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Findings

Background

EQUAL is a European Social Fund transnational initiative for developmental projects working on social disadvantage and equality of opportunity in accessing employment.

The FUTURO partnership works with employers and people from a range of disadvantaged backgrounds to pilot schemes to improve recruitment and retention in order to promote the employment of a diverse workforce.

The FUTURO partnership consists of three projects;

Embracing Diversity in the UK, a Lungo in Italy and Zamarat in Spain and the partners meet to share findings and good practice. The fourth transnational seminar of the project was held on the 12th - 14th November 2003 at the Midland Hotel in Manchester with themed workshop discussions taking place. This page highlights the conclusions of the Manchester seminar and will be followed by papers on **“Strategy”** and **“Engaging With Employers”**

Embracing **Diversity**



Establishing **The Partnership**

- There must be clear evidence of need in the community and local support should be established.
- Identify organisations existing locally, which could be involved.
- Create a database of organisations and resources so staff are able to signpost beneficiaries to appropriate services within and outside of the Partnership. Data sharing protocols and guidance with regard to Data Protection and Confidentiality are needed.
- Establish clear operational leadership and facilitation of the Partnership.
- Workplans should be drawn up to provide clear aims and objectives.
- An Executive group should be set up to monitor and review the Partnership, consisting of people who reflect the diversity of the membership, including beneficiary representation.
- Agencies should sign up to the project. Their commitment needs to be formalised.
- Agencies must be flexible in adapting to their role within the Partnership
- A forum should be established to represent the whole range of Health, Economic, Employment and Social Care services.

Sharing **Information**

- Roles within the service must be complementary and transparent so beneficiaries can move within the service without duplication.
- A common identity and branding would re-iterate the common goals and objectives
- The project should be publicised at all levels within the Partnership.
- Sharing of information should be with the beneficiaries' permission.
- The Partnership must know what it has achieved through regular monitoring.
- At least some workers and organisations could be based within the community and be directly accessible to beneficiaries.
- Use local voluntary organisations to encourage beneficiary trust in the Partnership.
- Information to be passed to the beneficiary so he or she understands the whole picture and how organisations work together on their behalf.
- Share information with constant updates across the transnational Partnership including staff at all levels.

Example Partnership Working (**Embracing Diversity**)

The Partnership in Bury is especially strong between the Employment Support team and voluntary organisations. Some Employment Officers are located at voluntary agencies within the community in order to provide a co-ordinated centre for beneficiary support. This provides, for example, care-leavers with a one-stop shop where they can receive support, get advice and meet Employment Officers to discuss work issues. The service becomes more accessible to the community and it helps promote trust in the organisation in order to enhance the possibilities of supporting people into employment. It also improves the relationship between different agencies, developing co-ordinated working and the sharing of information.

Engaging **Beneficiaries**

- Ensure agencies have access to a range of contacts and an awareness of support agencies involved with the individual. Formalise that information.
- Publicise the service in a creative and pro-active way. Get information out into the community targeted at people with identified needs through posters, community events and media and through locally based organisations.
- All information must be in accessible formats.
- Agencies need to be flexible in order that beneficiaries are able to get information at the appropriate time and place, for example at school or community centres.
- Staff must know the people they are going to be working with. It needs to be individualised, continuous, one-to-one support.

Development

- The beneficiary should be encouraged to engage in social activities within the community in order to develop confidence and self esteem. These activities should be relaxed, informal and relevant to the interests and needs of the beneficiaries.
- Employing mentors who have similar experiences as the beneficiary can be inspiring.

Example Café Circle (Zamarat)

As part of the Zamarat project, beneficiaries and their families are invited to attend a weekly gathering at the Café Circle. This provides an environment for people to mingle with other beneficiaries, their family members and employees of the organisation. These sessions are used as a social occasion and also as a learning experience with talks and discussions taking place. The aim is to encourage interest and participation in the project and for people to share different backgrounds in order to increase understanding and sensitivity to cultural differences. It also helps to identify some of the beneficiaries' needs in advance of the job search and for them to establish friendship and bonds, providing them with a social network.

Empowerment and **Motivation**

- The beneficiary must feel that the process is a positive experience, which helps them to grow in confidence and feel more able to move towards employment.
- The key worker must build a relationship with the beneficiary and gain their trust.
- Agencies must be positive and concentrate on what people can do rather than concentrating on what they can't do.
- Adopt a multi-agency approach. Use the resources of the agencies within the Partnership and outside if necessary.

Example Personal Development Plans (Embracing Diversity)

PDP's are developed through continual listening and learning, with the individual's wishes and aspirations at the centre of the plan. The aim is to shift the focus of power and control to the individual and to help that person get a better life on his or her own terms. The beneficiary chooses the setting, style and timing of meeting and who to involve in the process and is consulted throughout. The plan is also developed in partnership with appropriate bodies such as the person's family and community, voluntary organisations, professionals, and carers. It is positive, focusing on the capacities and abilities of the person while looking at the support required and what is possible. It is an ongoing process looking towards future aspirations with set goals and ongoing reviews and updates to sustain progress. The Personal Development Plan is included in a pack, which the person keeps with information about the service. Accessibility is vital and information can be provided in audio format on tape or CD, while the text can be translated or converted into symbols. Future plans include using digital photography and audio/visual, interactive CD ROMS.

- Assessment must not be too narrow. It must not just look at work but needs a holistic view seeing the whole of the person's life and identifying barriers. Friends and family must be involved where the beneficiary gives permission.
- Share information with the beneficiary – it is their plan.
- Each beneficiary should be assisted to develop their own action plans.
- Agencies must focus on realistic, achievable outcomes.
- The plan must be individualised and person-centred and must be monitored.
- The plan must be creative and flexible, looking at relevant objectives.
- The plan should take into account the beneficiary's culture and aspirations: what they want to achieve and the broad range of support needed to get there.
- The main worker or advisor has a key role and must develop an overview through co-ordination and continuity. This person becomes a single point of contact.

TRAINING

Maximising Potential

- Identify how the person learns best in order to maximise their potential to enter as high as possible on the job ladder.
- A reliable and accessible system is required for validating overseas qualifications.
- Get away from labels for certain groups and treat training needs as individual to each person.
- Make training accessible at a convenient time and location.
- The training provider must be creative and have a belief in the beneficiary's ability to succeed.
- Make the training relevant to the labour market and very clearly working towards employment. Identify local skill shortages in order to direct training.
- The best place to learn a job is in the workplace.
- Create a partnership between education, training and business.
- Ensure certificates are of value to employers.
- Publicise innovations through networks. Share and exchange good practice.

Ownership by **Employers**

- Involve employers and accredit learning undertaken in the workplace where possible.
- Try to use employment practices existing within the company and adapt to needs.
- Training should be as discrete and natural as possible.
- Bring Education, Training and Support Agencies and Employers together.
- Employers should receive incentives for providing training in the workplace, for example to provide cover for staff.

Example Literacy Programme (a Lungo)

These are personalised for individuals or small groups in order to provide low level training in basic skills and social and general culture.

The sessions incorporate between 30 and 100 hours and take place in an accessible place such as someone's home, providing a relaxed and informal environment. There is an agreed timetable, which takes account of the level of existing skills, but it is flexible and can be changed during the learning process. The results for the beneficiary include acquiring basic skills that have a positive effect on their daily social situation, support and encouragement towards gaining a job and increased confidence and a feeling of belonging. The success of the project is due to constant, continuous and discrete monitoring. The agencies work in partnership, sharing the planning of the programme and the creation of the right environment by considering the venue, relationships between the people involved and motivational factors.

FINDING SUITABLE EMPLOYMENT

Individualised approach for clients **and employers**

- Look at jobs that will allow for social integration, workplaces with a good culture and a supportive environment.
- Offer a range of options, including self-employment as an alternative, and be flexible.
- Conventional interview methods do not suit everyone and reasonable adjustments may be required.
- Consider "working interviews" as an alternative way for the employer to accurately gain an insight into the person's competence and suitability for the job.
- Employers need to be encouraged to engage directly with the community.
- Employers need to be pro-active in encouraging diversity. They need to look at application issues such as the accessibility of their forms and processes.
- It is vital to have confidence that the beneficiary has, or can learn in a reasonable time, the skills required to do the job.
- Beneficiaries must receive the same terms and conditions and pay as anyone else.
- There is a case for considering financial incentives for employers in circumstances where it is justified by reduced levels of productivity and increased support needs.

Choice and **Control**

- Beneficiaries often have little autonomy and the employment process should provide a framework for empowerment.
- Choices should be based on information, experience and the beneficiary's preferences.
- Identify individual barriers to employment and concentrate on removing them.
- The job-finding process is part of career development and beneficiaries need to be able to progress, either through promotion or change of job if they wish.
- There needs to be an "open door" policy so that, if the job doesn't work out, a process must be used to learn from the experience, reviewing the support and preparation required.
- We must address the issue of employability and "work readiness". People are seen to be ready when they want to work. The issue is one of motivation and commitment rather than qualifications.

The Pivotal Role **of staff**

- Staff have to believe in the beneficiary's skills and expect positive outcomes.
- Expectations should be high but achievable.
- There must be a belief that people can change.
- Consistency of contact is required between the client and the agency and the employer and the agency. This can be achieved by using named staff or account managers.
- Staff should build a relationship based on trust and a rapport with clients and employers.

Resources

- Job finding needs a higher profile within mainstream services. The funders of mainstream employment and education services must believe that most disadvantaged people can work.
- Inform the mainstream of innovation and success in order to influence it.

Example

Self Employment (Zamarat)

The Zamarat project offers extra employment options by helping people who express an interest in setting up their own business to achieve that goal. They use a rounded approach by looking at the beneficiary's personality and skills while also analysing the business idea. They help the beneficiary to obtain funding and a technical team looks at all areas of support that might be required, for example, childcare or specific training. The Social Worker provides the beneficiary with emotional support while practical help with processes such as finding and securing premises is given. Further help is provided to find funding for the initial investment and by inviting the media to the opening of the new business. Once the business is set up emotional and practical support continues.

SUPPORT IN THE WORKPLACE

- Support should be discrete, sensitive to employer/employee needs and avoid dependency.
- We should support the employer and the employee, acting as a facilitator.
- Workplace support should be adapted to individual circumstances and can take many different forms. For example it can take place onsite, offsite, and offer emotional and/or practical assistance.
- Mentoring and Peer Support: companies can mentor companies while workers can mentor workers.
- Monitor progress and intervene early if there is a problem.

Employer

- We should move towards supporting the employer to manage the employee. They need to take ownership of the individual as their employee.
- It's about good management techniques. Let managers manage and not rely on agencies to resolve problems. We need to make information and guidance available.
- Raise awareness of disadvantage and stigma issues with supervisors and co-workers.
- We need systems to fund support and mentoring in the workplace. Employers could potentially provide this support if they were funded to do so.
- A consortium of social and commercial partners could provide employer training.
- Support employers at different levels of the organisation.

Employee

- Some employees need additional support to learn the job and integrate into the company. Our role is to arrange whatever support is needed and ensure it is provided.
- Some people need ongoing emotional support out of the workplace.
- Self-employed beneficiaries should be offered emotional, legal, physical and financial support.
- Individuals will need different levels of support but we should aim to offer the lowest effective level.

Further Action

- We need to be clear about the cost to society of people not working and be able to move funding across the education, health and employment sectors.
- Publicise and quantify the business case for diversity and job retention using case studies.
- Trade unions have a potentially powerful role in workplace partnerships.
- Create partnerships between employers, chambers, unions and business support agencies – engage in a co-ordinated way.
- Funding is required for workforce training and business support. We must consider different ways of using money to provide support.

Example Access to Work (Embracing Diversity)

This is a UK government programme, which provides advice and information to disabled people and employers. Through Jobcentre Plus, Access to Work will pay the costs of extra support a person may need at work because of long-term illness or other disability, or make a substantial contribution to them. The scheme offers help in a flexible way to suit individual needs and each person benefits from tailored solutions to the barriers they face in the workplace. Access to Work applies to any paid job over 16 hours per week; permanent or temporary, including self-employment. It's available for people who are looking for work, starting a new job, in work or who are self-employed. It can provide funds for communication support such as an interpreter, special equipment, alterations to buildings or the working environment, travel to work and also provision for one-off items that are required.

Further Information:

For further information about EQUAL and the projects in the **UK, Spain** and **Italy** contact:

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