

BEAT

Bristol Employment Action Team

“Helping you get a job – and keep it”

(Version 0.2 Draft)

Background

All the organisations, groups and agencies working with homeless people are trying, in the long run, to get people into work. For some, this is an explicit part of their objectives, for others the objective is implied or assumed.

Over the years, CCM has seen a degree of success with many of the people we have been helping: we have seen them move into stable accommodation and get a job. But far too often, the job could not be sustained, and they either end up back on the streets again, or remain trapped in the benefits system.

Many organisations are working to help homeless people. Most of them have a good success rate, but the problem is not getting any better. The reason is partly because the problem is harder than we like to admit, and partly because we are not measuring the right things. CCM has a success when we refer someone to a rehab, the rehab has a success when someone completes the programme, and so on. But the usual outcome of all this ‘success’ is that the person being helped ends up back on the streets and addicted again.

Our success is measured in helping people move forward. But this success rate is irrelevant: what counts is not how many people move forward, but how many people do not slip back again.

Once all the charities and agencies have been successful, once all the boxes in the support plan have been ticked, once we all think we have done our job, the subject of all this help is still left struggling with many emotional and psychological problems, unresolved family conflicts, and trying to overcome all the new problems created by being in work.

Whatever help is available to the people we have been supporting, most of the time it is not enough to enable them to keep the job they get. And, as a consequence, much of the good work done with them is lost or undermined.

For most of our clients, the system as it currently operates is simply not working. It is not working for many of the people we are supporting, and the impact of this on the lives of those individuals is incalculable. It is not working for society as a whole – the cost of the present system is massive: the cost of the treatment and services provided to people who have lost a job yet again, and the cost of the crime, the police, courts, prison and probation services, all of which are tied up with the consequences of this failure to keep a job.

This Document

This document is the first draft of a proposal for a scheme to address this problem in a client-centred and holistic way. Comments on this document and offers of help should be directed to the authors. Contact details are given at the end.

The suggested name ('Bristol Employment Action Team') and strap line are only provided as a working title. If we don't have a provisional name, we have to describe the project every time we mention it ("That possible project about supporting people in work we were taking about with Paul and Andy last Monday."), which gets to be a pain after a while. Any suggestions about a better name, strap line, branding, etc, will be warmly welcomed.

Outline

As we see it at the moment, there are three main interlocking areas that need to be addressed.

- Preparing to get a job (overcoming the barriers to employment, dealing with the main reasons why people lose their job, and addressing unhelpful expectations about what it will be like to have a job)
- Finding the right job (an appropriate job, with the right level of responsibility and suitably challenging, with an employer that understands the issues)
- Succeeding in the job (doing the job well, enjoying the job, career development, social life)

Clearly, for this to happen, we will need people who want to go down this route. Recruitment is one of the key issues that will need to be addressed. It may be helpful to break this down into two phases.

- Initial contact and bridge-building (a wide variety of activities and contact point will be needed, such as conversations with volunteers in the Wild Goose coffee shop, the video club, Bridgehead, art and music workshops, etc.)
- Confidence and relationship building (the sort of things we covered in modules 1 and 2 of the LITE Course)

Details

Preparing

CCM runs the LITE Course, which has the aim of enabling people from a street background to 'move on' to something worthwhile. In practice, this usually means one of three targets: a place in a rehab unit, training for a formal qualification, or employment.

The course explicitly addresses many of the common barriers to employment and independent living, and implicitly addresses most of the remaining problems. For example, group work gives people the experience of working alongside others, and an

opportunity to practice the taught skills of conflict resolution, anger management, communication, etc. Simply attending the course gets people used to getting up in the morning, organising their personal life so they can be at a particular place at a given time, and so on.

Finding

One key part of the LITE Course is a work placement. As far as possible, we try to find a placement that fits in with the student's plans and desires, and which they will be able to complete successfully.

Sometimes, we have been able to help a student find a permanent job at the end of the course. This is usually when the placement has been successful and the student can continue to do work they have shown themselves capable of doing well.

We have been able to do this for a small number of students at a time. It is not clear how straightforward it would be to scale up this area of work: would we manage to build constructive relationships with many employers within Bristol, or would we rapidly flood the market?

Aspire offer an excellent first job for people seeking to rebuild their lives, but they can only cope with a limited number of employees at a time, and aim to help them move on within 18 months. So a job with Aspire cannot offer the permanent employment we are seeking to make possible, but it can be an important step towards it. We need to find more employers like Aspire: partly because of the limited number of employees they can manage, and partly because the work available through Aspire is not suitable for everybody.

Succeeding

Once the client has been found a suitable job, the main part of the work begins: supporting them in the job, and helping them be successful in it. The key features of this part of the programme are:

- The employees spend half a day each fortnight with BEAT, receiving ongoing support in the following ways.
- Mentoring – personal relationships are vital. Initially, we will need to employ people to provide all the mentoring, but as people move through the programme, they start to help and care for the newer people, and some should be able to provide mentoring to others.
- Personal reviews will, alongside the mentoring, aim to identify issues before they become employment-threatening.
- Ongoing personal development through group training tailored to the issues and challenges identified in the mentoring and reviews, and through occasional individual projects.
- Occasionally, BEAT staff may engage in advocacy work with the employer, explaining problems the employee has difficulty communicating, and suggesting ways to overcome or sidestep problems.

It is anticipated that many (if not all) of the issues addressed through the training and the personal work will have been covered to a degree through the LITE Course

(or whatever the 'Preparation' part of the programme is called), but at this point the focus of the training will be two-fold.

- Briefly reminding people of the principles they were taught in the previous training.
- Helping people discover how to apply those principles in the real-world context they find themselves in.

People in the programme should move from receiving help and support to supporting others to providing training and direction. Eventually they will move away completely, but not before they are well established, and know there is a permanent open door whenever it is wanted.

Expecting the clients to move on from receiving help to giving it serves at least three purposes.

- It helps break the victim / dependency mentality, and trains the employee to learn how to help others and take responsibility.
- It provides additional manpower within the scheme, thus reducing the overall running costs.
- It keeps the problems and issues faced by people learning to cope with work as relevant and important questions, even after the employee has 'succeeded' in overcoming them – helping others cope with the frustrations of work reminds you of the ways you need to cope with the frustrations of work.

Integrating

The three aspects of the programme need to be undertaken in a coordinated way. Through the initial training, you discover the student's skills, interests and weaknesses. These are vital in finding a suitable job, and also in providing the employer with a realistic set of expectations.

The issues identified by the people who are in work will shape the support activities, and also inform the preparation for work training, and enable the training of the new students to be more precisely targeted to their needs.

Funding

It is anticipated that the employers will be prepared to contribute something to the running costs of this project (in addition to releasing employees for half a day a fortnight), but we will probably need to secure other funds. In the long term, it ought to be funded from central government, as the agencies who will benefit from this work are funded in that way.

As a personal note – I think that (as a medium to long term objective) instead of the employers being asked to contribute to the funding of the project, we ought to be able to channel funding from the project back to the employers, to make it more attractive for them to employ people from a street background, and reimburse them for loss of earnings for the time their employees spend on BEAT activities.

Actions

Some time ago, there was a project looking at employment in the Social Economy sector – the Western Partnership for Sustainable Development (‘WPSD’) who were involved with that may well be interested in this. Paul H will provide Paul T with the details. Paul T will also contact Business in the Community, who should be very interested in a project like this.

Paul H will write up some notes on the discussion and send them to Paul T and Andy. You have the notes here – hope it is what you were expecting!

We need to talk with a few people – but what then? It seems the next step is to find some funding to employ someone to undertake a development project, to see if this idea has been explored by other people before or in other places, and whether it could become a viable scheme.

So the next piece of work *we* need to do is to define the scope, budget and timescale of the development project.

At some point, we will need to sell the idea of ‘supported employment’ to employers in Bristol. The idea of ‘supported accommodation’ took a while to get established, but is now mainstream, so there is a good precedent. The key thing is that we are looking for employers to provide real, permanent jobs (but not necessarily full-time jobs) to people who are not able to do those jobs without support. We are asking them to enter this arrangement on a semi-permanent basis: we are not promising that the employees involved will be fully able to compete and perform as well as their colleagues after six months or two years. But keeping a job for two years seems like a reasonable way to measure a real achievement.

The Authors

This document arose from a conversation between Paul Tipler of Aspire, and Andrew Luxford and Paul Hazelden of Crisis Centre Ministries.

Crisis Centre Ministries has been working with homeless people since 1984, and has run a life skills training programme since 1990, one of the first to operate in this country.

Aspire has been providing homeless people with employment since 1999, and is developing new opportunities for homeless people to get on the first rung of the employment ladder.

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