

Bury EST Progress Report November 2002

The sections of this report are consistent with those of the 'Development Partnership Progress Report' that we and our partners Stockport have recently submitted to ECOTEC. Our contribution to that report is detailed below.

Beneficiaries

Number of Starters: 59 (Learning Disability 20 / Mental Health 27/ Physical Disability 2/ Ethnicity 5 / Retention 5/ Young care leavers 0)

Number of completers: 0

Number of on-going: 58

Number of early leavers: 1

Number of employers: 30

Number employed: 9 (LD 3 / MH 6)

Progress Towards Project Aims and Objectives

Objective 1: To transfer the model of supported employment to other disadvantaged groups

- 15 project staff have been provided with induction and training into organisational and project aims, objectives, policies, procedures systems and practices.
- Beneficiary referral guidelines and publicity material has been developed.
- 47 beneficiaries predominately with disabilities have been recruited to the project.
- Profiling of beneficiaries and identification of the barriers they face has been initiated.
- In partnership with community-based organisations, three supported employment initiatives are in various stages of being set up. They will focus on transferring supported employment to the new disadvantaged groups of ethnic minorities, young care leavers and health related job retention issues.

Objective 2: To test a new Human Resources driven model of supported employment

- The project has been successfully marketed to a diverse range of public and private organisations. As a result 30 employers were recruited to participate in the project and form the membership of an 'Employers Forum on Diversity'.

- Work with employers has initially focused on awareness raising of diversity issues and supported employment. We are currently undertaking company analysis and diagnosing employers' awareness of and attitudes to diversity and equal opportunity issues.
- Partnership links are being cultivated with local HR related initiatives that will support employers in managing a diverse workforce.

Objective 3: To write an agreed template or 'district model service' for welfare to work services

- We are in the process of establishing local and regional strategic partnerships with the aim of influencing education, training and employment policy makers to mainstream the good practise learnt from the project.
- Potential members for beneficiary networks are now being identified and themes and agenda for network meetings are being developed.

Objective 4: To share and exchange best practise with our European partners

- The Embracing Diversity partnership recently hosted the first FUTURO transnational partnership technical meeting and subsequent transnational seminar on 'methods and practices.' Staff from each project gained a valuable insight into the different approaches taken and the challenges faced by their European partners.

Equal Opportunities

- As part of the project induction, project staff have undertaken training in equality awareness and implementation of the project's equal opportunities policy.
- A database has been developed to collect the data that is necessary to ensure that beneficiaries are not discriminated against in accessing the project.
- On commencing the project, beneficiaries will be issued with a Clients Charter which informs them of the commitment of service they can expect from Bury EST and the services principles
- On signing up to the project, beneficiary details are inputted into a database to enable the effective monitoring of the project's equal opportunities procedure

- Barriers faced by disadvantaged groups in moving towards and retaining employment are now being identified via beneficiary profiling. Beneficiary action plans have been introduced to identify actions to reduce these barriers.
- Procedures are now being developed to track clients' progress in breaking down barriers and to identify emerging barriers as the client moves into employment.
- The Employers' Forum on Diversity' has provided a platform for us to inform employers about the need for equality and fairness in their recruitment and retention policy, procedures and practices. This is being achieved via awareness raising sessions about diversity management and its value. We are currently conducting a survey of Forum members to diagnose employers' awareness of and attitudes to diversity and equal opportunity issues.

Innovation

A key innovation of the project is to put employers at the centre of an evolutionary process of developing a HRM driven model of supported employment, which is owned by employers. We have taken a number of key steps towards this objective.

- In recognition of the central role employers will play in the project we have appointed an Employer Consultant to initiate and cultivate partnerships with employers and related HR groups and seek to engage them in the project.
- We have established an 'Employers Forum on Diversity'. Initial meetings of the Forum have focused on raising employers' awareness and knowledge of the project's aims and objectives and of the concept managing diversity and its value.
- The process of 'Action Learning' is a key innovative feature of the project. Staff have received training and support materials focusing on the concept and processes of action learning and what type of information they need to capture for the process to be effective.
- Systems and practices for capturing and acting upon project learning have been developed. This has included changing the format of team meetings and staff supervisions to be more learning centred and the development of IT based staff learning files and 'Learning Tree', which are used to document individual and collective project learning.

Empowerment

- Potential members for beneficiary networks are now being identified. Drafts for constitutions, terms of reference and themes and agendas for network meetings are being developed.
- The process of empowering individual beneficiaries has been incorporated into beneficiary profiling and formal reviews. We have begun this process by identifying the barriers that mental health and learning-disabled beneficiaries face in finding and retaining employment.
- Initial analysis indicates that both client groups face a range of common barriers with lack of confidence, job finding skills and health issues being particularly prevalent. However each group had a strong association with several particular barriers. Mental health beneficiaries emphasised financial and attitudinal barriers, whereas learning disabled beneficiaries focused on their lack of basic and vocational skills as major obstacles in them moving into employment.
- If empowerment is to be realised there is a need for those in power to relinquish some of that power by adapting and changing their attitudes, practices and decision-making processes. As previously documented we are in the process of facilitating such change with employers via the 'Employers Forum on Diversity.'

Monitoring and Evaluation

- Workplans are being developed to ensure the effective implementation of the projects aims and objectives at an organisational and sectional level. These are to be reviewed and if necessary revised on a regular basis.
- Systems, procedures and practices have been set up to monitor and account for the amount and type of contact that project staff spend with beneficiaries and employers.
- Data entered on to the learning tree is monitored and evaluated via team meetings and supervisions. They provide the opportunity to capture and evaluate any learning that is taking place and identify any actions that need to be taken. Analysis of the learning provided by individual staff contributes to the management of project staff performance.
- A staff supervision structure and scheduled project meetings have been established to monitor and evaluate individual, team and organisational progress towards meeting project aims and objectives.

Activities, Outputs and Outcomes

- Much of the projects early work has focused on project set up which has involved the recruitment, training and induction of project staff and the development of project systems, procedures and practices.
- The service for ethnic minority groups and young care leavers are in the process of being established within community based organisations of the Asian Development Association of Bury (ADAB) and The NCH 'Extra Mile' project respectively. The ethnic minority service has now been established. However there has been a delay in launching the young care leavers initiative due to staff sickness.
- We have also forged a partnership with the local Primary Care Trust (PCT) to undertake a pilot job retention initiative within a local health centre for patients who are in danger of losing their job due to health issues. The support of key referral individuals and organisations has been secured and our Retention Officer is now holding surgeries at the health centre to discuss referrals. The service is receiving a growing number of referrals requesting immediate intervention in order to support the job retention of a worker with a health need. The brief of the Employment Retention Officer has been expanded in order to meet this need and the officer is presently supporting 5 retention cases.
- Project provision for people with disabilities is being provided by our long established learning disability and mental health teams. The existing client base of these teams is being utilised to provide project beneficiaries.
- The different stages at which the service is at in delivering the project to target groups is reflected in the current beneficiary profile. 54 out of the 59 beneficiaries currently recruited to the project have a disability. It is also this group, which accounts for the 9 beneficiaries who have found employment to date.
- Initial project learning has emerged in several areas. Profiling of beneficiaries has highlighted major difficulties in beneficiaries accessing non-means tested disability benefits with the knock on effect of ineligibility for working tax credits. This provides a major financial disincentive to obtaining employment.
- Initial partnership work with employers suggests there is a need to improve methods of job matching and retaining workers with health issues. This would seem to be consistent with the major learning need identified amongst members of the Employer Forum on Diversity, who on being recruited to the project had little awareness of managing diversity and its value.