

# Case Study – WE Work for Everyone, Bristol City Council

## Introduction

Bristol City Council leads the WE Work for Everyone (WWfE) programme supporting Disabled people with Learning Difficulties and Autism into paid work. A WWfE Navigator started supporting Joe in July 2021. He was a recent college leaver when he joined the programme. Joe has a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder and dyslexia. He had studied IT for 3 years at college. He had been volunteering for years in a charity shop so had some customer service, shop floor and till experience. He has a passion for computer hardware and had built 3 computers at home in own time from scratch using second-hand parts.

## The challenge

Joe came onto our programme saying he wanted either a job or an apprenticeship in IT. After profile building and job searching, we applied for an IT apprenticeship in October 2021. Joe had an interview with the apprenticeship provider which I attended with him online. He was successful in being offered the apprenticeship by the training provider but was required to find an employer to take him on for the workplace element of the apprenticeship. He also explained to the apprenticeship provider that his main interest was in hardware, not software, and that he wanted to build and repair computers, not provide over the phone first line response in IT support. This apparently made it more challenging for the apprenticeship provider and Joe to find a job to match him with, as most roles were for IT support over the phone. Joe also didn't want to travel over a certain distance to work.

## The solution

So, we started to discuss what reasonable adjustments he would need in place to be supported in working on the phones, taking calls, describing to the caller how to fix their IT problem. For example, we started thinking about voice to text software. Then a full-time role was advertised as a 'PC Build Technician' and was for Joe's dream job - building and repairing computers for a company in Bristol. Joe applied and was offered an interview I contacted the company to introduce myself as his Employment Navigator and with Joe's permission, disclosed his autism spectrum disorder and ask for the interview questions in advance, the response I got was positive. Joe's interview went really well and he was offered the job.

Once Joe got the job he was handed over to the Supported Employment Navigator to arrange what in work support (if any) he would need. We took a social model of disability approach and looked at what processes and systems were in place in the company and how these could be adapted to ensure Joe was supported in the most appropriate way. Joe had been very clear about coping strategies he employed in his daily life (EG – taking short walks if he felt stressed) and his employer had confirmed that he was fine with this. Joe did concede that he may find the first weeks very tiring but would soon adjust. This topic was discussed with Martyn who was fine with doing slightly reduced hours for the first few weeks as long as he was gradually bought up to full time hours when appropriate. The employer had identified a natural workplace mentor for Joe and they quickly bonded over baffling tech talk.

## **Funding**

Dedicated funding to support individuals with learning difficulties in gaining employment is crucial for fostering inclusivity and empowering Disabled people like Joe to thrive in the workforce. This level of support requires a comprehensive approach that combines financial support, and collaborative partnerships. The funding that enabled Joe to have support of an Employment Navigator to help successfully secure employment and then a Supported Employment Navigator to be available to consolidate the employment once it had started was covered by 3 years of funding from ESF and the West of England Combined Authority. Without it, Joe would have had to navigate the pathway from education to employment alone. The project has secured a further 12 months of funding from UKSPF that is being administered by WECA. This length of funding does not reflect the level of support that is needed by people like Joe to successfully gain and maintain employment. One of the key lessons identified in the first delivery period of We Work for Everyone was that our participants need more than 12 months support to progress (maximum length allowed on project)

## **Impact**

Despite the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic, this first phase programme has engaged 1272 participants, of which 699 live in Bristol. By August 2023, 201 participants have entered paid employment, 95 of which live in Bristol. The programme has achieved significant success in engaging with participants without basic skills (128) and supporting economically Inactive participants into job search on leaving (130). Overall, the WE Work for Everyone has been a unique and successful driver of change. We have worked with Disabled people with Learning Difficulties to raise their employment aspirations, with their parents and carers, and support professionals. We have worked with a wide range of employers including Aardman Animation, Bromford, Our Media, Bristol Zoo, Airbus, Boeing and the Avon Centre to promote the benefits of employing people with learning difficulties.

The WWfE Team has taken steps to work with the Council's Adult Social Care Team (ASC) to shape and deliver the programme. Following a data match of WE Work participants with the ASC LAS (Logic Adult Care System) we can see that 312 participants have had at least one contact with ASC, of which 101 are registered as having a Learning Difficulty. Of these, 49 were referred directly from ASC and 52 have come into the programme through external marketing and with the support of our partner supply chain. The local authority must submit an annual report to government and quarterly data returns of the number of Disabled adults with Learning Difficulties supported by social care who are in employment.

### **Lessons learned**

The participant journey from enquiry/referral to outcome has been streamlined and evidenced now with written guidance and instructions for delivery.. Over the length of the project, it became evident with an increase in referrals and reduction in specialist provision, programme navigators needed to be flexible and multifunctional with how they delivered the programme to participants, added to this was the confusion that regular handovers caused our participants. Individual 1:1 support is the model that has proven to work. Specialist provision that was part of the original programme did not become a reality until the second year and has proved to be essential for participants that need additional and intensive support. Specialist provision needs to be more reflective of the participants individual needs around securing employment and having an in-work support option available to consolidate continuous employment. A more targeted referral pathway that is administered through the lead accountable body and the confirmed local authority partners will identify the Disabled participants with Learning Difficulties in most need of support to secure employment.

More intensive caseload reviews, and peer led share of good practice, together with involvement in multi-agency reviews of our clients have significantly increased the quality of our service.

WWfE is keen to be recognised as a specialist employability support programme that is aimed solely at Disabled people who have a Learning Difficulty - creating an additional barrier to employment. We will re-focus marketing towards referral hot spots within the community and less visible and historic referral points such as DWP Job Centres.

Understanding the additional needs of our participants needs to be reflected in performance targets and the specialism that WWfE can deliver. Outcomes need to be reflective of improvements in wellbeing, confidence, and movement towards the labour market. Future funding agreements need to be for multiple years as this cohort needs a sustained period of support to achieve their potential.

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For more information about the WWfE programme, go to: [Home - We Work For Everyone](#)