



Inspiring the next generation and preparing young people for the next stage of life.

Words: Paul Chapman
Images: NCS

'Comfort is the enemy of progress' Simon Paterson, NCS

Simon Paterson works for Future Foundations, and is the Project Manager responsible for delivering the Nations Citizen Service (NCS) programme for Chesterfield and beyond.

"We're dedicated to developing the next generation to become socially conscious young leaders" he says. "If we're successful we expand the horizons of young people, by giving them access and exposure to activities and situations they may not otherwise have seen.

Irrespective of class, culture, religion, sex or creed, we bring them together and open their eyes."

"My job is to make sure the quality and delivery in the regions is up to scratch and that every student has the summer of a lifetime by building skills, taking on new challenges and giving back through social action and charity work."

NCS is available to 15 to 17-year olds, from all walks of life. It's a four-week programme designed to push you out of your comfort zone, it's aim is to equip you with skills and knowledge, and to give you the confidence to meet your future possibilities. It's about providing life skills and perhaps offers a different perspective to the learning at school.

"The transition from school to the world of work or university is unknown to young people" explains Simon. "Careers advice has more or less disappeared and up until this point many people won't have experienced these types of changes" NCS aims to bridge that gap, to offer experiences and skills to manage the transition

and to offer some insight into this next stage, in a managed environment.

"NCS is so important. Bringing together young people from many different backgrounds helps break down prejudices and preconceptions through friendship and personal development. It's about trying to instil a real sense of value, to get the young people to realise that they can make a positive contribution to society and take responsibility and ownership for their own future."

The team in the studio has grown over the last couple of years, Simon is assisted by apprentice Nathan Harmer and Amy Wadsworth. Nathan was a NCS graduate from 2016 and now works as an apprentice on NCS "NCS for me is a perfect platform for my generation to start to make their impact on the world; hopefully in a positive way!" says Nathan.

The enthusiasm of the team is infectious, they clearly care about the young people having a great time and experience on the programme. They visit local schools to present to students and encourage participation, and run the programmes during the school holidays. "Every student in the country is given the opportunity to attend the NCS programme" adds Simon, "there is a maximum charge of £50, with many subsidies available to ensure the scheme is open to all. The sign up to the programme in Chesterfield has been fantastic, since I started in 2016 attendance has grown from a modest 200 students to this years, 800 students who are scheduled to attend."

Once a young person has joined the scheme they take part in warm up events, people are bought together in teams of 15 to bowl, go to the Escape Rooms, attend comedy nights or one of many activities aimed at breaking the ice and getting to know each other and the NCS staff before the real work commences.

The program is split into four phases: Adventure, Discovery, Action and Celebrate.

Adventure; takes people away to an outdoor activity centre where the team of 15 undertake a series of adrenaline fuelled activities designed to take them out of their comfort zone and get them bonding as a team. After coming down from the excitement...

Discovery; is a week spent in university style accommodation to give the young people a taste of living without Mum and Dad or their guardian, "it's similar to what you might expect if you travel away to Uni" explains Simon. "They are taught life skills through sessions such as emergency first aid training, they learn about local and global issues and how a small group of young people can have a big impact. They are introduced to informed opinions, encouraged to think about social subjects, stuff they may not have done at school, a representative from Santander comes in to talk about managing budgets and finances."

Action; covers weeks three and four, the teams work in a local environment, such as college, to plan a social action project that will make a positive difference to the local community and its residents. "We want the students to deliver something they can be proud about" Simon explains, "samples include LGBT awareness projects, students placed a rainbow bench in the Crooked Spire to help spread the acceptance and tolerance of the LGBT community. Students raised money to buy tools which enabled them to provide gardening services to Ashgate hospice and they have helped produce CV's for homeless people to help them get back into society. Projects spanning all walks of life and all delivered without help, the students coming up with the themes themselves and running the activities from inception to delivery."

Celebrate; see's the end of the four week programme. A graduation ceremony takes place attended by local dignitaries, where students present their projects and receive a graduation certificate. "Certificates are something Universities and employers are increasingly looking for" adds Simon.

"Attending the NCS programme is good for your long-term future and I'd advise all young people to make sure they take part." Many young people who attend NCS go on to volunteer time to projects helping deliver social change.

If you're keen to get on a programme check out the website www.ncsyes.co.uk for contact details.

Also, if you're a local business or charity wishing to be involved, please get in touch with Simon and his team on ncs@future-foundations.co.uk, they are always looking for programme sponsors and 'Dragons Den' judges!

