

Embracing Diversity Progress Report December, 2003

Project Staffing

An Employment Officer has been appointed to lead the Mental Health / Ethnicity team. We have also appointed three Placement Officers to work with young care leavers, ethnic minorities and beneficiaries who have a learning disability.

Progress Towards Project Objectives

Objective 1:

Transfer supported employment to new disadvantaged groups

Young Care Leavers / Ethnicity

Progress

- 6 young care leavers and 4 people from ethnic minorities are presently employed.
- The allocated Employment / Placement Officers for our pilot services continue to develop strong integrated services and networks within the host organisations and with key supporting agencies such as Job Centre Plus, Connexions, the Youth Offending Team and the Asylum team.
- An emerging feature of the support provided to the new client groups is empowering them to determine the type and amount of support they require and the pace at which they want to progress at.
- Beneficiaries, especially young care leavers, are becoming more receptive to accessing job trials and work placements with forum employers, recognising that it will improve their employment prospects.
- The 'open door policy' continues to work well with inactive clients returning to Bury EST for support in finding employment.
- The beneficiary focus groups have recently been launched. Initial meetings were well attended. Discussions focused on beneficiaries talking about their positive and negative experiences in finding and maintaining employment and what they would like the focus groups to achieve.

Challenges and Barriers

- Internal issues within our host partnership organisations threaten effective partnership working.

- Fluctuating motivation levels and difficulties in maintaining regular contact of beneficiaries continues to disrupt supporting beneficiaries into employment.
- Lack of financial gain is acting as a disincentive to finding employment.
- Beneficiaries lacking basic skills, language skills and formal qualifications. The non-recognition of overseas qualifications for asylum seekers / refugees.
- Beneficiaries personal issues / circumstances often taking priority over finding employment.

Job Retention Pilot

Progress

- 32 Beneficiaries have been recruited to the pilot to date. 17 beneficiaries have been supported in retaining their employment and 3 in changing their job.
- The evaluation of the pilot is now underway and is being led by Bury Primary Care Trust.

Challenges

- For the health centre involved in the pilot to host our Job Retention Officer on a full-time basis.
- For Bury EST and Bury PCT to work in partnership to ensure the effective evaluation of the pilot
- To demonstrate the cost effectiveness of the pilot and its value to beneficiaries.
- For Bury PCT to find the funding in order to mainstream the pilot throughout Bury

Objective 2:

To Test a New Human Resources Driven Model of Supported Employment with Employers

Progress

- Since July 2002 44 beneficiaries have secured jobs and 18 beneficiaries have undertaken work placements. 30 beneficiaries are presently employed.
- The Employer forum has sustained an active membership of 35 organisations. 16 beneficiaries have found employment and 7 have found work placements via the forum.

- The employer forum is now coming to the end of its 'Learning and Commitment' phase. It has engendered the support of range of public and private employers to participate in the project and has raised their awareness of managing a diverse workforce. This has been achieved via a combination of presentations from a range of external agencies, forum discussions and individual work with employers.
- We have developed a number of innovative actions with employers. These include piloting the 'working interview'. We are also developing a vocational training pathway into employment for our beneficiaries. This has seen the development of a catering and hospitality training centre within our operational café at Bury Metro's Seedfield centre and the establishment of a partnership with the Catering department of Joseph Holts brewery.
- Building on the work done by our Employer Consultant with individual HR managers, we are now responding to request from employers to brief Directors and managers on managing diversity within their organisations.
- The Embracing Diversity website is now being utilised by participating and prospective employers. This has led to new partnerships being established with Manchester Prisons and the Inland Revenue (East Lancs).

Challenges

The forum is now entering a new phase in its development this will focus on employers developing and exchanging best practice in policy and procedures and the application and evaluation of learning through pilot actions. This presents us with a range of challenges:

- To increase the number of beneficiaries employed by Employer forum members.
- Extend existing pilot initiatives and develop new ones that promote workforce diversity but are flexible enough to be integrated into employers existing HR procedures.
- To increase the number and diversity of employers on the Employer forum.

Objective 3:

Creation of a District Template for Delivering a Welfare to Work through Supported Employment

- Bury EST continues to work in partnership with key local initiatives and agencies including the 'Valuing People' Partnership Board, Job Centre Plus and Lifelong Learning to develop a more co-ordinated joined up working approach to supporting disadvantaged groups into employment.
- As a direct result of lobbying by us and Greater Manchester Connexions Partnership, the LSC co-financing prospectus has included a supported employment pilot.
- We are looking to strengthen our partnerships with Bury Connexions service, the LEA and local training providers by naming them as partners in a co-financing bid to the LSC, which if successful will see the establishment of a supported employment team for young people with disabilities.
- In partnership with Job Centre Plus (Bury and Bolton) we are contributing towards the development of a district employment strategy.
- At a national level we continue to play an active role in the interdepartmental working group on employment for people with learning disabilities which reports into the 'Valuing People' Task Force. Current issues under discussion include greater incentives for people working 5-15 hours per week, local authority recruitment procedures and the inclusion of social policy contract clauses in local authority contracting arrangements.

Thematic Issues

Empowerment

We have continued the process of identifying and reviewing the barriers that beneficiaries face in moving towards employment. This highlights that on accessing our service beneficiaries face multiple barriers to employment with health / disability issues, financial issues, low confidence and job finding / vocational skills being the most prevalent. These barriers were reviewed after a period of accessing the service. It was found that even though significant progress had been made in overcoming low confidence and vocational skills / experience, they had made little or no progress in overcoming barriers relating to Health / Disability issues, lack of basic skills and job finding skills.

Innovation

We are now using feedback from employment reviews with beneficiary workers and their direct line management to promote a continuous 'cycle of learning' to

support company HR representatives in identifying and reviewing diversity initiatives. The employment reviews have been an effective tool in supporting beneficiary workers to maintain and develop their employment status. We plan to increase employer / employee ownership by piloting its integration into employer staff appraisal / support sessions.

In response to staff feedback we are in the process of developing a three stage profiling model which aims to speed up the profiling process and provide a more accurate picture of a beneficiaries abilities, vocational competencies and barriers to employment. It is envisaged that this will enable us to harness beneficiaries initial motivation to find work, provide them with targeted intervention to overcome barriers and a develop more individualised package of support in finding and maintaining suitable employment.

Equal Opportunities

Building on our earlier Employer Equality and Diversity Survey with members of the Employer Forum on Diversity, Manchester Metropolitan University and Bolton Bury Chamber of Commerce have recently conducted a survey with 70 employers across the Bury and Bolton area. Research outcomes highlighted that employers in the Bury and Bolton area are positive about equality and have made some steps to reduce discrimination within their workforce.

Research has recently been conducted to compare the experiences of project beneficiaries' with mental health or learning disabilities who are in employment. It concluded that levels of support provided by Bury EST to beneficiaries and their employers varied. The research raised issues around the disclosure of beneficiaries 'unseen disabilities' and the lack management training and support in relation to disabled workers. The beneficiaries experience of 'fitting in' at work seemed to be determined by how other staff treated them rather than the company culture or the extent to which companies had developed their diversity management policies and procedures.

Project Monitoring and Evaluation

In Bury team away days have provided an opportunity to evaluate, exchange and formalise project learning. They have provided the basis for themed project workplans on beneficiaries, employers and partnerships which reflect the operational targets and developmental needs of the project.

Activities, Outputs and Outcomes

A total of 114 beneficiaries have been recruited to the project so far with a cumulative total of 38 positions of employment secured for beneficiaries so far. Beneficiary focus groups have been established and mapping of client experiences in finding and maintaining employment is underway. It is evident that beneficiaries face multiple barriers in moving towards employment and our initial interventions to support beneficiaries in overcoming them are only partially effective.

The Employer Forum on Diversity continues to thrive as it enters a new stage in its development, which looks to apply the learning of its members to a range of pilot actions and develop their policies and procedures in order to manage diversity more effectively.

At an operational level we have continued to develop a multi-agency approach to supporting beneficiaries into employment. At a strategic level we are working with a range partners to affect progressive policy change at a local, regional and national level.

Innovatory procedures and practices are driven by several factors. Firstly, the need to speed up the process of beneficiary assessment and job matching whilst providing a multi-agency approach in enabling beneficiaries to overcome barriers to finding and maintaining employment. Secondly, the need to engage employer forum members in the piloting of a range of initiatives to develop their ability to take ownership of managing a diverse workforce and the realisation of the benefits it will bring to their business.

The recent research conducted in partnership with the project highlights that employers are beginning to take steps to implement workplace equality however it is clear that the experiences of beneficiary workers is determined by the attitude of other staff rather than company policy and culture.

We are continuing to pilot a procedure for identifying and reviewing the barriers that beneficiaries face in moving into employment. This has highlighted that health / disability issues, financial issues, low confidence and job finding / vocational skills being the most prevalent barriers to work. These barriers have been reviewed after a period of beneficiaries accessing the project. Even though significant progress had been made in overcoming low confidence and vocational skills / experience, there has been little or no progress in overcoming barriers relating to Health / Disability issues, lack of basic skills and job finding skills.