadly we also have to say farewell to Julie Anderson who will be leaving the project in January to take up a position in the University of Aberdeen. We wish Julie all the best for the future.

For further information and full profiles on all members of the ASPIRENorth team, please visit our website at:
www.scotland-aspirenorth.ac.uk

What's Next for S4 pupils?

S4 pupils are about to face some big decisions. Should they stay on at school and work towards Highers? Should they consider college or university? How do they pick the right course and how will they finance their studies? Through the 'What's Next?' activity S4 pupils explore the different ways people from their local area have accessed Further and Higher Education. The activity also motivates the pupils to consider how they will continue their education once they leave school.



'School Pupils' section of the ASPIRENorth website.

Where possible the ASPIRENorth team are looking to deliver a 'Student Hotseat' activity which will involve small teams of S4 pupils conducting interviews with our Student Volunteers, giving pupils the opportunity to examine post-school education at first hand.

Feedback from our pupils has been very positive:

The ASPIRENorth produced DVD 'What's Next?' provides pupils in target schools with the opportunity to view positive role models from their area giving personal accounts of their journeys into post-school education, helping raise pupils' aspirations and make continuing their education a more realistic and positive option. This activity demonstrates the range of options available to pupils when they leave school and encourages them to consider which option may be best for them.

After viewing the DVD the pupils take part in a short quiz, reinforcing the main messages from the student case studies. In the final part of the activity pupils are asked to create a storyboard film script, based on their own future plans, where and what they are studying, what they are doing in their spare time and what their hopes and ambitions are for the future.

This new activity has now been delivered to around 630 pupils in seven schools. Some of the pupil storyboards can be viewed in the

I learnt more about going to college and university and it made me think about what I want to do after school – S4 pupil, St Machar Academy

It [taught] me a lot more about uni – S4 pupil, Buckie Community High School

It was interesting and it made me think about my future a lot more – S4 pupil, Kinlochleven High School

Good company: Employers get involved with ASPIRENorth

ASPIRENorth has recently recruited two Volunteer Development Workers to focus on engaging with the business community and our partners through the North Forum, to recruit and train young employees as volunteers to participate in our school activities.

The volunteers who take part in the Young Employee Volunteer scheme will be enthusiastic apprentices, trainees or recently qualified graduates, from a diverse range of backgrounds, who are employed in local businesses. As with our Student Volunteers, their main role will be to share their experience, inspire pupils to continue their studies and act as role models. This experience will also provide the volunteers with an opportunity to develop their skills, work with young people and enhance their employability. Employee volunteers will receive comprehensive training and support throughout their involvement in the project and they will also be encouraged to reflect on their experiences and learning.

Employers also benefit from participation

in the scheme by providing their young recruits with an opportunity to develop a range of personal skills and experiences essential for the work place. Involvement in these activities can promote a socially responsible business culture which will enhance staff motivation. The main commitment required from employers is the release of appropriate staff for a half day training session and a minimum of one school session.

The Volunteer Development Workers have initially concentrated on adapting and developing appropriate materials, engaging with our partners and researching businesses across the project area. The next stage of development will focus on speaking to interested employers and preparing their staff to support our work in schools. This may be through formal presentations or informal meetings depending on what is required by the business. For example we recently spoke at a Graduate Forum held by a leading oil service company in Aberdeen. There has already been positive feedback from a variety of interested organisations.

Participation in the ASPIRENorth programme is an excellent opportunity to develop business – education links that are beneficial to all parties involved – the business organisation, the employee volunteer, the school pupils and the community. We are always keen to hear from organisations who may want to get involved in the scheme.

For further information on how to get involved please visit the ASPIRENorth website at

www.scotland-aspirenorth.ac.uk
or contact the relevant Volunteer Development Worker in your area:

Highlands & Islands

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F.A.M.E. at last for Aberdeen College students

F.A.M.E (Further Action for My Education), the ASPIRENorth activity for S1 pupils, has been successfully delivered in target schools for over a year. The drama based workshop tackles topics such as decision making, peer pressure, Standard Grade subject choices and the options available to pupils once they leave school. During the workshop short dramatisations are shown to the pupils as DVD clips. In these scenes the school pupils meet a number of characters, each facing a different dilemma which the pupils themselves could also face at some stage in their school career. ASPIRENorth staff and volunteers then work with the pupils to analyse and discuss the problems faced by the characters and help the pupils decide what they should do next. The main aim of this activity is to get pupils thinking about the important choices they will face during their time at school. This will empower pupils to make appropriate decisions about their future education.

The activity gets pupils thinking about the important choices they will face during their time at school

Following feedback from both pupils and staff at the schools who have received this activity and our own internal review, we took the decision to redevelop some of the dramatisations that are shown to the pupils. As during the first phase of development, drama students and staff at Aberdeen College have been invaluable to this activity as they have offered their time, resources and skills to create brand new dramatisations for the pupils. Since early October the drama students have been hard at work scripting and rehearsing the new scenes to be filmed in early 2008.

Together with the students' knowledge and creativity we have the expertise of Eyeline Media, a professional media production company, to film the new scenes. This should ensure that we end up with a high quality final product which we are sure will deal with some of the constructive feedback we had from pupils on the first set of dramatisations.

The filming of the dramatisations has led to a number of last year's student actors becoming student volunteers with ASPIRENorth this year and we are grateful to them for their commitment to the project.

We would like to thank Lynn Staite, Vicky Jamieson, the National Certificate Acting and Performance students of Aberdeen College and the staff of Eyeline Media for their assistance in redeveloping this activity. We look forward to rolling out the new and improved dramatisations to our schools early in the spring term.



Students at Aberdeen College rehearse scenes for the new version of F.A.M.E.

Positive feedback for DVD

'What's Next?' is a question we want all pupils coming to the end of their compulsory schooling to think about positively. But it's also a very scary question for some, and consequently a lot of youngsters are tempted to avoid giving it too much thought. We all know making choices about what to do when you leave school isn't always easy, and for many young people, fear of the unknown and lack of knowledge and confidence can all be issues. That's why the North Forum commissioned a set of regionally focused videos last year through ASPIRENorth, all put together on one DVD entitled 'What's Next?' Copies of the DVD went out to all senior schools in the north of Scotland during the summer, backed up by a set of posters featuring the local role model students who appear in the videos.

The final DVD highlights the experiences of 19 students in Further and Higher Education across the North Forum area from



Shetland to Skye to Aberdeen – each 'telling it like it is' and showing the positive and realistic benefits of post-school study.

A follow up evaluation is now complete and the excellent feedback to date strongly supports the 'local'

approach taken. Schools reported that pupils had engaged with the DVD because they could easily identify with the students used – especially when a featured student was a former pupil of their own school. Schools also welcomed the wide range of courses and progression routes covered by the DVD as it gave pupils an insight into the wide range of options available to them.

Thanks go to all who supported the production of the DVD and responded to the evaluation. If you did not receive your copy, or would like to order additional copies, please contact the ASPIRENorth Grampian office on 01224 274694.

If you fancy a quick look at 'What's Next?' right now, why not check out YouTube (www.youtube.com).

Just search for 'ASPIRENorth' from the main page.

Volunteering goes from strength to strength

The beginning of the new academic year was a busy time for the ASPIRENorth Development Workers as they set out to tell as many new students as possible about the volunteering opportunities offered by the project. The team attended a number of Freshers' Fayres including Aberdeen College, Inverness College, Moray College and University of Aberdeen and held follow up stands at Aberdeen College, Banff & Buchan College, Moray College, The Robert Gordon University, SAC and University of Aberdeen.

ASPIRENorth have also given presentations to some classes and in particular we'd like to thank Linda Gemmell at Aberdeen College for inviting us in to speak to all of her Childcare & Early Education and PDA Classroom Assistant classes, Lochaber College for having us to speak to some of their Tourism students and Scottish Agricultural College for giving us access to some of their BA Rural Business Management (Agriculture) students.

We're delighted that students from a variety of our partner institutions enquired about volunteering with ASPIRENorth and the number of operational volunteers has increased from 10 to 17. A number of training sessions are also scheduled in for the new year.

Our volunteers were inspired to work with us by a number of factors. We asked two of our volunteers; Sharon

Galashan (First Year Music Teaching Diploma at Aberdeen College) and Lisa Clarke (Fourth Year Corporate Communications at RGU) what they enjoy about volunteering for ASPIRENorth. Lisa explained that "It is nice to be able to answer the pupils' questions from your own experience and get the feeling that you may have made a little difference to their opinion of post-school education" whilst Sharon really liked the fact that you can "meet new people". We also asked them what they thought of the ASPIRENorth activities. Lisa told us "I think ASPIRENorth's work is really beneficial to school pupils as...it gives pupils the chance to see first hand what they can do when they leave school and shows them that there is an option to suit everyone" whilst Sharon enjoyed the more interactive style of ASPIRENorth activities and explains "I think it's good because they [ASPIRENorth] include games into their talks which make it more interesting and it encourages those who might be the first in their family to want to go to college or university but are unsure"

If you would like any further information about volunteering with ASPIRENorth then contact the Development Worker for your region or check out our website at www.scotland-aspirenorth.ac.uk

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