

How the Job Retention Service helped Chloe:

As a result of her problems, Chloe was considering giving up her job.

At work, Chloe was forgetful, sometimes nice to people and other times aggressive to both work colleagues and customers on the phone.

She was often absent from work due to her poor health and the difficulties she had in arranging suitable childcare because of her contracted hours of work.

Bury EST's Job Retention Officer met with Chloe to discuss her illnesses and their effect on her work. At the time Chloe did not want to disclose any information to her employer about the full extent of her illness and she was concerned that she would get an adverse reaction from other staff if they knew.

With encouragement, Chloe accepted that her employer should be informed because they would then be able to help. A meeting was held during which the manager was made fully aware of the illnesses.

She was extremely positive about how she and the company could respond to Chloe's needs.

Chloe Today:

Chloe's working hours have now been adjusted to fit in with her child care commitments. The company made adjustments to enable Chloe to continue with her job. These included changing her duties from a frontline role dealing with the public to a more administrative role and providing a quiet area where Chloe could take a breather when anxious. Her return to work was phased over a month and staff training helped her immediate supervisor to become more aware of her health needs. Other colleagues were informed on a "need to know" basis so that they were aware of her epilepsy but not the bipolar disorder. Her manager agreed to provide the extra support that Chloe needs and to liaise with Bury EST.

Chloe said, **"It's helped having a third party explain my difficulties to my employer. I didn't feel able to do this myself and Bury EST gave me the confidence to approach and meet with my employer and sort things out. My employer has been very supportive as a result."**

Chloe's manager commented, **"The whole process involving working jointly with Bury EST and has proved to be a great support to me in helping Chloe to return back to the workplace and, more recently, getting to the position where Chloe is once again a fully effective member of staff."**

Chloe, a single parent, was referred to the Job Retention service at Bury EST in July 2003.

She has temporal lobe epilepsy which caused Chloe to hear "voices" and go blank occasionally. She had also been diagnosed with a mental health condition, bipolar disorder, which caused extreme mood swings.



Best Practice:

If your employee acquired a disability or illness which affected their work would you know what to do or how you could help? What would be the implications for your company? The most common causes of long term sickness are stress and musculo skeletal disorders.

The Health and Safety Executive have recently published six key aspects of work which can lead to work-related stress. Details of this can be found on their website www.hse.gov.uk/stress. Don't forget that as the employer, you have legal obligations regarding the health and welfare of your staff. You can help to meet these by involving staff in taking preventative action and responding appropriately when employees require support.

A long-term illness or disability could affect any one of us at any stage of our lives. Acquired disabilities or health problems may involve a wide range of physical or mental conditions. You and the employee may want to get more information from health professionals about the implications of specific conditions. Not only will your employee have to adjust to the implications of worsening health, they may be unsure about their future with the company and may be reluctant to discuss these issues at first.

Keeping your trained and experienced staff is likely to benefit the company greatly.

Replacing staff is very costly. Pro-active retention policies can help you to keep your best staff and reduce costs. Don't wait until a problem exists – you can help your employees to stay healthy by monitoring both their physical and mental health: **be aware of what is usual and investigate the unusual.**

- Assess the risks that employees face in undertaking their duties.
- Involve staff in preparing written policies e.g. health & safety, risk analysis.
- Adopt sickness and absence policies that include return to work interviews.
- Look for signs of stress e.g. behavioural/mood changes, unusual sickness levels, tearful episodes, self-isolation.
- Take notice when staff are not managing their work in the way they normally do.
- Ensure that staff feel able to approach you if they have a health problem or personal concern.
- Provide a good working environment e.g. adequate lighting, ventilation and equipment.
- Provide appropriate training and re-training as necessary.

Try to be flexible when encouraging staff to return to work after a period of ill health.

Here are a few tips to ease the process:

- Keep in touch with staff who are absent from work - talk to the employee about how they view the future and identify all the options before agreeing an action plan.
- Complete a systematic evaluation of all the factors involved: job duties, staff skills and abilities, any health restrictions, safety & risk levels, support needs (people and aids), implications for others before employees return from long-term absence.
- Consider the options for adjusting or reallocating job duties to enable the employee to work to their strengths.
- Consider the value of a phased return to work and be sensitive to the worker's emotions when they return to work for the first time.
- A flexible approach to work hours will allow for medical support to be accessed.
- If a disability is affecting an employee, the provision of an aid, adaptation or personal support through 'Access to Work' may resolve the problem.

Factsheet 05 ◀

Embracing Diversity

is a project working to support disadvantaged people into employment and achieve greater diversity in our workplaces to reflect the communities in which we live.

If you are an employer or potential client who would like further details about what we could do for you please contact us.

Bury Employment Support & Training

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