

Employment

**Are you the relative of someone
with a Learning Disability?**

Are they thinking about a job?

A brief guide for Carers

Introduction

Years ago, the expectation for most people with a learning disability was that they would be looked after, occupied during the day, and that parents and other carers would have a lifetime of making decisions on behalf of their son or daughter.

Today, many people with a learning disability have been able to achieve a level of independence undreamt of only a few years ago, and carers and others find themselves in the role of supporter and advisor, helping the person themselves to make decisions and choices. They still need extra support to stay safe, but the support now needs to be offered in new situations, in places and circumstances that everyone else experiences.

For most people with a learning disability, paid employment was never a consideration. However, for many over recent years, it became a dream, and then a reality, and there are now many people in real jobs across the borough. Some of these jobs are full time, some are part time. Successful employment happens when it is tailored to the person's needs, skills, and interests.

This leaflet has been produced for carers and others and begins to answer some of the common questions and concerns that carers have about employment.

Finding a Job

- ***How is my relative going to be able to find a job?***

There are a number of organisations in Wigan which specialise in helping people to find out what jobs they could do, and support them to find the right job for them.

Usually the organisation will allocate a support worker who will spend time with you and your relative, and work out a plan of action. You can find out about the organisations in a number of different ways, such as through a social worker, a Disability Employment Advisor at the Jobcentre, or Pathways, one of the day services, through a college tutor or a Connexions advisor, or through the website www.looking4work.org.uk. There are also a number of parents whose sons and daughters are now working, who would be happy to share their experiences.

- ***What actually takes place?***

The support worker usually completes some form of vocational profile, an assessment which shows the person's skills, their likes and dislikes, and types of job that might be suitable. Work skills such as timekeeping, following instructions, application, relationships etc would be discussed and practiced, often during work placements set up by the support worker. The support worker should also be able to help with identifying suitable jobs, completing application forms, and at the interview itself. Skills for the actual job will be taught "on the job", either by the employer or by the support worker, who will stay with the person while they are needed. After that, the support worker will keep in regular contact for a negotiated time, or until everyone involved agrees it is no longer necessary.

Finance and benefits

- ***Would we lose benefits and be worse off?***

A meeting would be arranged with someone who can advise on benefits including an “in work calculation”. You would be involved when all the information was gathered and in subsequent decisions.

- ***What if we lose the job? Can we go back on benefit?***

The rules may change, but currently, people who work for two years or under should be able to get back on to the same benefit. You should discuss this with the advisor when deciding about taking the job.

- ***Is there a danger of being financially exploited, of not being paid the right rate for the job?***

People will only be supported into paid employment where they receive at least the national minimum wage. Pay levels will be agreed and monitored.

- ***What do we have to do about telling the benefits people?***

Once a job has been found, then a planning meeting will agree who will contact the benefits agency, and what the information is that needs to be passed on.

- ***Who can we talk to about this?***

As well as the employment support worker, you can get advice about financial matters such as this from Jobcentre Plus, from The Citizens Advice Bureau, or from Wigan Independent Advice centre.

Practical things

- ***What happens on day one of work?***

Your relative will already have been to the work place to meet and be interviewed by the employer, will have looked round the site and met some work colleagues. Agreements will have been made about who to report to, and who will provide support, such as remembering where toilets are, where to put personal belongings, what job to start and how to do it. Usually the support worker will stay for as long as it takes the person to feel confident, but how long this is will vary from person to person and one situation to another. There may also be a “buddy” already identified and working for the employer who will provide friendship and support until new friendships of choice are made.

- ***What if they don't like the job?***

This should have been discovered before the job starts, either during a work placement or work trial, or through visits and discussions with the employer. However, if it is only after employment starts, then the support worker would try to identify what was causing the unhappiness and deal with it. In extreme cases it may be necessary for the person to finish work and go back on benefit until a more suited job can be found.

- ***What if they can't do it?***

Part of the support worker's job is to assess the person's current and potential skills, and the skills needed for the job; then, to help the person learn the skills they need, either before they start work, or on the job itself. Over time, they will learn the skills to do more and more parts of the job.

Getting on with people

- ***My relative is very shy, and finds it difficult to talk to people. She is frightened of new people and new places. What can be done to help her?***

Her support worker would be matched with her to ensure that there was empathy and understanding. It should be possible to help her develop social confidence, and identify a sympathetic employer and work environment.

- ***I don't want my son to be picked on and given all the bad jobs to do. I'd be worried about someone taking advantage of my daughter.***

It is illegal for employers or work colleagues to discriminate or pick on someone because of their disability or gender, and this is talked about with employers. On a practical basis, it is important to identify a “buddy” in the workplace, and make sure that each person is part of a supportive team.

Part of work preparation is helping each person understand something about discrimination and exploitation, and who to go to if they are unhappy or unsure. During employer preparation and visits, any potential problems are raised, and monitoring systems are put in place to ensure that the person is not exploited. Training about disability can be given to employers and employees

- ***My relative doesn't speak very clearly. How would people understand him?***

Before seeking work, the support worker will want to find out all about his different ways of communicating. Then, part of the preparation with the employer will be working out what needs to be communicated, and how best this can be done for all concerned. It may involve using badges and signs in some circumstances, or having agreed phrases for certain activities. Work colleagues on site may need to undertake some disability awareness and communication training, which could be arranged by the support worker.

Health issues

- ***What if my relative has specific health care needs?***

This would have to be fully discussed with the support worker, and then a decision made about what needed to be shared with a prospective employer. It may be appropriate to seek medical advice which could lead to a health based risk assessment that takes into account the work place. Certain medical conditions, for example epilepsy, may rule out some jobs, while adjustments can be made to other jobs so that they can be done safely.

Concerns about Paperwork and forms

- ***What about people who can't read or write, so won't be able to follow instructions or sign for things and so on?***

Being able to read and write makes all areas of life including work easier and people are encouraged to improve what they can already do, through basic skills courses. Not being able to read and write at all would limit the choice of career, but there are still many jobs where adjustments can be made, so that people with some or no basic literacy skills can work.

Concerns about not being able to do the job, and being embarrassed about disability

- ***What if my son is unable to do the job because of his disability?***

Part of the preparation before looking for work will be gathering all the information together about your son's skills and abilities, so that a good job match can be made. This will enhance his chances of success. A plan will be developed to spend time teaching him the job so that he knows, and is able and confident to do, each part of the job.

- ***What if my daughter gets embarrassed in front of other workers and customers because of her difficulties?***

Experience from supporting lots of people into work has shown that people are valued because of their contribution to the work output, which over-rides any differences there may be.

Time management

- ***My relative doesn't do things very quickly, so might get into trouble for being late for work, or for not working fast enough. Also, how would they know when to have a break, or when to finish work?***

Any employer is going to require their employees to be at work when they're meant to be, and to finish the work assigned to them in a reasonable time scale. However, some jobs allow for more flexibility in deadlines than others, and part of the job match would need to take this into account. Some people are helped by having a timetable that they can follow which helps them to get to work on time. Hopefully, the employer or work colleagues might take some responsibility to ensure that breaks and finishing times are observed.

If knowing and keeping to time continues to be a problem, then discussions between all concerned should be able to sort this out.

Travel

- ***How would my relative get to work?***

If it is needed, then travel support can be offered. Some people need help to learn the journey, and over time are then able to travel independently, using the safest, not necessarily the shortest, route. If they are working more than 8 hours a week, it may be possible to get assistance with taxi fares, and in this case, arrangements can be made with the driver to ensure passengers are supported into the workplace if necessary.

Dealing with job rejections and feeling a failure

- ***How would you help my son deal with the rejection of not getting a job? What if my daughter really wants a job that she can't do?***

They could be offered one to one and group learning support to improve their job search skills and their interview techniques, and encouraged to have back-up plans. They might benefit from joining some confidence building sessions, and learning how to learn from previous experiences and disappointments. Part of work preparation support involves sorting out what someone wants to do, what skills they would need, and how to go about developing those skills, or looking for a different line of work. If your daughter is determined on one career that really isn't realistic or practical, she may need to be supported to try it out first, before she is able and willing to consider something else.

Activity during non-work times.

- ***If my relative is only working part time, what are they going to do for the rest of the week?***

You may want to discuss this with the support worker as well as with a social worker. It may be that they would benefit from joining a college course, or some other skill based training. They may be able to spend time with a personal assistant doing some fitness activity, or leisure pursuit. Following an assessment with the social worker, it may be possible to complete a formal person centred plan which would help identify different activities your relative could enjoy taking part in.

Keeping in contact

- ***How will we know what's going on?***

There are a number of ways of keeping in contact and the best means of communication in yours and your relative's unique circumstances will be found. This will be established at the outset of the programme, and might involve telephone calls, letters, review meetings, circles of support etc

There will always be a named person who you can contact if you are concerned.

- ***How will we get support if there is a problem?***

You will always be able to contact the named person. However through regular contact between the support worker, the employee and the employer, hopefully most concerns will be dealt with before they become problems.

Useful Telephone Contacts:

Adult Services	828777
Citizens Advice Bureau	08701 264459
Connexions	768055 or 705800
Jobcentre Plus.....	752170
Wigan Independent Advice Centre	324851

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