

Lancashire County Council

Regeneration & Renewal
Awards 2009

Tackling Worklessness



Our pioneering approach to reducing worklessness highlights how the public sector can transform individual lives and stimulate economic growth. Seizing our role as Lancashire's community leader, we brought together previously disparate elements of the public sector to forge truly joined-up partnerships and deliver clear, objective results. This approach features in our recent successful Beacon application (www.beacons.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=5096164).

In 2007 almost 100,000 people were claiming 'out-of-work' benefit in Lancashire. We made reducing worklessness a top priority in our Local Area Agreement knowing that innovation would prove crucial in tackling this complex policy issue. Where agencies once worked in isolation and focused on new or recent benefit claimants, we spearheaded a new strategy with Jobcentre Plus and other partners to target long-term recipients.

Multi-agency co-operation meant we could spot gaps in the system and spread good practice more easily across the sector. Together, we created a detailed action plan to deliver a tough new LAA stretch target: Get 480 people on incapacity or lone-parent benefit for more than six-months into the workplace. The result is two unique flagship schemes with national significance for tackling worklessness.

Communicating with the customer is crucial to any business plan. We posted 14,000 mailings to long-term benefit claimants and the respondents formed our core target group. A creative and comprehensive marketing strategy was brought to bear: We mailed job information to lone parents at the start of the new school year, held job fairs in boroughs where no employment services were previously offered and promoted the public sector to black and minority ethnic job seekers. Our micro-targeting tactics sparked a remarkable response. We achieved the challenging LAA stretch-target a full nine months ahead of schedule and helped 520 residents from some of Lancashire's most deprived communities find sustainable employment at an additional investment of just £28 per person.

As a major employer and service provider we recognise how the public sector can shape economic activity. How could we spur job growth by providing invaluable experience to new jobseekers? After listening to customers, we led the way, with Jobcentre Plus, in developing the first "WorkStart" trial in the public sector, promising 90 placements for 2008-09. So far, 37 are already employed as a result of the scheme. Now we're sharing this good practice across the public sector.

Innovation continues to drive our interventions in the market for skills, training and jobs. We've targeted apprenticeship recruitment by launching a multi-platform communications campaign in schools and communities. We created new programmes to boost the Third Sector's capacity to help the long-term unemployed move into work. We've looked beyond the obvious to identify hidden barriers to work, like the lack of awareness among Jobcentre advisers of local public transport routes. Our joined-up approach not only spotted this gap but led to a trial of journey planning programmes for jobseekers.

Making a difference for the long-term unemployed relied on innovation, creativity and teamwork. We've made great strides in a short period of time and respectfully invite you to learn more about our work.

A complex policy problem like worklessness demands a multi-lateral approach. We adopted a novel and innovative strategy in close collaboration with Jobcentre Plus and Lancashire's 12 city and borough councils, the Voluntary Faith and Community sector and the private sector to encourage incapacity and lone parent benefit recipients into the workplace.

The salient feature of our approach was reciprocal cooperation between agencies. For example, intra-agency rivalry or misunderstandings can thwart collaboration. Nowhere is this more prevalent in traditional policy campaigns than in event management. But our coalition organised 30 high-profile events across the County and created unique relationships with more than 14,000 claimants thanks to a sophisticated and targeted marketing operation.

Event invitations were targeted by Jobcentre Plus to local, long-term incapacity and lone parent benefit claimants and events ranged from the generic to the very specific. For example, we created separate bespoke events for BME jobseekers and for lone parents, reflecting the coalition's strong desire to reject pre-determined structures or force feed customers with "solutions".

The results were remarkable and well above expectation, with 2,200 claimants declaring an interest in returning to work or training.

The originality of our approach is further demonstrated by "WorkStart," a jobs trial programme for long-term claimants. Communicating with hard-to-reach groups didn't daunt us and we secured 37 placements at Lancashire County Council, 25 of whom are now in work. Our novel model attracted national attention as an example of sustainable good practice in June 2008 (www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=7993902&aspect=full).

Securing success for the long-term: To reduce worklessness by 2% in the 83 Lower Super Output Areas where more than 25% of the population claim out of work benefits. Partners have developed a draft "Joint Investment Framework to reduce Worklessness" with resources from the County Council's economic development company to support the delivery of this more strategic approach.

We're serious about sharing good practice. We are extending "WorkStart" and the County Council's integrated WorkStart, Apprenticeship and Temps service and procurement contract to other local authorities and public services across Lancashire through workshops and conferences.

And won't rest on our laurels: We're planning a significant extension to the authority's ground-breaking Apprenticeship scheme, with over 215 recruited in 2007-9.

No-one left behind: Despite the success of our Apprenticeship scheme, it may not be for everybody. Many Looked-After Children and young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) are not ready for an apprenticeship and would find it difficult to compete in the selection process. That's why we created *Future Horizons* to equip young people with the skills and knowledge to apply for our apprenticeship scheme in the near future. *Future Horizons* provides employability qualifications, basic and life skills, career information and advice, and a structured work placement – an essential stepping stone in securing an apprenticeship. Twenty *Future Horizons* participants joined the programme in November 2008.

These objectives enable long lasting impact because they are part of an integrated, sustainable and strategic approach.

We're building long-term success into our business planning through Local Employer Partnerships (LEPs) – another by-product of our commitment to partnership working. The LEPs encourage employers to recruit locally from Super Output areas and create a "demand-led" service uniting

Jobcentre Plus, Learning and Skills Council and their contractors to work with local employers and match local job seekers with local vacancies. This has led to a "Joint Investment Framework to reduce Worklessness", enabling Probation, Police, Housing, Adult and Children's, and Health Services to invest mainstream resources into local delivery plans to reduce worklessness.

We're also assuring impact in the future through the adoption of "WorkStart" by other public sector partners and the extension of the integrated WorkStart, Apprenticeship and Temps procurement contract.

Embedding this good practice into the institutional mainstream means these proven models have the foothold they need to prosper.

Four out of every five participants in our employment fairs rated their experience as positive: 520 have found work. The WorkStart, Apprenticeship and Future Horizons programmes also support our goal to recruit a workforce that reflects the community we serve.

The original approach of inviting claimants to events has been overtaken by changes to national programmes. However, the "Joint Investment Framework to reduce Worklessness" has tremendous potential for regional and national replicability, as has WorkStart. The Northwest Development Agency has requested a meeting to discuss how WorkStart can be transplanted to other public sector employers across the region.

We have been invited to address many national and regional conferences about our worklessness model and it is attracting the attention of Human Resources Directors and Managers across the country as a result. We have also designed and managed specific events with and for local partners.

The value for money of our original approach is self evident. Our model led to 520 people on incapacity and lone parent benefits gaining sustainable employment for an investment of just £30,000. The majority of job seekers were placed within a year or two of signing up for benefits. The national average length of time on benefits is 8 years, at an average cost of £7,750 annually. By placing 520 people into sustainable employment within these timescales we have secured up to £22,000,000 savings just in these benefit programmes alone.

The financial viability of "WorkStart" is rooted in the business case we have developed, which provides an integrated service to reduce worklessness and recruit apprenticeships without recourse to the additional costs of recruitment of temps. We have redesigned and re-engineered our recruitment process to enable us to sustain and develop it throughout the recession. In fact, this approach has already saved £569,000 and we expect further savings throughout 2009.

Hitherto, we have developed this approach on a pilot basis. Our next challenge is to expand delivery of the model. Our model is replicable. It opens the door to more people looking for work. It means more people from our poorest neighbourhoods can access public sector job opportunities than was ever the case in the past and the public sector can recruit a more reflective workforce, contributing to wider cohesion and equality programmes.