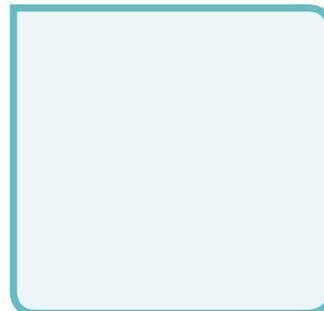
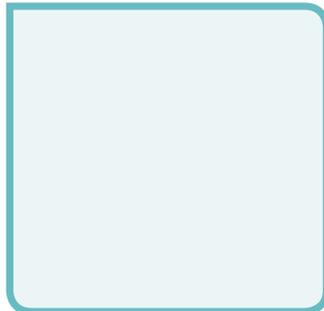


Tackling worklessness

How to use outreach to tackle worklessness



Introduction

This guide looks at how local authorities and their partners may work together, in order to reach out to those who are disengaged from the labour market. It looks at the issues involved; the role of 'outreach'; and lessons from outreach work in different places.

The guide is based on the assumption that in order to be truly successful outreach activity has to link to:

- a sound understanding of the needs and opportunities in an area
- good working relationships between partner organisations who share an understanding of the issues and how to address them
- a well structured needs assessment that deals with the individual characteristics and/or family circumstances that affect a person's ability to get and keep a job
- an effective commissioning process that provides support to meet individual needs, including confidence building, education and training, job search, job brokerage and in-work support.

What is the issue?

Worklessness

'Worklessness' describes the situation of people who are of working age but who are out of work – whether they are actively seeking work or are economically inactive. 'Out of work benefits' include Job Seekers Allowance, Incapacity Benefit (replaced by Employment Support Allowance) and Lone Parent Income Support.

Fewer opportunities and increased competition for jobs

Even in relatively buoyant economic times a large proportion of the working age population was not connected to the jobs market. Large numbers of people were transferred to inactive benefits such as 'incapacity benefit' became disengaged and ceased to actively seek employment or interact with those agencies able to help them access employment opportunities such as Jobcentres as these IB claimants were no longer 'customers'. The economic recession has reduced the number of jobs available, which makes it harder for those who are out of work to find employment. It has also increased the number of people who are unemployed, which in turn has increased competition for the jobs that are available.

The interplay between special initiatives, mainstream services and welfare reform

Over the last decade there have been a number of efforts to tackle 'worklessness' and 'social exclusion'. These efforts have included:

- initiatives to change 'mainstream services', for example, through the New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal
- area-based initiatives, such as the New Deal for

Communities, which have aimed to shift resources and power to local people and, in the context of worklessness, have tended to provide 'supply-side' interventions to link people to job opportunities

- wider welfare reform, which has increasingly focused on the 'personalisation' of services, i.e. tailoring services to meet the needs of individuals.

These initiatives have often highlighted the importance of outreach as a means of engaging the unemployed and economically inactive. Furthermore, recent changes in central government's approach to mainstream employment support highlight the importance of 'wraparound' services that can work with mainstream employment support to provide personalised support across a range of issues affecting someone's ability to work. Thus, successful interventions manage the interaction between the local labour market, employment support services and other support services that help people overcome barriers to work.

What is outreach and why is it important in fighting worklessness?

The term 'outreach' has a number of connotations. For some, it is a discrete activity linked to community development, where specialists use a mix of techniques and venues to make contact with people who have either been ignored by some mainstream public services or for whatever reasons have actively avoided interacting with public services. In the context of this 'How to guide' it has a narrower definition. It refers to efforts to engage the long-term unemployed and the economically inactive with the labour market.

Outreach is important in tackling worklessness because some of the target population are not required to seek support and an element of proactive engagement and stimulation is often required, in order to motivate clients.

What is the local government role?

Local authorities provide leadership in a place. They also provide services, and they are employers and procurers of goods and services. This guide focuses on local authorities as providers of services that can reach out and engage economically inactive people (other 'How to guides' in this series look in more detail at local authorities' roles as procurers and employers).

As service providers, local authorities play a number of roles in tackling worklessness:

- experimenting and innovating to inform the development of mainstream services
- filling gaps in mainstream provision, in terms of client groups left out by mainstream employment support or in terms of services to support clients on to mainstream employment programmes
- using contact with clients, e.g. in schools, children centres and libraries etc, in order to refer them to appropriate employment support.

The Houghton Review highlights a list of ‘wraparound services’ that are either statutory local government services or are often commissioned or provided by local authorities on a discretionary basis. The list includes:

- debt and benefits advice
- administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit
- childcare, Children’s Centres, and extended schools
- adult social care and mental health
- care leavers
- community outreach services
- services to social housing tenants
- transition to adult services for 16-17 year-olds not in education, employment or training
- adult education
- Drug and Alcohol Action Teams
- Interpreting services
- Volunteering
- Travel and transport.

Each of these services provides a point of contact with clients who could benefit from support in finding work.

What are the main challenges for local government?

The Houghton Review argued that ‘tackling worklessness should be a mainstream objective for local authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships’; and, indeed, 9 out of 10 Local Area Agreements have targets aimed at reducing worklessness. However, it is hard to make targets on worklessness ‘bite’, given the dispersed nature of the responsibilities for addressing worklessness, e.g. schools, in terms of educational attainment; employers, in terms of their commitment to the on-going development of the workforce; Jobcentre Plus with regard to helping jobseekers to find work; and GPs, in terms of assessments of a person’s ability to work. Thus, local authorities need to work with partners to make tackling worklessness a priority across a range of bodies, set targets that people actually use in their own organisations; but more importantly they also need to develop a shared culture, across organisations, that empowers staff to support people move into work.

Issues to consider

The Houghton Review pointed to the importance of neighbourhoods as points of delivery and ‘personalisation’ of services to address a combination of issues faced by individual clients. In doing this, it built on previous research, such as that on NDCs and Neighbourhood Management, which highlighted a number of issues that organisations providing outreach need to consider, including:

- understand the needs and opportunities in the area
- how best to work with local people to understand their needs
- develop easy access points, such as drop-in centres, one stop shops and other local facilities that reduce the hassle of accessing support
- co-locate staff from a number of agencies, including Jobcentre Plus, in order to provide a joined-up service
- employ experienced staff who have the necessary cultural awareness and language skills to meet the needs of the local population
- recruit and develop local people to provide the advice and guidance
- provide an holistic service, drawing on a range of services in order to tackle different individual-level barriers to employment
- ensure there is financial flexibility, in order to address local problems, such as provision of local transport, commissioning of bespoke courses and covering of out of pocket expenses for those going to interviews or starting work
- there is sometimes a need to differentiate employment support from mainstream public sector providers, as mainstream services are not always trusted
- build good links with local employers, in order to ensure their needs are understood, and to develop their awareness of the make-up of the local population
- understand the ‘business case’ for the intervention, so that funders and providers know what is required and what benefits are to be achieved in relation to costs – and back this up with evaluation to ensure on-going funding.

A series of case studies illustrate these points in different ways. Case study 1 is drawn from Tomorrow’s People, who have developed an approach to outreach via GP practices, helping GPs improve their patients’ quality of life, while saving costs to the NHS and the benefits bill. The project was initially funded through the Single Regeneration Budget, under the auspices of the London Development Agency. By tailoring the services to a specific client groups’ needs and collecting the evidence of what had been achieved, the approach has been replicated in numerous locations.

Case Study 1 – The Right Prescription: Back to Work

In 2001, the Third Sector organisation, Tomorrow's People established a specialist employment outreach clinic in a London Health centre, as part of innovative outreach work linked to the Getting London Working project, which was funded by the London Development Agency. The initiative was a response to the fact that many people on what was then called Incapacity Benefit and Disability Allowance wanted to work, but needed help if they were to find their way back into employment.

A Tomorrow's People Employment Adviser operates as a member of the primary healthcare team. He or she provides employment advice and guidance in what is a familiar and comfortable setting. The service is usually provided one day a week – clients may be referred by their GP or may make a direct approach for support, perhaps triggered by promotional literature in the waiting area.

The advisers tend to meet clients on a weekly basis for sessions lasting between 45 to 60 minutes. The sessions provide support, mentoring and information – if necessary support is given 'off-site', i.e. away from the GP surgery.

The approach is known as 'The Right Prescription'. It was developed in close partnership with the GPs at the surgery where it continues to be delivered today. The programme has now also been rolled out to over 80 GP surgeries around the UK.

An independent evaluation of the project carried out in 2005 reported 200 individuals were seen by an adviser – 85 per cent of whom were long-term unemployed. Sixty-one people registered for full employment support and the remainder received ad hoc assistance.

The unit costs of supporting each individual were estimated at £720 and the cost per job outcome was estimated to be £2,385. A range of benefits were identified, including a saving to the GP on average of £423 and net savings in terms of benefits no longer paid of £3,000, with average taxes paid to the exchequer of £9,000 per job outcome.

For more information visit:

<http://www.tomorrows-people.org.uk/#content>

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Partners in North Staffordshire have developed an end-to-end process based on the 'journey to work'. They researched needs and provision, including lessons from elsewhere. They also consulted the local community to understand local concerns and what outreach activity might be effective. The team reviews the effectiveness of its outreach work, in order to make sure it uses its resources effectively.

Case Study 2 – Jobs Enterprise & Training (JET) Service, North Staffordshire

The JET Service was developed to address local concerns in North Staffordshire. It has built on learning from elsewhere. The project's steering group includes local authorities, Jobcentre Plus, the Learning & Skills Council, and the regional development agency, Advantage West Midlands. The JET Service's purpose is to link long-term unemployed people (particularly from disadvantaged areas) to work opportunities.

The Service works with employers (via the 'JET Business Centre', which coordinates job placements) and individual clients. The individual clients' relationship with the JET Service is structured on the basis of a 'journey to employment'.

The journey starts with engagement with those who are not clients of Jobcentre Plus. This is a vital element of the JET Service. Research was undertaken in order to find out the most effective ways to reach out to disadvantaged communities, where best to locate services, and to identify the types of organisations that should be involved.

Local people helped design the service and provide on-going input into how best to manage delivery. In the early stages of the project, residents highlighted concerns over potential loss of benefits; the costs associated with work, such as the costs of care for dependants, training, transport etc; and cultural barriers, such as inter-generational unemployment. This indicated the need for benefits advisers, flexible financial support to cover the initial costs associated with getting and keeping a job and wider activities to engage families and communities, not just individuals.

The outreach activity includes:

- coffee mornings
- family fund days
- knocking on doors to raise awareness
- stands at local events
- a presence in local venues, including schools, and Children's Centres etc. and talking to parents as they wait to collect children from school.

The JET team assess the effectiveness of different approaches to outreach, in order to target its resources most effectively, e.g. parent/teacher events with a clear focus on children and education are not necessarily the right events to engage parents in discussions about employment options.

Following engagement clients are assessed and an action plan is produced. Pre-employment support then follows – this might include support with CVs, basic skills, debt management etc. Additional support is also provided, where other issues, such as health concerns, housing problems or care responsibilities have been identified. For those who choose self-employment, Business Mentors are available along with 'test trading initiatives'. And for those

who have been out of work for a long time, work trials are organised, e.g. through volunteering or a wage subsidy scheme. Support is then provided to help prepare for job interviews, and on finding employment flexible support is available to help overcome any final barriers, such as out of pocket expenses for clothing or equipment.

The overall operation acts on the basis of a 'people friendly approach', where there is 'no wrong door' and where 'word of mouth is crucial' to success. This is supported by effective partnership working that delivers referrals from other agencies, and support to vulnerable clients.

For more information visit:

<http://www.stoke.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/jobs-and-careers/training/jobs-enterprise-and-training--jet/>

Contact Alison Knight, Employment & Skills Director, alison.knight@nsrp.co.uk

Leeds City Council links its interventions on worklessness to its area-based regeneration work, ensuring they have a local presence that is based on neighbourhood working. The project is built on short-term funding; therefore, it faces particular risks in terms of staff turnover and by conducting an evaluation from the mid-point of the project it aims to provide evidence of the business case for the intervention, as a means of persuading potential funders of the project's merits.

Case Study 3 – East and South East Leeds (EASEL) and West Leeds Gateway Worklessness Project

Efforts to tackle worklessness in East, South East and West Leeds are linked to broader regeneration initiatives. A priority for the worklessness pilot is to change the behaviour, aspirations and life chances of residents.

The pilot is led by the EASEL Area Regeneration Team and is overseen by Leeds Worklessness Strategic Outcomes Group. It has three objectives:

- achieve positive outcomes for the case-managed families/individuals
- strengthen partnership approaches
- improve individual and community well-being.

Four of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the city (Halton Moor, Osmondthorpe, Gipton and New Wortley) form the focus of the pilot. They are located within regeneration target areas and already have in place neighbourhood management structures that can support delivery of the project.

The pilot is funded by the regional development agency, Yorkshire Forward, which has provided nearly £250,000 for the financial year 2009/10.

The team has five posts; each member of staff is managing about 20 cases at any given time.

Intensive support is required in order to move individuals

and families into a position where they are motivated to find and sustain paid employment. But before intervention can take place engagement work is required.

The outreach work can be intensive and complicated – sometimes requiring tailored approaches. But core activities include 'door-knocking' to raise awareness of the service; work in schools, Children's Centres and community centres; and work with voluntary and community organisations, which refer people on to the pilot. The project essentially operates on the basis that it should use whatever facilities are available locally.

A 'person centred approach' is being used. It identifies the barriers individuals face, designs responses and engages employers, so that there is a destination on the journey to work. Support is offered to address housing, health, education, childcare, debt and low skills; but it is designed to cut duplication of effort across agencies and programmes and make the most of the resources that are available. Thus, for the most part, staff signpost to mainstream opportunities that people were not aware of, or 'bend' mainstream resources into the area. However, where necessary, the project intends to commission specific activity e.g. to cover gaps in provision of courses in English for Speakers of Other Languages.

As it is based on short-term funding the project faces particular risks that have to be managed, e.g. there is a risk of staff turnover, as funding runs out at the end of the financial year. Early experience shows that building relationships and trust with clients is important in understanding the barriers to work, which can be undermined where staff continuity is lacking. Also, management time will be taken up seeking funding for after March 2010. With this in mind the evaluation of the pilot is seeking to provide information on the business case for this type of intervention. Thus, it will look at the unit costs of each case supported, the unit costs per job outcome, the scale of the journey travelled towards getting a job, and the cost savings to the Exchequer given tax receipts and reductions in the scale of benefits paid out.

For more information visit:

http://www.leeds.gov.uk/Business/Regeneration/EASEL_and_employment.aspx

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In St Helens, partners started with a basic question – 'who is best placed to deliver the service?'. The local Chamber of Commerce, rather than a public sector body, was identified as the most appropriate body to provide employment support. It offered flexibility in its approach – as it was not tied by many of the public sector's rules and regulations – and good links to employers; thus, providing a mix of local knowledge and responsiveness to personal needs.

Case Study 4 – St Helens ‘Starting Point’

Starting Point is run by St Helens Chamber of Commerce and has been in operation for a number of years – it was originally set up using money from the Single Regeneration Budget and the European Social Fund. It is supported by St Helens Council and accesses funds from the Local Enterprise Growth Initiative for specific projects. It provides careers advice, job search support, skills assessment, redundancy counselling and has access to flexible funding to cover training costs and costs faced by individuals in taking up employment.

Services are available from its town centre base and outreach staff operate in around 80 different venues, such as community centres. Activities include roadshows and jobs fairs. Starting Point also supports adult education.

The town centre office, which is open 6 days a week, provides a web-based facility that provides access to a directory of local services and opportunities and a basic introduction to the services that are available. In addition, there is free access to newspapers, the internet, telephones, postage, sign language and interpretation facilities etc.

The service has adopted a six stage employment and skills continuum – a process from outreach and engagement, to information and guidance, to pre-employment support, through to the transition into employment, to post-employment support and finally to workplace progression.

Some of the features that have contributed to Starting Point’s success are:

- the services are based on a ‘scientific’ approach where all interventions are mapped, so there are no gaps in provision
- the operational independence of the Chamber of Commerce means clients are more open with staff, as they do not assume information will be shared across mainstream and council departments
- the Chamber of Commerce’s links to employers means it knows what employers want and can prepare clients for what is required. Equally it can prepare employers for the potential candidates they are likely to receive
- the Chamber is less bureaucratic than public sector bodies, which means it can meet particular needs in a flexible and timely manner, e.g. out of pocket expenses for attending interviews etc.

For more information visit:

<http://www.communitycentres.org.uk/startingpoint/>

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Top tips

The case studies provide a number of telling points in terms of what to look out for. Furthermore, consultees provided insights into the factors that they think are important for delivering outreach services to tackle worklessness. The learning points can be summarised as follows:

- be aware of the big picture in terms of costs and benefits – small costs may look attractive, but effective work with hard to reach groups may require significant upfront costs, in order to achieve significant long-term returns
- operate to the spirit of an indicator, rather than getting bogged down in problems over definitions – indicators are there to help not constrain, use them that way
- involve potential providers of employment support in discussions about what is required – keeping providers at arm’s length may increase the transaction costs of commissioners and result in frictions between commissioners and providers at a later date
- commission outcomes, don’t specify inputs and processes – providers may know more about how to deliver services than commissioners, so avoid specifying what is required so tightly that they cannot bring their knowledge to the table
- when commissioning provision, ask the question who is best placed to deliver this – avoid institutional or established ‘provider interests’
- map the journey to work and manage potential points of conflict along it – sometimes funds and/or providers seek to ‘keep clients in order to claim outcomes’, which means they don’t refer clients to the most appropriate provider; where possible establish protocols on claims and payments, so clients’ best interests are served
- empower providers and hold them to account via effective monitoring and governance arrangements
- employ experienced staff who have the necessary cultural awareness and language skills to meet the needs of the local population and recruit and develop local people to provide the advice and guidance, based on knowledge of the local area
- multi-annual financing arrangements help – uncertainty over funding causes a number of problems: first, providers may increase their prices to take account of the risks of funding being cut after the set-up costs have been incurred; second, staff turnover is often higher than it needs to be, increasing costs and hampering the smooth running of the service; third, and perhaps most important, communities lose faith in services that do not appear to be there for the long term
- try to avoid tying up projects in a multiplicity of grant/ funding conditions – cocktails of funding often result in layer upon layer of conditions and eligibility criteria, which can limit the operational effectiveness of projects – where this is unavoidable, make efforts to ‘hide the wiring’
- in order to realise the added value of local projects there has to be flexibility in what is provided – notwithstanding the fact that fidelity is an important factor in the delivery of some programmes.

Further information

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