

The Great Climb

In May, students and staff from Zone 3 took on 'The Great Climb' challenge, using our indoor climbing wall to scale the heights of the Burj Khalifa, the tallest building in the world, standing at 830m tall.

The event was organised by Sport student Eliza as part of her coursework, and as a way to raise money for QAC and YoungMinds, a charity that helps to provide support for children and young adults struggling with their mental health.

In order to reach the height of the Burj Khalifa, the group had to climb the wall 104 times and Eliza worked really hard to persuade plenty of students and staff to get involved and make it possible. As organiser she designed her own event logo and also had to help write the risk assessment, assign roles to other students and take into account considerations around Covid guidelines – not an easy task – so there was plenty of sanitiser and lots of cleaning of equipment between climbs to make sure it was safe.

Everyone involved worked really hard and challenged themselves, whether they



completed one climb or twenty, and received a certificate to mark their achievement. It was worth the effort and aching limbs though, as everyone finished with smiles on their faces and the event raised over £1200 to be split between both charities, which is fantastic. A big well done to everyone involved, especially Eliza who pulled the event together, receiving a letter and certificate from Young Minds for her effort.

A Word from Bev



Thank you to everyone who has enabled QAC to get through another challenging academic year. We look forward to removing the complications of lockdown and reviving the great QAC atmosphere.

Everyone at QAC has engaged positively whilst operating differently this year. We were able to introduce Mental Health First Aiders and the Thrive at Work programme (a regional initiative to improve health and wellbeing) to make support for staff, students and clients even better moving forward.

We saw continued success at our Pinewood Campus with a great new supporting video of our Employment Pathways and we effectively supported all students and clients across all services to achieve and do their best. We continue to promote the excellent QAC Respite and Supported Living services (Independence Plus) and look forward to expanding our numbers in all areas over coming years. Look out for future webinars!

QAC's Community Services has a new base next door to the campus. From this location we operate our support worker service, specialist consultancy and training and have ambitious plans for future growth. The All Formats Team have an amazing new website advertising their services in transcription and they look forward to moving to their new location on campus and expanding their valuable services.

QAC has made a commitment to supporting climate change and sustainability initiatives and is in the process of formulating its aspirations for the next 10 years.

Thank you to all of our external stakeholders, governors and staff for support through such busy and complicated times and huge thanks to parents and carers who have been so positive and supportive throughout. As we look forward to growing our student and client numbers in the year ahead, we thank you in advance for your support for our amazing College and community charity.

Bev Jessop
Principal & Chief Executive

Oakwood Fun

Residential students from Oakwood had a great time when they visited Birmingham Botanical Gardens, looking at the flowers and animals and exploring the hidden areas of the gardens. They enjoyed it so much they were inspired to create their own little garden to enjoy back at college.

They discussed what they each wanted in the garden, including planters, decorations and seating and even asked Maintenance to create a picket fence and gate to complete the look.

They worked hard to get the area looking nice and it will be perfect for enjoying some sunshine and fresh air. Another treat will be

some delicious homemade scones and cakes, thanks to student Charlie who has been practising his baking skills, with great results, and to the delight of other residents!



Highlights



Lots of Socks!



Music with PFL Amber



Yoga Poses in the Yurt



Summer Enrichment



Earth Stories Artwork



World Down Syndrome Day

Staff and students put the spotlight on World Down Syndrome Day in March. The students learned more about the condition and supported the Down Syndrome Association by raising awareness of the condition. People were asked to wear brightly coloured socks and joined the online campaign #LotsOfSocks uniting with other organisations to spread the word. There were yellow socks, red socks, spotty socks, long socks.... Basically, lots of socks!

CBSO Virtual Performance

Each year QAC students are fortunate enough to be invited to watch an interactive Relaxed Performance by the CBSO, with the added excitement of visiting somewhere new. This year, things were slightly different and although we were still able to view a performance, due to Covid there was no opportunity to visit them in the City centre. Instead, approximately 80 students were able to enjoy the performance from the comfort of their classrooms as 'Peter Pan', featuring a 10-piece orchestra, was live streamed to audiences in May. Everyone had a great time joining in with songs and we are really looking forward to next year's project and visiting the CBSO in person.

Yoga in the Yurt

Back in January, we were really excited to have a large yurt installed at the top of campus, perfect for a range of mindfulness activities, including yoga which is a really popular activity for our students. The yurt is designed for the UK climate and is fully accessible with access ramps and wheelchair width doors, ensuring easy access for all.

Since the Spring, our yoga instructor has been using the yurt to deliver one to one and group yoga sessions, with a number of students taking part. It offers a more relaxing space than our hall or classrooms and is the perfect space for

students to work on their breathing and postures as well as other mindfulness techniques, enhancing their physical and mental wellbeing.

Our Earth Stories

Throughout April and May, QAC students and staff were part of a public consultation around the use of green spaces, led by Naturally Birmingham (on behalf of Birmingham City Council). We were asked to provide them with insights into how we used open spaces, which spaces we used and what memories and emotions were evoked while using the spaces.

We ran internal competitions and had lots of amazing entries. It was great looking through the artwork and reading the wonderful stories from people sharing what they enjoy about their local green spaces, whether it was their garden, nearby park or nature reserves. We try to build outdoor time and activities into students' sessions as much as possible and it was lovely to see how they enjoy doing so in their own time too. We hope that with our input, Birmingham can look forward to increased open spaces with more activities and amenities for everyone to enjoy.

PFL Amber Activities

PFL Amber students have been busy learning together and actively engaged in a seaside project, bringing aspects of the seaside to the classroom, such as making sandcastles.

They had even more fun as they discovered their musical talents during the summer term, listening to music from various cultures including English, Asian and African. A highlight was listening and dancing to a Somalian song called Dhanto. They also enjoyed playing a range of instruments, particularly the drums, and taking to the microphone to sing their favourite songs.

Student Catalogue

In the absence of in-person sales, and following the success of the Student Christmas Catalogue, the Fundraising Team organised a Summer edition, giving student groups another chance to design and make things to sell to staff and families. Many groups from PFL and LEAP took part, as did Pinewood and Independence Plus, creating some great pieces for around the home and garden. We also used the catalogue to sell some great gardening items and some of the ex-stock from Umberslade. Although we cannot wait to hold our in-person sales again next year (fingers crossed), we are also looking forward to developing our catalogue too!

Summer Enrichment

With the absence of our Summer Games for another year, some of our PFL groups were still keen to do something a bit sporty. So, the 'summer enrichment' programme was put together with a range of activities such as basketball, kurling, art competitions and even welly wanging!

It was great fun for everyone involved and not only gave an opportunity to have fun and do something physical, but also develop other learning skills such as numeracy, communication and teamwork. Some groups even chose to dress up a member of staff to represent an Olympic country!

Spotlight

'Paws Up' for Pet Month!

April was National Pet Month and QAC got involved by celebrating our pets. Many staff members keep pets, so there was a fun quiz for students to guess which pet belonged to which staff member and there were a few surprises along the way, with rats and tortoises in the mix as well as plenty of cats and dogs.

We also wanted students to tell us about their own pets and favourite animals, so there was a competition with some wonderful stories, poems and artworks submitted and prizes being awarded.

As it was all about pets, we decided to do something to support pets in need, working with our local Blue Cross rehoming centre in Bromsgrove. Through a series of videos and information, students were able to learn about the invaluable work done by The Blue Cross as a charity, and some great tips on how to look after and care for pets such as dogs, cats and hamsters.

We organised a 'Toys & Treats' collection with people donating a great selection of different toys and treats for the animals at the centre to enjoy, and our Fundraising Team organised a Virtual Pet Show where people could donate and upload photos of their pets, with money raised being split equally between both charities.

Following all the activities, some of us were able to visit the centre to present the staff with the cheque and collection. It was a fantastic way to educate the students whilst having a great time and we really look forward to working with The Blue Cross team more in the future.

Leaders in Diversity

We have been working towards our 'Leaders in Diversity' award this year. It has culminated in lots of recent work which has included a focus on staff wellbeing, increased mental health training for managers and staff, and the introduction of Wellness Action Plans for all staff, along with reviews of policies and processes. In the near future we will be introducing a team of Mental Health First Aiders, made up from staff across college to be initial points of contact for colleagues needing support. This award also follows our Principal and CEO, Bev, being nominated in the Diversity and Inclusion Leader and Company Leader (100+ employees) categories of this year's Midlands Leadership Awards.

Umberslade Update

Things have been busy at Umberslade since becoming a satellite campus at the start of the academic year, but PFL Green students have been REALLY busy there since January.

They have worked amazingly as a team, digging and weeding the site to transform it into a place where they really enjoy being and working. They learnt about different plants and how they grow as well as the environment, taking part in some mini beast hunts to see what critters live on the site with them.

The weather doesn't dampen their spirits as come rain or shine they are onsite with smiles on their faces and getting their hands dirty. When it was time to harvest their home-grown vegetables they did so, taking the harvest back to main campus to sell to staff!

Gardening is not the only thing they get up to. The group has also started an upcycling project, using one of the large polytunnels as a workshop to give old pieces of furniture some TLC. They have also worked hard to make the site brighter and more exciting, with decorations, games and sensory spaces for people to enjoy when they visit. They also helped the Fundraising Team create an inventory of ex-stock to sell to raise money for their activities.

It's not just PFL Green who are busy onsite... Our Maintenance Team has been busy too, designing and building some wonderful log cabin shelters for students to use, which look great in the top meadow area. Our LEAP Hub Trades have helped take down some old wooden structures that were not safe and are looking forward to doing more work down there next year, and students from PFL Yellow and PFL Indigo have also visited as part of their work placements.

Although no longer open to the community as a garden centre, we held a successful 'Pots & Bottles' day where members of the local community were able to take some unwanted plant pots and glass bottles off our hands for a donation. We raised over £400 which is fantastic and was put towards buying an outdoor pizza oven which can be used in student sessions and future events and open days.

Umberslade has so much potential, both for curriculum activities and open days, and we are really looking forward to making these happen next academic year and welcoming more students to the site, so our Umberslade Update will be a regular feature of newsletters going forward!



Umberslade Activities

Pet Month Winners

Spotlight

Engage the Workforce

Employability is an important aspect of skills development for students, and we try to run activities that are as realistic as possible, alongside work placement opportunities.

We often do this by meeting people working in different roles, giving students the opportunity to find out about jobs and industries they might be interested in, or that relate to their work and studies at college.

We still wanted to work with some of our external contacts this year, but of course we had to do things differently.

So, instead of in-person sessions, we invited people to take part in some 'Engage the Workforce' video calls. Sessions ran for about an hour and students had the opportunity to meet individuals and ask questions about their roles and experience, and where they worked.

A big thank you to Chris from Birmingham Town Hall & Symphony Hall, Michelle from Yorkshire Building Society and Hannah from B2022 who were the first to take part, talking with students from Hospitality, Performing Arts, Sport, Creative Media and our Pinewood STRIDES and Supported Intern groups. Sessions went really well and we look forward to building on the initiative in the future with more opportunities for students to engage with industry professionals.

College Gardening

Gardening is not just an Umberlade thing as students across College have been getting into the green fingered mood lately, having lots of fun doing so.

After Oakwood created their own garden seating area, LEAP Ruby took on the task of transforming the garden of Thornton House for others to enjoy. They made a range of colourful clay planter decorations, recycled hanging mobiles and decorated stones that they displayed around the garden and individually planted a mixture of vegetables including tomatoes, onions, lettuce, peas and chillies.

They worked really well together and took 4 weeks to complete the project from start to finish, including the planning and even remembered to take before and after pictures so they could share the amazing transformation with others. They enjoyed themselves so much, they carried on the garden crafts theme, making more recycled hanging mobiles and clay planter decorations to sell through the QAC Summer Catalogue.

We now have a number of raised planting beds at the top of campus for PFL gardening activities. Some have been placed next to Oakwood, with our Maintenance team creating new pathways to make them accessible, and others are going to be outside the yurt to enhance that space. These are great additions and PFL groups have already started using them to grow a range of plants and vegetables which they can harvest and use in other sessions.

Community Services Catch Up

Following successful trial runs in the October and February half terms, the Community Services team coordinated a full holiday club provision for every day of the Easter break. It was really well attended and we were happy to see that after coming along to try it out, several students and clients ended up attending the whole two weeks – there is no better feedback than that! In fact, it went so well that we ended up running an extra two days during the Whitsun break too.

But what actually is the holiday club? It can be more or less whatever the students and clients attending it want it to be. We are very lucky to have brilliant support staff from a wide range of different backgrounds, with lots of interests and skills. This has meant that we have been able to offer art, crafts, music, yoga, board games, gardening, quizzes – you name it and we will give it a go. What we have really noticed, though, is that the most important thing for many of those who attend is just the opportunity to spend time with others and socialise, in a way that feels comfortable for them.

Some of our 'best bits' included making music and singing karaoke together, some fabulously creative crafting sessions (including macrame workshops), planting out some veggies to harvest in the summer, learning to paint simple watercolours and the endless (and we do mean *endless*) UNO tournaments. It was great fun, and we even managed to get outside and soak up the sunshine as we played football and outdoor skittles. Now we are all looking ahead to the epic summer holiday social club, with plenty of activities in store.

Another new and exciting addition is the long-anticipated opening of the QAC Community Hub over the road from main campus. We recently got the keys so we are still settling in, but things are moving along and we are really excited to open fully and show it off very soon - watch this space for how we will be using the hub to deliver our services.

These are exciting times in Community Services. If you are interested in finding out more about what we are doing – whether that's to book a place, ask us about our other community activities, or enquire about joining the team – please email us at communityservices@qac.ac.uk



Events

Fundraising

In March we hosted our first virtual challenge, 'March Thru March', where participants had to march and step their way through the month, to reach a distance equivalent to walking from QAC to somewhere else in the UK such as Cardiff and Newquay. There was no minimum sponsorship, people were just asked to raise as much as they could and overall our team of steppers marched well over one million steps during the month of March and raised nearly £500. It was a good introduction to virtual challenges and we hope to run more in the future, including our Step-tember Challenge!

Following the success of our Santa Saturday craft bags before Christmas, we decided to do it again for Spring, this time with a 'pick & mix' theme for the whole family. There were plenty of crafts to choose from including dreamcatchers, macramé, papercraft and fabric crafts, along with colouring pages and an Easter chocolate treat. Everyone who had one enjoyed making their crafts and displaying them with pride.

Another first for us; we organised some virtual tasting sessions, with Nelsons Gin Distillery & School hosting a gin tasting evening and Unique Wine Safaris 'taking us' to Spain for some wine tasting and a vineyard tour. Fun and informative, these were great events with those taking part enjoying trying something new and picking up some tips along the way.

Everyone loves their pets and to tie in with National Pet Month activities across College we ran a Virtual Pet Show, raising money for QAC and The Blue Cross rehoming centre in Bromsgrove. All pets were welcome to enter whether they were furry or feathered, scaly or shelled and there were some great photos entered with categories including 'Funniest Pet', 'Best I Fit So I Sit' and 'Best Owner & Pet Selfie'. Each winner then went forward to 'Best in Show' with Rupert (and his owner Amy) crowned overall winner! It was a great, fun event and raised over £200 to be split between both charities and is definitely something we look forward to doing next year, hopefully with an in person element too!

This year saw the return of our 'Principals' Challenge', seeing Bev and Jan go head to head in a series of challenges, this time with a creative theme. They created showstoppers in a cake decorating challenge, let students style them for a day and tested their artistic skills as they created portraits of each other to be displayed in College. The highlight was them taking to the courtyard for an outdoor lip sync battle, with Jan channelling her inner Bjork as Bev took on Kate Bush's 'Wuthering Heights'. It was a fun way to end a very strange year and raised over £400.

Corporate & Community

In April, we were awarded a grant from the Asda Foundation as part of their 'Supporting Communities' initiative. They donated nearly £500 of products to our Community Services holiday clubs provision and the best bit was we were able to go to our local Asda Barnes Hill store and join Katey, their Community Champion, for a shopping spree. Two trolleys later, there were plenty of snacks, refreshments, games, DVDs and craft supplies to keep the group going for a while!

The Lord's Taverners kindly gave a large grant towards a new, wheelchair accessible minibus, and PFL Black were more than happy to accept delivery followed by an inspection and thumbs up from Errol, one of our College drivers.

Yet more gardening took place thanks to Emma from Matthewman's Sweetpeas in Solihull who kindly donated some sweet pea plants. PFL Green, along with some IP clients, enjoyed separating and planting them, and we look forward to seeing them bloom over the summer. Emma will hopefully be back next year with some seeds for us and will join students at Umberslade for a planting session.

A big thank you to Arnold Clark Community Fund who donated £750 and Blakemore Foundation who donated £100 towards our Community Services summer holiday clubs. The money will be put towards a range of equipment and resources to enable a range of different activity sessions to happen meaning no-one will get bored.

Thank you to the Medical Management Centre and Claims Proposition & Market Insight teams who, as part of the Zurich Community Trust summer challenge, spent a £500 donation on Amazon wishlist items for us. The items included games, activities and kitchen equipment to help set up our Community Services Hub ready for clients to use.

A big thank you to everyone who has supported us this year, at a time when we really needed it, we really do appreciate it!

If you would like to know more about how you can get involved in supporting us, please contact fundraising@qac.ac.uk

Sweet Peas



New Minibus



Bev vs Jan



Blue Cross visit



Asda Shopping Spree



Wishlist Gifts

Life at Pinewood

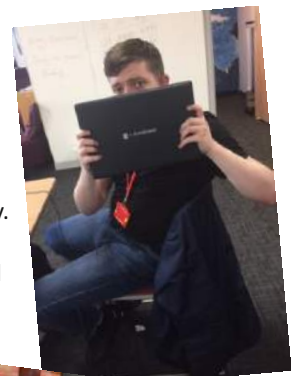
The Covid pandemic and restrictions made attending placements more difficult for our Supported Interns (SIs), but we are pleased to say they all managed to attend placements for a minimum of two days per week, with some doing additional days. They have worked in various roles at Extra Care Retirement Village, Birmingham Wildlife Conservation Park and Resources for Autism, making the most of the opportunities and have flourished in the process. It is not just our SIs who have got a taste for work and almost all of our STRIDES students have been out on work placements too, gaining some real life work experience along with a taste of what a Supported Internship is all about.

This was the second year of our 'Fund Me' initiative, supported by The National Express Foundation, giving students the opportunity to apply for a grant to buy their very own equipment and resources, to support their QAC studies now and in the future. It was a bit different this year with applicants presenting to a panel virtually, telling them about what they thought they needed – whether technical equipment, additional training or other kit – and how it would help them complete their programme and support them once it has finished. We

were also able to open up the initiative to STRIDES students this year, giving them the opportunity to apply. Once again there were some great applications with Bradley, Kevin, Jasper and Thomas being successful and shopping lists including assistive technology, computer technology and woodwork equipment.

Congratulations to Kevin and Amy who were selected to be Pinewood Reps, similar to the QAC Student Ambassador role. One of Kevin's first tasks was to draw on his performing arts skills to appear in front of the camera and show people around the Pinewood campus in a virtual tour. Pinewood is an offsite satellite campus and as such a lot of QAC students and staff haven't seen it and this was a great way to show them what it is so that they know what Pinewood is when people talk about it.

There was an unveiling of a bespoke piece of wall art, created by Beth. The colourful piece features in one of Pinewood's mentoring rooms and celebrates the diversity that can be found at Pinewood, QAC and the wider city of Birmingham. Great job Beth, it looks superb!



QAC is the UK Agent for Revolution Advantage Carbon Fibre Canes. These canes are light weight, give greater sensitivity, are highly reflective and have a 12 month warranty.

If you would like to order please call 0121 803 5484 or email enquiries@qac.ac.uk. You can find out more information on our website at www.qac.ac.uk.

Conferencing Facilities

QAC has a diverse range of facilities available for hire and offers fully accessible amenities together with a unique friendly atmosphere. With excellent transport links to/from New Street Station and all major motorway links, QAC is the ideal venue for meetings, training, team building days and conferences.

Our on campus facilities include training & seminar rooms, a hall that is suitable for larger groups and a modern sports hall - all of which are available for hire evening, weekend and out of term time.

In addition, our high quality commercial training kitchen is also available for small businesses and training companies for catering production, cooking demonstrations and classes.

All our facilities are available for hire throughout the year with some restrictions during term time but we welcome all enquiries. By choosing QAC as your venue, not only will you benefit from our first rate facilities and friendly staff, you will be supporting our services for people with disabilities. If you would like more information about hiring any of our facilities please contact Karen Easthope by email: keasthope@qac.ac.uk or call 0121 803 5310.

We are currently open to clients offering activities permitted within Government Guidelines in relation to COVID-19 and have robust protocols in place to ensure that our venue is COVID secure.



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For more information about what is happening at QAC and how you can get involved visit www.qac.ac.uk or follow us on social media



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