

Planning for better services

The Joint Investment Planning for Welfare to Work has kicked off in Bury with the formation of a core group to drive the process forward. The group, led by Lynda Hughes, Service Manager for Disability Services, is going to meet monthly to coordinate the plan.

Other members of the group include Huw from Bury EST and representatives from the Employment Service [Dave Knight], Bury College [Lorraine Dowson] and Bury Healthcare NHS Trust [Clive Meadows].

Representation is planned from users, Bolton Bury Chamber, Careers, Education and other training providers.

The Joint Investment Plan [JIP] will be a three year strategy for reshaping services. It will involve mapping out the current provision and resources before detailed analysis of the services required locally. The JIP should bring an employment focus to the work of all the services involved.

The plan, which needs to be ready by April 2001, will ensure that

there is a coordinated investment in services to assist people who have a disability:

- who want to enter work for the first time
- who wish to re-enter employment, perhaps through retraining
- who want continuing support to remain in work
- who are not ready yet for work but who want to move closer to the world of work.

We'll give an update in the next issue of Connect

National Minimum Wage - One year on

The National Minimum Wage [NMW] has been with us for a year now. The rates are due to rise this year from £3.60 to £3.70 per hour (from 1st October) for workers aged 22 and above and from £3.00 to £3.20 per hour (from 1st June) for workers aged 18 to 21. There is a separate rate for all people receiving accredited training from their employer. This will stay unchanged at £3.20.

There has been much debate as to whether the NMW would deter employers from recruiting people with a disability under the therapeutic earning rules and even make some employees redundant. Bury EST has sought

the going rate for jobs whether or not they were classed as therapeutic and so only a couple of people were affected when it was introduced.

Elsewhere in the country though, it seems that many people have been working unpaid or working 15 hours a week for only £15 income.

The Low Pay Commission contracted the Association for Supported Employment to research the effect of the NMW on the employment of people with a disability. This showed that up to 40% of people with a disability are still earning less than the minimum wage. Though nearly 20% of workers

had a wage rise, many have had to reduce their working hours to stay within the Income Support earnings disregard level of £15 per week. Further research is likely.

We'd like to know your experiences of the minimum wage. Has it improved your quality of life as a worker? If you're an employer, how does its introduction and level affect your ability to recruit people with a disability? Any comments would be treated in confidence and can be passed to Huw. Further information on the NMW is available on 0845 6000 678 or on the internet at www.dti.gov.uk/ir/nmw.

Embracing Diversity #2

Bury EST and Stockport Employment Services are organising a major conference at Old Trafford later this year. Employers are being invited to the event on September 7 which will see keynote speeches and a number of workshops. The event will promote workforce diversity and focus on disability issues.

See page 5 for an update on the Equal Partners project.

Further information about the conference is available from Huw.

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Embracing
diversity

Beyond disability -
See the worker

Anthony gets a 'Working Start' at B&Q

The 'Working Start' project, funded through the European Social Fund, was launched in January 1999. Its aim was to provide work-based assessment, training and a recognised vocational qualification for young people under 25 years old with a learning disability. In total, 12 individuals have accessed the 'Working Start' project. In this article we follow the story of one of those individuals, Anthony Freeman.

Anthony approached Bury EST in September 1999 requesting support in finding a job. After gaining an initial assessment of Anthony's abilities using a vocational profile, it was decided that he would benefit from attending Bury EST's active assessment centre based at Chadwicks of Bury Ltd.

authentic environment, it enabled us to complete a comprehensive and concrete assessment of Anthony's vocational skills and potential for development."

After completing an 8 week period of assessment, a vocational review meeting was held to discuss the work skills that Anthony had demonstrated and to decide on his future. The conclusions drawn from the review are summed up by Tony; "The active assessment left me in no doubt about Anthony's motivation and commitment to finding and keeping a job. It also highlighted some viable career options for Anthony. It also helped us to identify his work skill competencies so that we could match him up with a job that reflects his talent for practical work."



The concept of active assessment was developed to supplement Bury EST's existing profiling process. It is based on the principle that the best way to assess a person's skills and attitudes is by observing the person in a workplace. By providing space within their premises, Chadwicks of Bury enabled Bury EST to establish a simulated work environment and put the idea of active assessment into practice. As Tony Henson, Placement Officer, commented, "Because the active assessment provides a real work experience in an

After canvassing local employers, a 16 week work placement was negotiated with the B&Q Warehouse in Bury. Under the watchful eye of Roy Compton, who doubles as a customer advisor and "buddy" to new staff, Anthony developed his skills as a customer advisor in the gardening department. By the end of his placement he had become a valued member of staff. This is summed up by his colleague, Pauline Bailey, "He's got a nice way about him with customers. He is very willing and



Anthony and Marcus at work

straight away if asked." His contribution to the customer advisor team has also not gone unnoticed by the section manager, Marcus Hedge. He recognised that Anthony's ability to undertake the customer advisor role to a good standard was an asset to B&Q and offered him a job as a customer advisor. "Anthony has proved himself" commented Marcus "and this job is a way of rewarding him."

However, for Anthony the offer of a job is not the only reward for his participation on the 'Working Start' project. "I feel that things have really improved for me since I started using the services of Bury EST. Not only have I found a job, I have become much more confident and independent." These sentiments are echoed by Lorraine Diggle, Anthony's mother. "We are pleased that Anthony's abilities are being recognised at last, and with the help of Bury EST he is now getting somewhere."

For more information, please contact Lee Salad on 0161 253 6286



Anthony with trainer, Tony, at the B&Q Warehouse

Employer Focus LOOT

LOOT pioneered the first free-ads paper in the UK. It was first published in London in March 1985 by a staff of 9 people. Today, the LOOT Group employs more than 900 people, in the UK and abroad. In fact the LOOT Group consists of a dynamic, enterprising workforce that has kept LOOT as the only independent UK company to stay among the top 100 fastest growing companies throughout the past 8 years.

LOOT has however achieved success without sacrificing the values and underlying principles, upon which the company was formed. Instead they have used these

ethics to their advantage. They do not consider LOOT to be a typical company but as a community, which continually matures and expands because it is based on simple, clear and fair principles with which all the members of the community are happy. The end product is a public service, whereby LOOT offers a simple, clear and fair means of selling, buying and exchanging goods.

LOOT have won many awards and much recognition, not only for their excellent product, but also for their innovative approach to looking after the people who work for them. These include:

- Double award winners of the prestigious Northwest Health Challenge Award.
- The Rubicon Employer of the Year Award.
- Investors in People recognition.
- Positive about Disabled People employer.
- Free fresh fruit and daily massage available for all staff.



Jonathan and Colleagues

"I don't spend my time looking at the bottom line - as long as there are smiles, profits will go up"

David Landau
Chairman - LOOT Ltd

Jonathan Colman...Customer Services Advisor

Jonathan joined LOOT in February 1998 as a Trainee Ad Taker. Initially, we had reservations regarding his concentration and ability to absorb large amounts of information - both pre-requisites of the post. On this basis we decided we couldn't offer Jonathan employment.

Jonathan wrote to us asking us for clarification and re-emphasised his own skills and interest in the post. This led us to reconsider and we realised the formal interview was not enough time to gauge whether a person with a disability would be competent to do the job.

One of our department trainers, Philippa Coslett, offered to take responsibility for Jonathan's training and introduction to the company workforce. Due to her enthusiasm and commitment throughout the induction period, coupled with Jonathan's ability and competence, he successfully completed his probationary period.

From day one, Jonathan's supervisors and work colleagues have also been fully supportive and understanding of the adjustments necessary for a person with learning difficulties. This has allowed Jonathan to thrive in his role and we now have, after over 2 years with us, a committed and very reliable individual, who is an ideal ambassador for the company.

Jonathan loves working at LOOT, and his role within the company. He is particularly pleased that he has recently been given extra responsibility, in the form of entering international advertisements.

"Jonathan's introduction into the department has taught us a great deal about the types of adjustments we are able to make for a disabled person. It has also brought home to us that it is often the attitudes disabled people encounter and the environment, in which they live and work which disables them."

Christine Campbell
Free-Ads

He stressed that he thinks the people at LOOT are brilliant and the people he works alongside very friendly. He also feels that he had a good relationship with the trainers, his team leader, and manager. He is particularly pleased with the staff benefits and likes to take advantage of the free fruit, papers and drinks.

The annual staff parties have been a particular highlight of his time at LOOT, together with, of course, the moment he passed his probationary period and was offered a permanent position. Jonathan, even when pressed, could not recall a single bad day during over 2 years at LOOT. He said that on the odd occasion when he has had to be spoken to about his behaviour, this has been done fairly and he has not been upset about it in any way.

Jonathan feels that working for LOOT has very much improved his life by allowing him to feel he is doing something of value. "It's good to get out of the flat and come into work with lots of nice people." Jonathan sees his future with LOOT and even though he has been doing the job for some time now, he is still as enthusiastic about it as the day he started.



Jonathan at work

How are we doing?

Have your say!

As part of the 'Best Value' process, Bury EST is to set standards of performance against which we can be assessed. We want to consult with users of the service before setting 'performance indicators' which will show us how well we're doing. We are keen to ensure that our service meets the needs of potential workers, carers, referring agencies and local employers and so we want to involve as many people as possible in the process.

We recognise that not everyone has time for these sorts of meetings.

Previous attempts to form a User Group have been unsuccessful so we're going to try something different by organising a series of consultation meetings with separate focus groups including employers, referring agencies and potential workers and their families.

We will be asking these groups to consider the sorts of standards of service provided at present and how you think we should be judged in the future. The exact indicators will vary according to the needs of each focus group but could include things like waiting times, number of people entering work, job retention rates and so on.

It has been suggested that 2 focus groups be formed to represent people with a disability who use our service. These could be split into mental health and learning disability service groups with approximately 6 persons in each.

They may consider what is working at the moment and suggest areas for improvement and generally advise us on how they would like to become more involved with improving the service. It is anticipated that the meetings will be held in late Summer.

User Events



The 'Chance to Work' Conference

'Chance to Work'

The 'Chance to Work' conference took place at the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester on April 12th and was attended by 5 users from William Kemp Heaton, Wheatfields and Whittle Pike. The event, funded by Stockport MBC and the European Social Fund, was aimed at people with a learning disability who might be interested in finding paid work and want to know what this involves.

150 delegates attended from across the North West to hear a variety of talks and video presentations. A number of Supported Employment agencies, including Bury EST, put up exhibition stands to show the sorts of services available.

A video of the conference is being produced and is on order. If anyone wishes to view it, please contact Tony Henson on 0161 253 6286.

'Breaking the Barriers'

Service Users, Steve Jackson and Stephen Aiken went to the 'Breaking the Barriers' conference in Manchester on May 31st. The conference aimed to gain the views of disability organisations and individuals on employment issues.

Delegates examined workplace discrimination and the barriers which prevent people accessing open employment. Steve Jackson commented, "At least there are people out there pushing things. I enjoyed taking part in this conference and would like to go to others in the future."

The conference was part of the PANDORA project, promoted by Toucan Europe and funded by the European Social Fund.

For more details, please view www.online.org.uk/pandora.

Weblinks

We've compiled a few useful weblinks for those of you using computers and hope to feature a few in each issue: this time it's Government and policy links.

<http://195.74.198.21/ebnsc>
European Business Network for Social Cohesion

<http://pipe.ccta.gov.uk/coi/coipress.nsf>
Access to all the Government's press releases

www.afse.org.uk
Information about the Association for Supported Employment

www.bitc.org.uk
Business in the Community's site

www.disability.gov.uk
Government site with a range of links on disability issues

www.dti.gov.uk/ir/nmw
Information on the National Minimum Wage

www.efd.org.uk
Employers Forum on Disability: Lots of information and services

www.europa.eu.int/index-en.htm
The European Commission's main site

www.hse.gov.uk
Home page of the Health & Safety Executive

www.ohn.gov.uk/ohn/school/workplace/work2.htm
Information about the Healthy Workplace initiative

www.open.gov.uk
Government information on all sorts of stuff with links to each Department

www.regen.net
Comprehensive information about social and economic regeneration.

www.worksupport.com
American-based resources around disability and diversity issues

Equal Partners for Change

EMPLOYER COUNCIL

'Equal Partners', the follow up to our New Horizons project, is well underway. The project is being jointly promoted with Stockport Employment Services and we are working closely with an advisory council of employers to identify methods of engaging employers more effectively.

CD & VIDEO

We have contracted Centre Screen, which has a strong track record for producing striking multimedia materials, to produce a marketing CD-ROM and video aimed at informing employers about the benefits of Supported Employment and the merits of employing people with a disability. It will be ready in time for being launched at the Embracing Diversity conference in Manchester on September 7th and 8th.

MILAN VISIT

Our partnership with the Bank of Milan will be strengthened by a visit to their 'laboratory' at the end of June. We will be accompanied by representatives of the Cooperative Bank and Arden Packaging to see how employer involvement is encouraged there. A document describing this will be available following the visit.

SEMINAR

We will be discussing the lessons from the Milan visit with the advisory council at a seminar in Stockport on July 6th. The seminar will welcome new members to the council and we are hopeful that LOOT,

Kellogg's, Cooperative Retail Society and ASDA Stores will be participating in addition to the existing members; Arden Packaging, Cooperative Bank, House of Fraser, Stockport Healthcare Trust and Whitbread Plc.

CONFERENCE

A fuller report will be issued before the Embracing Diversity conference planned for Old Trafford, Manchester on September 7th, which features presentations by representatives of ASDA and B&Q as well as key speeches from consultant, Phil Friend and BBC correspondent, Peter White. We will be announcing another major speaker shortly.

FOLLOW-UP DAY

The event will promote workforce diversity and focus on disability issues. A follow up day is being organised for service providers on September 8th and Phil Friend has agreed to speak again on this day. It is hoped to attract many supported employment agencies around the country to discuss methods of working with employers more effectively.

PUBLICITY

The project will also be publicised through articles in specialist journals. Bury EST has recently had articles published in 'Life in a Day' and 'Open Mind' magazines. The project is funded by Bury and Stockport Metropolitan Councils and the European Social Fund.

THERAPEUTIC EARNINGS CHECKS

The Benefits Agency seem to have launched a crackdown on therapeutic earnings in Bury. Amidst rumours of people abusing the system, officials have been setting time limits for entitlement to therapeutic earnings which seem to vary widely according to the individual.

Bury EST Manager, Huw Davies, said, "They seem to be only interested in progressing people into work but the regulations allow therapeutic work in order to maintain health. Work is consistently named by people as a key indicator of a healthy lifestyle and therapeutic work can keep people in touch with the labour market."

Database is a real asset

Bury EST and Computing Help Ltd have been working together to produce a tailor-made database system for Supported Employment agencies. Asset has facilities for recording all contacts with users and employers, as well as staff details. The system is being widely marketed and has generated a lot of interest from other services up and down the country because of the detailed activity reports which can be produced at the touch of a button.

Further information from Huw Davies at Bury EST.

Computing **HELP** Limited
in association with
Bury EST
Stockport Metropolitan Council

*A Project Management Tool
for Supported Employment
Services*

the
asset
system

access system supported employment and training

News in brief....

CAFE-BAR SEEKS ASSISTANTS

The cafe-bar is looking for more assistants to help with the catering service there. 8 people are currently involved, with 3 undertaking NVQ's in conjunction with Bury College. The team is now able to provide catering for events at Parsons Lane and tuck boxes for workplaces.

A small training payment is made to those users taking part. For further information, please contact Katrina at Bury EST or Allison at Parsons Lane on 0161 253 6556.

EISE

Trafford Mental Health Forum have set up a new project, the Employment Information & Support Exchange [EISE], to provide people with mental health needs with a database of employment, training and voluntary opportunities. Funded by the Health Action Zone, EISE will provide services to people and agencies in Salford, Trafford and Manchester. Further information is available from Moira or Chris on 0161 912 4205.

WICKED ISSUES

Bury EST presented a workshop at the Wicked Issues conference in Manchester last March. The focus was on job retention with particular emphasis on mental health issues.

WHERE WERE YOU?

Because we're quite a small team, we have to make sure we're spending our time wisely. Between January and May this year, we made 59 appointments to see clients regarding their wish to find employment. 30 of these appointments were not kept. One person has rearranged 5 appointments but still not turned up! We try to give reassurance, particularly to people coming to see us for the first time, and encourage people to bring

a friend or support staff. Is there anything we can do to make this process easier? If so, we'd like to hear from you.

WHERE WERE YOU? [2]

The mental health network, EON, met in early April to plan future events but the meeting was poorly attended. The network consists of agencies which assist people in accessing training and employment and ran a series of successful events last year. A number of agencies have been in touch and, undeterred, a future meeting is being planned.

NEW DEAL

Huw attended a national consultation day on the New Deal for Disabled People at Birmingham in May. The event sought opinion on how the NDDP should develop and it appears that there will now be a gradual roll-out rather than a national launch.

The evaluation of pilot projects, perhaps unsurprisingly, found that the most successful schemes had skilled staff, strong leadership and pre-existing networks and partnerships and models of provision which looked very much like Supported Employment.

NEW OFFICES

We've had council approval to extend our offices at Ribchester Drive. The expansion, subject to planning permission, will see all our staff located at this site by late Autumn.

MENTAL HEALTH & SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Bury EST will be represented on a group looking at social exclusion issues and mental health. The implementation of the National Service Framework and Joint Investment Plan for mental health has a number of sub-groups and Huw will be attending the Standard 1 subgroup which will examine social exclusion issues.

GOODWILL INC.

The DfEE organised a day long seminar at their headquarters in London in May, attended by Huw. The event was led by staff from Goodwill Inc, an American federation of charitable organisations with distinct ideas about welfare reform and the coordination of assistance to people who have a disadvantage in accessing work.

Other agencies including Remploy, Shaw Trust, King's College, Disability Matters and the Employers' Forum on Disability were represented.

NEXT ISSUE

We're looking for articles and ideas for our next issue. If you have something you want to write about, please send it in.

Bury EST is funded by BuryMetro Social Services Department, The Department of Health, and the European Social Fund.



A reminder of our current staff:

Huw Davies

Manager

Trish Hilton

Clerical Officer

Mental Health Service

Rod Goodwin

Employment Officer

Katrina Sartini

Employment Officer

Lorraine Robinson

Placement Officer

Learning Disability Service

Lee Salad

Employment Officer

Anne Clarke

Placement Officer

Dennie Ford

Placement Officer

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