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Charlotte Spencer

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Employment: what we have learned



Charlotte Spencer
Department of Health, England

Abstract

This article summarises work done under Valuing People Now to improve employment prospects and outcomes for people with learning disabilities in England. It summarises the barriers to improvements and explains how understanding these barriers has helped to unlock solutions and new approaches.

Key words

Valuing People; employment; learning disabilities; intellectual disability

Introduction

It is clear from many UK (and international) examples that people with learning disabilities can secure and retain jobs that employers value. With the right support, this applies to people with severe impairments as much as those with milder disabilities; see www.valuingpeoplenow.dh.gov.uk for case study examples.

Government policy is that people with very complex needs should not be excluded from work, although clearly the challenges here are even greater. This is the focus of the Sustainable Hub of Innovative Employment for People with Complex Needs (Cooper & Ward, this issue).

Yet few people with learning disabilities are in employment. In 2009–10 just 6.4% of adults in England aged 18–64 and known to councils with adult social services responsibilities were in paid employment at the time of their assessment or latest review. Of adults known to social services but not in receipt of services, 12.9% were in paid employment, compared with 2.2% for those in residential care (NHS Information Centre, Social Care and Mental Health indicators from the National Indicator Set, Provisional further analysis England, 2009–10). The Labour

Force Survey puts the overall employment rate for disabled people at 46%, but the average employment rate for people with 'severe or specific learning difficulties' (a broader category than those known to social services) over the past two years is far lower, at 15%. This average is taken over the last eight quarters of data available from the quarterly Labour Force Survey.

The cross-government Valuing People Employment Team (resourced by departments of Health, Work & Pensions, Business, Innovation & Skills, Education and the Office for Disability Issues) has been investigating what it will take to change this and attempting to tackle the barriers, in particular through:

- **the Getting A Life demonstration sites**, driving whole-system change so that young people with severe learning disabilities get a paid job and a full life when they leave education; 12 core sites plus newer 'associate' sites
- **Project Search internships**, a partnership of a host employer, supported employment provider and education provider who offer a year of supported work experience and training on the employer site (government evaluation of demonstration sites)

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- **the Jobs First project**, where people with learning disabilities in seven local authorities refocus their lives on employment goals and use their personal social care budget, along with other appropriate funding such as education monies or Access to Work, to buy the support they need to get and keep paid work
- **campaigns and training to increase work aspirations and expectations** among people with learning disabilities, parents and family carers, education and post-16 education staff, health and social care staff, midwives, paediatricians and early years staff as well as NHS employers.

More information on these initiatives can be found in the Department of Health's (2010a) report. Evaluations of Getting a Life, Jobs First and Project Search will be published in 2011.

Barriers that are not quite what they seem

We have found that the barriers are not always quite what people assume.

The benefits system is often cited as the single biggest barrier, and it is widely believed that people with learning disabilities will be worse off in work due to loss of benefits. While it is true that this fear is a major deterrent, the reality should not be; the Government has made clear that most people with learning disabilities will receive significantly more money in work of 16 or more hours per week than on out-of-work benefits. In cases where the amount by which

individuals would be financially better off in work is small, the answer – in our view – is to increase the number of hours worked, rather than advise people against employment.

We are often told that employer prejudice is a factor, but we have found that, once employers understand how people with learning disabilities could benefit their business (often a gap) and are connected to high-quality employment support (also a gap), many will respond positively to recruiting this group. This is in line with international evidence, particularly in the USA (Beyer & Robinson, 2009). Project Search employers have found quantifiable business benefits (such as recruitment savings) from including people with learning disabilities in their workforce. NORSE Commercial Services reports that Project Search has saved it £5500 a year in recruitment costs and £16,000 a year in overtime payments, and the Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital says the model saves it £6000 a year in recruitment costs. Other employers we have encountered are equally positive (**Box 1**, below).

We regularly hear from professionals that families' low aspirations for their learning-disabled relatives are an obstacle to their accessing work. As most people with learning disabilities live with their families, it is true that family encouragement is crucial to people's work ambitions. In-depth work with families in the Getting A Life sites has found, however, that parents tend to have high aspirations for their children; their low expectations are of what the 'system' will enable.

Box 1: Working at Legoland

Legoland Windsor has worked with the supported employment service of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead to identify areas where roles could be carved from unmet need or staff were difficult to recruit or retain. Using work trials rather than the usual assessment centre, Legoland Windsor has recruited 17 staff with learning disabilities in a wide variety of jobs. Six of them work more than 16 hours per week and many more plan to increase their hours to this amount. Martin Green, Human Resources Assistant Manager, says the approach is 'extremely successful for Legoland Windsor'.

At present, individual budgets and support planning do not generally prioritise employment. This causes individuals to make choices, such as about housing and how they spend their time, that move them further away from employment. Since the benefits of employment are well documented, in these cases 'choice and control' does not lead to better life outcomes, as is intended, but the opposite.

There is a funding gap for employment support and job coaching; our employment demonstration sites report long waiting lists (often over a year) for local supported employment services. Yet considerable sums are spent on activity that does not in practice help many people to get jobs. Getting A Life has found that careers services point young people with learning disabilities to further education rather than employment, and this further education is usually classroom-based learning and qualifications, when evidence shows that on-the-job learning is more likely to lead to work for people with learning disabilities (Beyer & Robinson, 2009). Day services are often not work-focused, or activity is limited to volunteering and is not a pathway to paid work. **Box 2**, below, shows how wasteful this approach is.

Education staff in some Getting A Life sites have admitted reluctance to promote work through the curriculum, work experience and in transition plans when they suspect the local market will not have sufficient supported employment routes available.

Solutions

Happily, understanding these barriers helps provide the key to solutions.

The whole-system pathway to employment

This approach, developed and now being implemented by the Getting A Life sites (DH, 2010a), sets out what is needed during the transition to adult services for young people with learning disabilities to access employment. It includes career planning from school year 9, work experience from year 10, supported employment agencies working with schools, and post-16 options such as internships, supported self-employment, supported employment, apprenticeships and employment-focused further education. See **Box 3**, below.

Box 2: Examples from Getting A Life and Jobs First sites (names have been changed)

John, 21, has just completed two years of residential college following a special school. Since the age of 18 John has wanted an office job, but he did no work experience for this at school or college, and at college there was no planning for what he would do when he left. John's education from age 18–21 cost £38,666 per year on average.

Jim, 43, has a current social care package of £26,000 per year, based on his entitlement to attend a day centre five days per week. However, as he does not like the day centre and rarely goes, this funding is currently wasted. Jim would like to work in a hospital full-time.

In contrast, we estimate that the total employment support John and Jim would need to secure a sustained job outcome would cost no more than £11,000 each. (This is based on emerging findings in the Jobs First sites. The Jobs First evaluation, due in autumn 2011, will examine this in more detail.)

Box 3: Straight to employment

Gwyn (not his real name) is now 20 and his family got involved in Getting A Life while he was still at school. Gwyn decided he wanted to get a job straight from school. At age 16 he used his personal social care budget to buy job support from Mencap Pathways and did supported work experience to explore options. Gwyn now has two paid jobs, as a caretaker and as a cleaner. He is the first young person from his school to leave and go straight into paid employment rather than college.

Prioritising employment in individual budgets and support planning

See **Box 4**.

Using money differently

Money can be used differently and resources be refocused on employment as part of local authority service reviews in response to fiscal constraint (**Box 5**, below).

Commissioning local employment routes for when young people leave school

See **Box 6**, below.

Making day services genuinely work-focused

See **Box 7**, opposite.

Bringing together different funding streams around an individual to fund employment support

An individual can use a number of funding streams to contribute to their employment support. With a pooled budget (also known as an individual budget), the funding contributions are all pooled into a single pot. 'Braiding' is a way to do this in cases where accountability for different funding streams would make a pooled budget difficult, or where some funding

Box 4: Using resources differently

Derek (not his real name) is a 41-year-old man taking part in Jobs First. He had an employment-focused review which looked at his support package and how he might change the way he spends his time and funding entitlement in order to work. A person-centred planning officer who knows Derek well did his review, focusing on Derek's skills and interests and how they could help him find paid employment. Derek had been spending five days a week on leisure activities, but decided to refocus three days per week on employment. This freed £13,000 a year to buy membership of MiEnterprise (see below) and to pay his personal assistant, who supports him with his market stall.

Under Jobs First, support plans for the Jobs First cohort will only be signed off if they prioritise employment goals.

Box 5: New ways of working

For example, intensive job coaching in the Project Search sites is provided by a full-time tutor (funded by education or further education budgets) and a full-time (supported employment-funded) job coach, who work flexibly together. Rather than being based in a school or college, the tutor is based on the employer site, just like the job coach. The tutor also steps in to help with job coaching when needed. This is a new way of working.

Box 6: Local employment routes

Havering College's ROSE programme, a partnership with local employers, supports young people into work using recognised job coaching approaches. Individuals are referred by college tutors or external agencies.

miEnterprise is a social enterprise that enables people with learning disabilities to start and run micro-enterprises. People initially buy miEnterprise support with their personal social care budget, but fund more of it from trading income as their business grows. Operating in several Getting A Life and Jobs First sites, micro-businesses include second-hand bookselling, conservation of environmentally sensitive sites, original art, cake making, a local produce box scheme and artisan ice cream.

Box 7: From day centre to work

Newcastle City Council runs Capability's, a café and print shop where people with learning and other disabilities try work in a safe (but 'real') work context, gaining training and qualifications, rather than attending a day centre. The explicit expectation is that those who attend will move on into paid work, supported to do so by WorkFirst, another part of the Council's supported employment offer. A place at Capability's costs £2500 per person per year, significantly less than the equivalent day centre place.

Box 8: 'Braiding' funding streams

The Jobs First sites are exploring how to use a variety of funding streams to support individuals into employment. The streams include social care, Access to Work and either Work Choice money as a direct payment or the equivalent from Remploy (a large national employment service working with people who experience complex barriers to work).

Leicester Jobs First site expects this to work as follows:

Brian (not a real person) has an employment-focused review. It identifies that he has £6000 of social care funding in his personal budget to put towards his employment support. He also knows he will be getting £2000 from his Work Choice entitlement, accessed as a direct payment. Put together, they will buy him enough support to identify and secure a job. Once he is working 16 hours per week or more, he intends to apply for Access to Work to pay for any ongoing support he may need.

might not be available until a later date. With 'braiding', different aspects of the support can be paid for separately by the agency in question (**Box 8**, above). Each agency makes clear how much it can contribute for the support, and at what point. The contributions are nominally added together during the planning process to enable the person to budget for the full support they need.

Practical tools and materials to support delivery

Practical materials to aid local delivery – such as case studies, information on costs and benefits, commissioning tools and accessible information about employment – have been made available at www.valuingpeoplenow.dh.gov.uk.

What next?

Of course there remains much to do, but there is now a broad coalition in favour of employment that feels tangibly different from when *Valuing People* began. Local and regional learning disability partnership boards now see employment

as a high priority (DH, 2010a). Mencap has launched an employment campaign (www.mencap.org.uk/page.asp?id=19028). The National Forum and National Valuing Families Forum are delivering activity to promote employment.

The demonstration sites have raised the bar for others to follow. Project Search sites have won Business in the Community awards. The Government is leading by example by running Project Search in the Pension, Disability and Carers service. The Local Government Association included Getting A Life information in recent guidance for members (www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=7968796).

Supported employment providers (including Work Choice prime providers – www.dwp.gov.uk/supplying-dwp/what-we-buy/welfare-to-work-services/specialist-disability-employment/) and local commissioners have welcomed the draft supported employment and job coach standards (HM Government, 2010), which, if followed, will raise standards in the industry. Work on qualifications for job coaches continues with the Department for Business, Innovation

and Skills. The Department for Work and Pensions has made clear that Access to Work can be used for job coaching. (Use of Access to Work for job coaching is available for a limited period (normally up to 26 weeks) and is subject to guidance. On 2 December 2010 the Department for Work and Pensions announced an independent review of specialist disability employment programmes, with Access to Work as one of the programmes within the scope of the review.)

The new Social Care Vision (DH, 2010b) recognises employment as social care's business. Learning from the employment demonstration sites is informing the Skills Strategy, the Right to Control project and the Green Paper on special educational needs and disability.

The most important learning is that, like everyone else, people with learning disabilities

(and those who advise them) should view employment in the context of their whole life and experiences to date. This is why attempts to increase their employment prospects must be whole-system, and this is what *Valuing People Now* employment work has aimed to demonstrate.

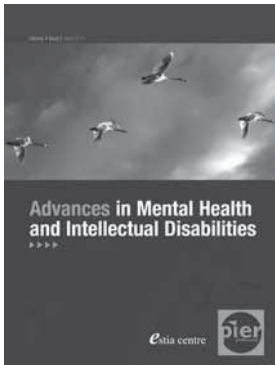
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Aims and scope

Advances in Mental Health and Intellectual Disabilities (formerly *Advances in Mental Health and Learning Disabilities*) is a vital and pioneering source of information and research, and is the only UK-based journal specific to the mental health needs of people with learning/intellectual disabilities.

The Journal integrates current research with practice and keeps professionals up to date with a variety of different perspectives on developments within the field. It supports professionals in delivering high-quality and evidence-based practice to people with learning/intellectual disabilities who have additional mental health needs, and provides a forum for the debate of current issues and opinions.

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