

Embracing Diversity

Embracing Diversity Project: Bury EST Progress Report June 2003

Project Staffing

- The position of Female Placement Officer (Ethnicity) has yet to be filled
- We are in the process of recruiting an Employment Officer to lead the Mental Health / Ethnicity team.
- We are shortly to appoint two Placement Officers

Project Statistics as of 30/04/03

- Cumulative number of beneficiaries: 106
- Beneficiary completers
- Beneficiary leavers: 1
- Beneficiary contact time:
- Cumulative number of employers: 39
- Cumulative number of jobs: 23

Transferring the Model of Supported Employment to New Disadvantaged Groups

Three pilot services are now well established within community based organisations with the aim of transferring the model of supported employment to ethnic minorities, young care leavers and supporting individuals who have health related issues to retain their employment. The allocated Placement Officers have now a working caseload of clients and are developing strong integrated services and networks within the host organisations and with key supporting agencies.

Emerging Issues: Young Care Leavers and Ethnic Minorities

Fluctuating commitment and motivation have emerged as key barriers for these groups. We are responding to this in two ways. Firstly by creating an 'open door policy' so that clients who have difficulty in committing themselves to moving into employment can access the service at a later date. Secondly, we are in the process of shortening the length of time between initial referral and job placement, with the aim of harnessing the initial enthusiasm shown by beneficiaries in order to support them into employment.

Embracing Diversity

Job Retention Pilot

The Job Retention pilot is being conducted in partnership with a local health centre and Bury PCT. The high demand for this service has meant that we are unable to deal with any new referrals at present. Our Job Retention Officer is successfully supporting clients in their return to work by providing a support package of direct intervention via client counseling and negotiating on the client's behalf with their employer. However his ability to utilise the specialised and intensive support provided by other services is being hampered by the inability of these services to respond to the immediate needs of this client group.

It is emerging from negotiations with employers that many do not have a coherent job retention strategy in place and have little awareness and recognition of stress related conditions.

Bury PCT are now leading on an evaluation of the pilot. The aim is to demonstrate its effectiveness in order to secure funding to mainstream the pilot in health centres throughout Bury.

Empowerment

Identifying and Overcoming Barriers

In discussion with beneficiaries, we identify the individual and collective barriers that beneficiaries face in moving towards employment. Our findings so far highlight that low confidence, lack of job finding skills and health/disability issues are the predominant barriers.

Actions to overcome these barriers are identified in the beneficiaries Development Plan. The progress made in overcoming these barriers are reviewed at key stages. This enables us to assess the effectiveness of our intervention and the extent to which the beneficiary has become empowered in the pre-employment phase.

Beneficiary Focus Groups

Four beneficiary focus groups are in the process of being established. Potential members have been approached to request their participation and launch dates have been set. The common thread that will run through the focus groups will be to discuss the barriers and opportunities that beneficiaries face in finding and retaining employment. This will inform what actions can be taken to influence key project stakeholders.

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Engaging Employers

Employer Forum on Diversity

The Employer Forum on Diversity is now well established. It meets on a quarterly basis and has a membership of more than 30 employers from a diverse range of public and private sector organisations.

It is making good progress in its initial 'Employer Learning and Commitment' phase. Forum based actions have focused on:

- Raising employers awareness about supported employment and the benefits of employing a diverse workforce.
- Identifying the barriers and opportunities that employers face in the recruitment and selection of a diverse workforce.
- Presentations by external organisations such as the Commission for Racial Equality have been delivered to raise employers awareness and knowledge about disadvantaged groups and the barriers they face in accessing employment.
- Forum members have been introduced to a range of local employer initiatives, which has enabled them to network with other employers and business support organisations.
- We have conducted an Employer Equality and Diversity Survey with members of the Employer Forum. The findings highlighted that the majority of forum employers said they demonstrated a degree of equality in their policies, procedures and practices, however there appears to be an opportunity to introduce flexibility into their recruitment and selection practices which would attract applicants from more diverse groups. In partnership with Manchester Metropolitan University and Bolton Bury Chamber of Commerce, the survey will now be repeated with 1100 employers across the Bury and Bolton area.

Individualised Work with Employers

The Equality and Diversity Survey completed by each employer is providing a platform to support them in analysing the strategic and operational aspects of their ability to manage a diverse workforce. From this analysis we are developing a range of diversity initiatives that are being tested via the employer recruiting and retaining project beneficiaries. A cumulative total of 23 positions of employment have been secured for beneficiaries in a diverse range of jobs.

One of the key ways in which we are supporting employers in testing diversity initiatives is the establishment of a 'cycle of learning.' This involves a continuous cycle of developing, implementing, monitoring, reviewing and refining diversity practices by engaging Company HR



Embracing Diversity

representatives, line management and beneficiaries who are prospective or actual employees. EST's Employer Consultant and Placement Officers are supporting this process at strategic and operational levels within the company.

This has already led to innovative practice in the recruitment of beneficiaries. Employers are beginning to recognise the value of making adjustments in order to gain an accurate assessment of a beneficiary's suitability for a position. For example using 'accompanied interviews' and 'Working Interviews.'

As part of this process we are conducting a study into the extent to which employers are taking ownership of supporting beneficiary workers in the work place.

Partnerships

Bury EST has created a range of strategic and operational partnerships with key agencies in order to develop a new co-ordinated approach to supporting disadvantaged groups into employment and to influence local, regional and national training and employment strategies.

At a Local Level

We are working in partnership with the Learning Disability Partnership Board, local Bury college, the Connexions Service, Job Centre Plus, the Benefits Agency and the Inland Revenue.

Initiatives

- A Connexions Personal Advisor is to dedicate time to working with beneficiaries.
- We have negotiated an arrangement to work in partnership with Job centre Plus to support beneficiaries into employment who are accessing JSA / New Deal.
- In partnership with Bury and Bolton Job Centre Plus we are contributing towards the development of a local employment strategy.
- Partnerships with the Benefits Agency and Inland Revenue (Tax Credits) have focused on Identifying a liaison staff within agencies, delegating the support clients require in completing benefit applications to the Benefit Agency staff and providing feedback on how their services can be improved.

At a Regional Level

Huw has attended a meeting of the LSC GM External Advisory Group on Equality and Diversity. We are working in partnership with GM Connexions. Having recently attended their SEN group for young people aged 19+, we are considering a joint approach to GM LSC to explore funding arrangements



Embracing Diversity

At a National Level

We are members of an interdepartmental working group on employment for people with learning disabilities. This group is led by the Department of Health and involves senior officials from the DWP and reports into the 'Valuing People' National Support Team. It is considering improvements to the Permitted Work ruling for people with disabilities. We have also provided feedback to the Government Select Committee on 'Employment For All' and to the authors of the Green paper 'Pathways To Work.' We also intend to contribute to the Social Exclusion Unit's project on Employment and Mental Health.

Transnational

Learning from the Zamarat Seminar

- The effective and professional use of the media (radio, TV and the press) in raising the profile of the Zamarat project and their hosting of the seminar.
- The support given by the Zamarat project in supporting beneficiaries in establishing their own businesses.
- The utilisation of trainers / mentors employed by host employers in the A Lungo project was considered an effective way of enabling the employers to take ownership of employing disadvantaged groups.

Project Monitoring and Evaluation

Systems, procedures and practices are operating effectively in monitoring and accounting for the amount and type of contact that project staff spend with beneficiaries and employers.

Action learning is now emerging as an effective and responsive tool for identifying, developing, testing and reviewing project actions. It has provided the basis of Staff 'Away Days' which provide the opportunity to evaluate, exchange and formalise project learning and identify future actions. It is also central to the process of supporting employers in testing out diversity initiatives.