

ASSISTING YOUNG PEOPLE INTO WORK REPORT

- **What support is most effective and what are the main barriers that face young people trying to enter the labour market?**

Over the last few years the economic climate has encountered a recession. However, there have been a number of programmes designed to give opportunities to young people who live in Wales. The rocky road of unemployment and becoming NEET has become a reality for some even before they turn fifteen. To counter this there should be support for At risk NEETS from the age of fourteen upwards.

Barry Communities First in partnership with the Can Do project officer put together a draft project plan to support those at risk of becoming NEET. This was written as a result of evidence gathered from a local project called Can Do which works with those pupils at risk of disengagement. A ten week coaching and mentoring course with identified pupils helped build confidence and tackle issues affecting their day to day lives both inside and outside the school environment. The spin off from this is that they gain confidence, are more socially aware and have support from people telling them what they Can Do as opposed to those telling them what they can't do and therefore becoming isolated and socially excluded.

From working on the ground with local NEETS, providing one to one support has proved very effective. The Communities First referrals come from many differing partners including; Barry Job Centre Plus, Careers Wales, the local Volunteer Bureau, Youth Service provisions, Choices project, work based learning providers such as Rathbone and People Business Wales, housing groups such as Llamau and Newydd Housing Association and care providers such as Amy Evans, Flying Start and Gwalia.

Partnership working is very effective, adopting the team around the family approach or in the NEETS cases, the team around the individual. By working in partnership we can adopt a partnership approach, for example; Communities First could provide the mentoring and coaching support on a regular one to one basis whilst gathering support from training providers such as Prince's Trust and People Business Wales who provide work based learning and employability training.

In order to work closely with young people you have to gain their respect and trust. Quite often there are social issues surrounding the young person. You are a stranger to them and first impressions count; just like an interview people often make judgments within the first thirty seconds. Meeting young people in an informal, open and friendly environment sets the tone for putting someone at ease. Keeping things informal in the first meeting helps lay the foundations for an open discussion without seeming too pushy or inquisitive.

By getting background knowledge you can personalise things, as for many NEETS they don't have anyone who takes an active interest in them and this is what makes them disengaged and distant. To know that they have someone who has an active interest in them or is supporting them in their life can be the difference. All too often with that little bit of extra support or pointing them in the right direction it helps them aspire and reach their goals.

By giving them ideas to think about helps motivate them and think of career paths that they perhaps had not thought about. So an action plan is the best method for those people who Communities First meets on a regular basis. It gives them a structure and a base to work from.

For those who are difficult to get information on the best way is to put them at ease straight away. There isn't a set criteria to the first impression setting as every young person is unique; some are nervous, some are quiet, some are brash, some are difficult to engage with, although the majority do engage, especially if they have been given background information on the CF programme.

In the first instance, Barry Communities First is a provision and not a mandatory service so CF is in a better position than most as we can help make a difference.

The Communities First brand is definitely starting to take shape and more and more people are becoming aware of the difference it can make. For example NEET A completed the 10 day Personal Track Safety training and now has a Rail Card enabling him to work on the rail track as a Blue Hat. NEET A socialises with NEET B,C & D in an informal setting and tells his friends that Communities First helped him out. All of a sudden NEET B, C & D can see the benefits and want to know how to access this opportunity and the seeds have been sown.

So, what are the barriers facing young people entering the labour market?

1. Lack of qualifications – pretty self explanatory really, a young person leaves school with no qualifications. They immediately feel isolated with no support and drift into anti social behaviour and into the benefit system. There are lots of opportunities for young people to enter into schemes to help them into work, Jobs Growth Wales and Prince's Trust apprenticeships being two. However, the first step has to be the attitude of the young person.
2. Attitude – Young people often look at the negatives of their life, no qualifications, no money, no prospects but often with a little bit of guidance you can turn a negative into a positive. Every person has something to offer, a skill or talent and it's about using this skill or talent in a positive way. The first meeting with a NEET often revolves around their life (sometimes they start off talking negatively) but you can leave them with positive thoughts, even if its look, we'll meet next week and update your CV or how about if you attend the Jobs Café and we can help you with your job search.
3. Life issues – Family issues, mental health issues or bad experiences with work are all factors that affect NEETS in a negative way. Communities First have links to signpost young people to; Recovery Cymru, MIND, Amy Evans, Support Workers, Community Projects, etc. You don't want to set people up to fail – you want that person to feel comfortable even if you attend initial sessions with NEETS.
4. For many NEETS it's about becoming job ready and settling into a programme, project or organisation to enable them to become job ready. It's not about saying there are jobs around, go and complete as many job applications as you can and one will come up. The young person feels great about achieving targets set in an action plan. Gradually the young person gains in confidence and you will see them progress and become more positive. This is where the Communities First programme comes into its own as the programme has the ability to work with these young people on a regular basis. Yes, there will be blips but you have to expect this working with young people who are NEET. It's about being ready for these blips and having an alternative action plan or simply being patient and understanding to their needs.

5. Knowing what opportunities are out there – It might sound simple to people who are in the loop but more often than not young people have no idea what help or assistance is out there for them. They struggle with barriers and end up on a downward spiral which often leads to bigger issues. By working with NEET young people on street outreach sessions or by simply talking to them they become engaged in the system. OK, so not every young person will stay engaged as this is another barrier, engaging in a conversation on a street is the easy part but keeping them engaged on a longer term basis is more problematic. There are a number of factors behind this but losing contact is one of the major barriers faced when working with NEET young people.

- **What progress has been made with the YEPP plan?**

Youth Engagement and Progression Framework Implementation Plan

There has been a review of the structure and changes to the partnership arrangements that support the Vale Community Strategy 2011-2021 (the Single Integrated Plan (SIP) for the Vale of Glamorgan) and the implementation of the delivery plan 2011-2014.

The new structure has been approved by CMT and this includes:-

1. Ensuring there are Senior Reporting Officers within the Council to engage with partnership activity and also to ensure that progress reports are presented regularly to the Local Service Board.

It is also important that there are lines of accountability back to the Local Service Board

- **Transport (especially in rural areas): what are the problems and what assistance can be provided?**

Transport links from Barry to Cardiff Central and Cardiff West are good but there is a general consensus that it's difficult to rely on public transport for early or late shifts that are required especially for hospitality jobs. A local company who took on a group of 16-24 year olds through Jobs Growth Wales have arranged for the three candidates to be picked up and dropped back to their area after work as the company premises doesn't have access to local public transport links. This has been well received and has helped the individuals overcome a significant barrier. Young people can't rely on using taxis due to budgeting as the JGW scheme pays the majority of clients the National Minimum Wage. Some employers are able to work shifts around this however this isn't always possible, there could be a need to address public transport links in the area especially to operate later into the evening.

- **The impact of the Welsh Government prioritisation of support for young people age 16-18; and the impact of this prioritisation on those aged 19-24;**

Some people will say that we have to concentrate on the youth and give them priority into employment. The impact is that there are more opportunities for young people to progress aged 16 – 24 as there are schemes and organisations set up to help those who are NEETS aged 16-24. With the NEET issue now being addressed we need to look at the financial

benefits matching up to reducing the NEET population. What impacts are there in society for reducing the NEETS population and for those supporting the NEET 50-65 age bracket? What is being done to help that age bracket into the job market?

And statistically, for those initiatives mentioned above (JGW, Apprenticeships) what is the long term sustainability? How many of the young people are staying in employment once the schemes are finished? Are more young people not going into full time education after the age of 16 and moving into the WG schemes due to the cost implications of course fees, living costs, etc. With the new YEPF plan is there an effective Evaluation and Monitoring tool that can be devised to look at this data and analyse the cost implications of young people completing and staying in employment and also looking at the effect on society as a whole.

With regards to the JGW scheme is there any reason why the JGW opportunities couldn't be available to 16 – 30 year olds. Employment Officers work with 25+ and a number of their clients would thrive on a JGW placement. Finally, more needs to be done to educate young people about the scheme to ensure that it is utilised as fully as possible.

- **The need for Softer Skills: e.g. Effective Interview and Application Skills; Ready for work skills**

This is definitely an area in which young people need help in and continued support. At the moment Communities First are putting together Retail Focus Groups to enable young people to become job ready by attending sessions put on in areas such as Effective Interviewing and Application skills. In the era of Digital Inclusion young people need to be given the tools to be able to not only apply for work but skills to enable them to become confident at interview and ready for work. To highlight a case study, Asda Supermarket will be opening a new store in Barry next year.

Communities First have made contact with Asda representatives and the local Job Centre to work and put together a package where local young people can attend focus groups and get an insight into the Retail environment. With specific jobs being advertised we can train young people up to become ready to apply for work in the Retail environment. Some young people have never been through the job interview process and Communities First have developed links with companies such as Leadbitter and Admiral to look at organising site visits and therefore not only giving young people an insight into the company but also giving them a fast track to the application process by attending mock interview sessions.

The Adult Community Learning team have recognised the need for softer skills and a number of courses have been set up to encourage people to become Work wise. These courses are often run free of charge and CAVC (Cardiff and Vale College) has also recognised the need for softer skills by running Fast Forward Level 1 courses. These courses also encourage links with the employment sector and offer work experience placements and further educational opportunities.

Recently, a Prince's Trust 12 week course was run at a local work based learning provider. This course will give young people the opportunity to learn softer skills and more importantly the chance to use these skills in a work environment. Communities First is now more focussed than ever to provide soft skills opportunities that can make a real difference to the lives of young people and working within the community enables us to provide one to one support to those who might struggle in a group setting.

- **What can be done to assist the groups of young people who are more affected by barriers to re-entering the labour market, for example those with a disability?**

There are groups and organisations that CF works with to help people who suffer with learning, physical or mental disabilities. CF are not the experts in the field and we don't profess to be but we do have links to these organisations. For example, Innovate Trust run a Peer Mentoring project for young people who need additional help and support and we have the referral forms to signpost people into the project. Similarly, we work closely with St Giles Trust and the Choices project to enable those who require help and live outside of the Barry CF cluster. By building up our links through engagement in the community we are aware of what is out there and we can signpost young people into these projects.

In the one to one sessions with young people we try to give them as much opportunity as we can and if we can't help instantly we look to refer onto organisations that can. The Youth provision directory is one outlet along with Youth Service provisions and the FIS (Family Information Service). One positive aspect of the CF programme is that more organisations are now working in partnership; for example Vale CAB have outreach provisions where people can attend drop in sessions and have instant access to a CAB worker.

CF offers one to one help at work clubs and the jobs café to look at supported opportunities in the employment market. What I mean by supported is that organisations offer opportunities for people with learning difficulties and are prepared to offer support in order for the young person to enter into employment.

There is an ESA (Employment Support Advisor) worker at the local job centre who CF has contact with. We attend communications meetings to keep the job centre in the loop as to what CF has to offer and we also attend outreach sessions at the job centre to promote our services. It would also be useful to provide greater support and awareness sessions to employers so that they have more knowledge and support prior to recruitment and interview sessions.

CF also offers young people reimbursement of their travel expenses for their first month of travel to and from their new work placement on the condition of a letter of employment from their employer. CF can also help with interview clothes and one to one interview preparation.

With our referral form we identify any additional support that the young person requires and also highlights any disabilities that the young person has. Once this has been identified we look at steps to address these and if this would affect the young person and their opportunities into employment. We have worked closely in the past with organisations such as Llamau, the Adult Autism Service and Social Services to help people who need that extra support and we also link in with support workers.

- **Regional variations and local challenges;**

Despite local awareness of public transport issues there is an understanding that in more rural areas there are greater issues with public transport. Where people live in smaller communities and job opportunities are less frequent, individuals realise that there is a need to be flexible with travel but often there is a barrier when discussing logistics of access to public transport from the smaller areas to larger towns or the next town.

- **The social problems that prevent young people from finding work, and how to change the culture and attitudes that entrench unemployment for many.**
- The recession has now been with us for almost a decade and this has created problems with society. Young people have seen employment opportunities decrease and unemployment figures have risen. However, with new initiatives being set up with WG, young people need to be kept informed so that they can access these opportunities.
- Welfare Reform – New legislation introduced has left many people on the brink of poverty. Universal Credit is being rolled out in parts of the UK and this will affect thousands of people along with the controversial Bedroom Tax. Many young people are struggling to survive and are reliant on hardship funds and food banks.
- Young people are becoming disengaged with society – NEETS leaving school are becoming hard to reach and social issues such as sofa surfing and homelessness are becoming more apparent.
- Earlier interaction with Young People – With regards to working with at risk NEETS young people earlier engagement is essential and would help inform young people and give them alternative options. Schemes such as the Prince's Trust, Apprenticeship programmes and JGW placements would work better if young people were given information in a school environment. The additional benefits of young people participating would help develop their social and people skills as working towards objectives; these benefits help young people to realise when you work you not only earn a wage but you gain a structure to your life.
- Drugs and Legal Highs – over the past decade many young people are becoming dependent on cheap drugs and legal highs which are affecting their lifestyles. Unable to live a structured life young people resort to crime to pay for their drugs and this often leads to criminal records and time in jail. Legal Highs have also become more available and leading to severe mental health issues and irrational behaviour.

New initiatives have been introduced to try and encourage young people into work. The idea is for young people to get on the first step of the ladder, gain a work placement or apprenticeship and then move up the ladder as they gain experiences and confidence.

Organisations such as Families First, Flying Start and Communities First are trying to break down the barriers and giving people an opportunity to progress but these are early days and we have to gain the confidence of the communities we work in to make a difference.

A number of current issues are slowly being addressed such as long term job seekers out of work, mental health issues and a lack of job opportunities, but while we keep trying to engage with the community and as the recession eases, we can start to see slow signs of progress. Barry as a community is looking forward and working on the Tackling Poverty agenda. There are new regeneration projects in the pipeline, a retail development on the Waterfront and new housing being built so we can look to provide young people with a positive outlook for the future and a community they are proud to live in.