

An Independent Evaluation of Team Domenica: Summary Report

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Summary of findings from the independent evaluation

What is an independent evaluation?

An independent evaluation is defined as an evaluation carried out by people who are not employed or affiliated with the organisation being evaluated. An independent evaluation can help to provide more objective results, which means that those results can be seen as more trustworthy and free from any bias.

From January 2024 to July 2024, consultants at the Tizard Centre, University of Kent ran an independent evaluation of Team Domenica to gather the experiences and opinions from a range of key stakeholders around the impact and experience of Team Domenica. The independent evaluation was commissioned and funded by Team Domenica.

Who were the key stakeholders and what data was collected?

The key stakeholders included candidates themselves, staff working at Team Domenica, parents and carers of candidates, partner employers and the wider local community.

The two Tizard Centre consultants interviewed 14 candidates about their experiences, and sent out surveys to all candidates, staff working at Team Domenica, parents and carers of candidates, partner employers and the wider local community.

What did the evaluation find?

Below is a summary of the main findings. All findings are presented in full in the 'Final Report'.

- Candidates appear highly positive about their experiences of being involved with Team Domenica and many report making great gains in their confidence and independence since starting.
- A main theme across candidate interviews was the feeling of being included in Team Domenica. The formation and importance of new friendships was also a dominant theme across the interviews and surveys with candidates, as well as the parent carer survey. It is evident that Team Domenica creates an environment where friendships can form and social and interpersonal skills can be developed.
- Some staff and candidates commented on the need for a wider range and variety of placements and internships that would better match candidates' competencies and aspirations outside of the hospitality sector; with some staff acknowledging that many barriers exist to fully achieving this and that teams are already attempting to diversify placements and internships on offer.

- For the meaning of **independence**, main themes centred around explaining independence as being able to do “lots of things on my own and learn how to do things better” and “without any help”. Some comments centred on how support at times will always be needed and one comment highlighted the need to develop independence to support others too. Findings from staff, parent/carers and candidates reported that Team Domenica supports the development of independence for its candidates.
- Staff commented on working with candidates and their colleagues as some of the best aspects of their job, as well as commenting on aspects that could be improved. Staff described the Team Domenica workforce in several positive ways, focusing on the passion, support and dedication of staff.
- Many parents and carers reported observing several positive differences in various quality of life domains for candidates since starting with Team Domenica, such as gains in their emotional wellbeing and interpersonal relationships.
- Some employers discussed positive changes to their own perceptions, and those of their staff, around employing people with learning disabilities and/or autism.
- For the wider local community responses centred around Team Domenica helping to facilitate a stronger sense of community and inclusion.

Conclusion

Results indicate Team Domenica are making a meaningful difference to the lives of many young adults with learning disabilities and/or autism, with positive knock-on effects for parent carers, staff, employers and the wider local community.

The findings for the majority line up with findings that Team Domenica have reported in their internal interviews and surveys with candidate, employer and parent groups. There are areas for potential growth evident in the findings, including need for a wider variety of workplace opportunities for candidates and some changes for the staff workforce.

The experience and growth of candidates is reported to be central to the work of Team Domenica and it is evident that staff believe this is a central aim and purpose of the organisation and their own role within it.

The authors of this report call for more support to promote Team Domenica from partnering organisations, the local authorities and wider networks; as well as more investment in the organisation so that it can broaden its reach and scope to enable more young people to access meaningful and potentially life-changing employment opportunities.

The consultants would like to say a large thank you to everyone who took part in this evaluation, either by interview or by completing a survey. For several candidates in particular we appreciate the considerable time spent discussing your experiences of being involved in Team Domenica as part of an interview!

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