

**MINUTES OF CARE LEAVERS FOCUS GROUP MEETING**  
**25 SEPTEMBER 2003**

Venue: Learning Shop, Bury

**ACTION**

1. **PROGRESS ON ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN**

- N/A.

2. **FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION**

- General experience of employment.
- Interviews.
- Benefits.

**3. KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION**General experiences of employment:

- Work experience has worked for Michael, after 3 weeks work experience at Marks & Spencer's, the position became available and he applied, went for an interview and has been offered the job.
- There is another concern where youths say they have began what is supposed to be a promising career junior at a hairdressers but reality was very different – picking up cigarette butts etc, no job satisfaction.
- Some of the jobs they have tried are:
  - Shelf Stacking
  - Crew Member at McDonalds & Burger King
  - Drivers Mate
  - B&Q
  - Care Assistant
  - Nursery Nurse
  - Babysitting
  - Cleaner
  - Pot Porter
  - Hairdressing
  - Customer Service Adviser
- It was also mentioned again about the lack of job satisfaction.
- Modern Apprenticeships are good but should pay more.
- Employment Agencies are rubbish.
- Flexi-time is good – not so structured.
- Society looks down on the unemployed (taxpayers stating they pay benefit claimants – they are happy to take it rather than the alternative). No self respect, catch 22. Are they any better off for working?

Interviews:How do you feel at interviews?

- Low confidence/self-esteem, find it hard to make eye contact, find it hard to find the words needed/speech reduces due to nerves. It was felt that the employers are ignorant to their situation. The added strain of benefits is on interviewee's minds.

Views on the interviewing process.

- Interviews are intimidating - it's harder to express themselves due to nerves/lack of confidence. An induction to interview could prove helpful. It's hard to sell yourself, as you know there are other candidates who have a better chance, low self-belief. Accompanied interviews could work – having someone to support you during the interview, filling in the gaps.
- Interview techniques training could prove constructive – again the problem with information was highlighted. Young Care Leavers talked about how interviews can be intimidating added to this is the problem of with how to come off benefits.

**Benefits:**

- The young people stated that there was a lack of quality information, which didn't allow them to make informed decisions about how to come off benefits or be supported into work.
- The problem with benefits was conflicting information between agencies for example "Permitted Work". A more streamlined line and simplified approach it was agreed to aid young people.
- Even if a single mother wants to work, by the time they have forfeited their benefits and paid for childcare, they are no better off financially for working – only more tired. Whatever job they can get is not well paid enough to make it financially viable to return/begin work. There is also the added strain that she is penalised if her partner lives with her, her benefits are either reduced or withdrawn. Meaning she has less support at home.
- Income support allow you to earn through permitted work and do not deduct it from your benefit – yet housing benefit do not allow you permitted work and will deduct the money.
- New Deal is quite good as they pay for any new clothes you may need for an interview. Employers sometimes expect too much of new employees – expecting them to provide steel toe shoes etc which creates another barrier.
- If you have no qualifications you have less chance of getting a job, if you have no experience you have less chance of getting a job, combine the both and you are in for a real struggle. It's a lot to ask someone to risk the security of benefits to struggle on a low income. On top of that benefits are paid weekly, most employers pay monthly, which means that unless they have someone to support them they would have to go a whole month without any money. Employment can be risky and lead you to debt.

**4. ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN**

- Fran to arrange the next focus group.
- Fran to inform Nigel at Streetwise of the date and collect names of interested people.