

# Valuing Employment Now



## THE FAMILY LED JOBS PROJECT, BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

### Introduction

The Family Led Jobs Project was originally tried in the south west region of England in 2008, to demonstrate that families of people with learning disabilities can be powerful advocates for them in gaining paid work.

The approach was used again in Bath and north east Somerset during 2009 and, on this occasion, was subject to an independent evaluation. The project aimed to assist a group of nine young people, aged 17 to 29, to secure a regular, paid job of at least 16 hours per week. It was funded by the local authority.

### Description of the project

The project aimed to:

- build a network of support around the young person and their families
- raise expectations about what the young people could do in work
- clarify what employers are seeking from employees
- alleviate any anxiety about loss of family income
- achieve positive stories that could be shared locally.

The project comprised a series of four workshops for families, facilitated by Anne O'Bryan and Steve Parr: both highly experienced job coaches and trainers.

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It began with an open session for about 40 people. This introduced supported and customised employment best practice, and showed families how their family members can be better off in work through maximising welfare benefits and earned income. It also allayed concerns about health and safety, training and support issues. Young people were also invited to this session.

Nine families then chose to join the Family Led Jobs project. The young people were encouraged to invite relatives, friends and supporters to join their team. If a team was in need of extra input, the facilitators linked additional, local, professional people to the young person.

Each of the subsequent workshops provided the team with key tasks to complete before the next meeting. These tasks mirrored the steps of customised, supported employment, namely:

- vocational profiling or 'discovery'
- individual planning meetings and development of a portfolio
- research on local potential employers ('employer discovery')
- employer negotiation and securing a work trial or job
- support in the job.

The two facilitators had a number of days to help each team as needed, during the 11 months of the project. Six families participated for the duration of the project.

## **Findings from the evaluation**

### **The views of parents**

Parents were particularly positive about the project because it allowed them to feel involved, informed and supported. They were pleased to meet like-minded people who wanted their sons and daughters to work, and felt the process was collaborative. One of the parents said:

"The process allowed people to learn from each other through the sharing of profiles and ultimately, the portfolio that could be used with an employer. This was particularly appreciated as it helped us feel confident about what we were doing."

However, several parents commented on the time commitment involved, especially if they were working. One said that it is not always helpful to work in a family led way, if the young person does not respond as positively to their parents as they do to other people.

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## **The views of young people**

For a variety of reasons, only four of the nine young people attended the majority of the workshops. They were not as positive about the process as their parents, though they appreciated the purpose of the project. There were three main reasons for this:

1. They disliked being expected to speak up in the workshops.
2. One did not like unfamiliar people being added to the team of supporters.
3. The idea of the project was initially confusing.

However, the five young people who commented could all see the benefit of the project.

## **The views of professionals**

Professionals tended to be positive about the process, and most said they felt comfortable and supported in their role. They regarded the benefits of the project for the young people as putting them at the centre, widening their horizons, boosting their confidence, enabling them to have a more mature relationship with their parents and the provision of support and encouragement during job seeking.

The perceived benefits for parents were: a raising of their aspirations for their 'children', a sense of collaboration and encouragement, increased knowledge about entitlements and services, seeing their son/daughter in a more positive light (especially their potential to work), their 'child' avoiding being slotted into the usual services, and a more positive relationship with professionals.

Only one person thought that sometimes parents were too dominant and the young people would be better doing more of the work in college without their parents. This was also linked with the need to commit a lot of time to the process, which both professionals and some families mentioned was a problem.

Others felt that the biggest problem was providing the young people with a personal and consistent job coach from the beginning, as families did not feel equipped to approach employers or seek out on-the-job support.

## **Outcomes**

Two of the young people's families withdrew from the process when their young people were due to move into supported housing. The families were unable to commit to both projects due to time constraints.

One young man's family had not been able to get to any of the meetings so another approach was successfully made to find him a paid job based on the discovery results of Family Led Jobs.

Of the remaining six:

- three had paid work
- one had been offered a full time job as a car valet
- one had converted her voluntary job into a paid job (although working less than 16 hours per week) and she was seeking another paid job
- one young woman had disliked her job, but was much happier with it after a change of manager
- two had decided to do a further year at college, but wanted weekend and holiday jobs
- two were still actively seeking full time work with support.

## Conclusions

- The Family Led Jobs Project provided a supportive process for young disabled people seeking paid work.
- It proved difficult to get the young people into work, despite the enthusiasm of the parents and professionals.
- The process demonstrated that there was a shortage of job coaches available to provide support to carry out tasks that families are generally unable to undertake, such as negotiation with employers or on-the-job support.
- The project highlighted that if such a programme is to work effectively, young people need a consistent job coach from the beginning and this is a workforce issue that must be addressed.
- There needs to be good independent facilitation of meetings by supported employment staff who have a family focus, as well as adequate resources to support families throughout the process.
- Such a project is likely to be helpful in informing families and raising expectations of employability and is useful where families are not satisfied with existing approaches to job seeking, or where they feel that there is some urgency about the young person getting a job.

A final report of the evaluation will be available in March. For details please email the author, Carol Robinson:

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For further resources please visit [www.valuingpeople.gov.uk/venresources](http://www.valuingpeople.gov.uk/venresources)

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301331b 1p March 10 (Web only)

Produced by COI for the Valuing Employment Now cross-government delivery team, based in the Department of Health.