

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Director of Social Work and Health Services

Social Work and Health Improvement Committee: 15 October 2008

Subject: Work Connect II Supported Employment Project (ESF Vulnerable Groups) 2008 - 10

1. Purpose

- 1.1** To report on progress in implementing the Work Connect II Supported Employment Project (ESF Vulnerable Groups) for people with a learning disability or mental illness, further to the previous report to Committee on 19 March 2008.

2. Background

- 2.1** Building on the achievements of the Shadow Work Connect ESF Project 2007 – 08 we were successful in the attracting ESF funding as part of the Vulnerable Groups component of the West Dunbartonshire Community Planning Partnership ESF bid 2008 – 10.
- 2.2** Work Connect is a locally conceived and designed programme that enables people with support needs to work and train in real work settings.
- 2.3** Shadow Work Connect supported 14 people on short term contracts with the Council in the six month period to 31 March 2008. A significant barrier to employment for people with learning disabilities and people recovering with a mental illness is the fear of losing benefits. Work Connect staff worked closely with Welfare Rights and Jobcentre Plus to provide accurate information and better off calculations. The average supported employee was financially better off by £120.00 a week based on working 16 hours a week. The best gain was £146 per week and the least gain is £24 per week.
- 2.4** The Shadow Work Connect Project, building on employment support initiatives in Learning Disability Services since 2002, has been a good news story for everyone involved. In addition to benefits deriving to supported employees, there has been excellent joint working across departments and services and a real sense of enthusiasm, energy and commitment. The support and encouragement provided by staff on the ground in Land, Catering and Cleaning Services to the supported employees was truly excellent and staff in those sections are to be commended.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** Work Connect II aims to support 40 people with either a learning disability or a mental illness, over the two year period to 2010; supporting i) 40 people to work readiness, ii) assisting 20 of those people to secure paid employment

and iii) supporting them in employment. Work Connect provides an employee and employer support service to promote the recruitment and retention of people traditionally excluded from the labour market. Individualised, person centred support that is flexible and ongoing for the employer and the employee is a cornerstone of the project.

- 3.2** Employment Support Workers support people with learning disabilities or mental illness at their places of work. The Employment Support Workers provide job coaching and work alongside the supported employee ensuring that the job is done and that there is no reduced productivity. Support is monitored to ensure there is a gradual fading as the new employee acquires their new skills to do the job safely and competently.
- 3.3** Work Connect provides vocational profiling, job development, job analysis, on the job training, benefits advice and better off calculations, support in the workplace and co-ordination of people and services. Additional support and input from Work Connect to West Dunbartonshire Council employing departments includes:
- promotion of non-discrimination and equality in the workplace,
 - provision of training to staff and co-workers on disability issues and supported employment,
 - training of “Friends at Work” mentors throughout participating departments
- 3.4** Work Connect II is one of a small number of CPP projects that started on 1 April 2008. The local CPP ESF consortium had to comply, in the event, with a single start date; the 30 July 2008.
- 3.5** Work Connect II supported 5 people into new jobs during the period April – July 2008. Owing to the new agreed start date of July, these jobs will not count towards ESF project targets. However, the project has supported an additional 5 people in new jobs during the period August – September 2008 and we are online to meet this year’s targets.
- 3.6** Work related skills training is key to promoting the employment of people traditionally excluded from the labour market. Work Connect II is working in partnership with Clydebank College to improve individuals’ skill base, essentially, to skill them up to compete for jobs. The College has agreed to provide, without charge, Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) in Horticulture for 12 Work Connect candidates over the next year. The SVQs will be delivered on the refurbished Levensgrove Park garden depot site.
- 3.7** We are exploring a similar arrangement for an SVQ in Catering with the College that we anticipate will be delivered, in the main, at Café Connect in the Learning Disability Resource Centre, Bruce Street, Dumbarton.

4. Personnel Implications

- 4.1** We were fortunate in being able to retain the majority of the Shadow Work Connect team. Project staff were recruited on the basis of fixed term contracts to July 2010.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** The Fairer Scotland Fund will underwrite costs of £50K for the four months from 1 April to 30 July 2008. The project in turn has been extended by four months to July 2010.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** The project will enable Council to deliver on its duties in respect of section 26 of the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 (services designed to promote well being and social development), the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 (promoting and ensuring equal access to jobs), on its power under section 20 of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 (promoting health improvement) as well as meeting recommendations proposed in such national policy directives as; 'Same as You' (Scottish Executive 2002), 'Healthy Working Lives' (Scottish Executive 2005) and 'With Inclusion in Mind' (Scottish Government 2007).

7. Conclusions

- 7.1** Shadow Work Connect provided an excellent grounding for the current project, which is progressing towards achieving it's targets in terms of job related training, preparing people for work, supporting people in work and supporting employers.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1** The Social Work and Health Improvement Committee is asked to:
- i) note the achievements and benefits deriving from this project and the Work Connect approach,
 - ii) instruct the Director of Social Work and Health to bring forward progress reports.

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Wards Affected: All Wards.