

# **WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**

## **Report by the Executive Director of Social Work and Health**

### **Social Work and Health Improvement Committee**

**19 March 2008**

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**Subject: Work Connect Supported Employment Project 2007-08**

#### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1** To report on progress in implementing the Work Connect Supported Employment Project for people with a learning disability or mental illness.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1** Learning Disabilities Services - Supported Employment has marketed and supported 35 people with a learning disability in jobs with a number of employers since 2002. On the job support and training is provided by 1.5 support staff. The service was also successful in drawing support from the Department of Employment and Pensions (£10K) and Careers Scotland (£5K) to set up Café Connect, an aspiring social firm that employs six people with a learning disability supported by a 2 part time cooks. In 2007 Learning Disabilities Services were awarded £20,000 from Workforce Plus to develop an employment resource centre for people with a learning disability.
- 2.2** A partnership between Social Work and Health Services, Housing, Environmental and Economic Development Services, the West Dunbartonshire Partnership and the Community Health Partnership was successful in a bid to the Shadow European Social Fund for £98K matched by £121K to implement the Work Connect project for one year. The funding enabled Mental Health Services and Learning Disabilities Services to recruit one senior employment support worker, three employment support workers and one part time administration worker and provided wage funding for up to 20 supported employees.

#### **3. Main Issues**

- 3.1** Work Connect is a locally conceived and designed programme that enables people with support needs to work and train in real work settings. The project supports up to 20 people with learning disabilities or mental illness in paid employment with West Dunbartonshire Council until the end of March 2008. It provides an employee and employer support service to West Dunbartonshire Council to promote the recruitment and retention of people traditionally excluded from the labour market. It provides individualised, person centred support that is flexible and ongoing for the employer and the employee, providing job coaching in the workplace.
- 3.2** Employment Support Workers support people with learning disabilities or mental illness at their places of work in Land, Catering and Cleaning Services. The Employment Support Workers provide job coaching and work alongside the supported employee ensuring that the tasks are 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** A significant barrier to employment for people with learning disabilities and people recovering with a mental illness is the fear of losing benefits. To ensure Work Connect supported employees are not in detriment through taking up paid employment, the team have worked closely with Welfare Rights and Jobcentre Plus to provide accurate information and better off calculations. The average supported employee is financially better off by £120.00 a week based on working 16 hours a week. The best gain is £146 per week and the least gain is £24 per week.

#### **4. Personnel Implications**

**4.1** Project staff and supported were recruited on the basis of fixed term contracts which will end at 31 March.

**4.2** If we are successful with the current European Social Fund bid for 2008 -2010 it is likely that we will be able to retain project staff and extend supported employee contracts.

**4.3** Supported employees are better placed to compete on the open market for jobs, including jobs with the Council.

#### **5. Financial Implications**

**5.1** Owing to time lags in notification of grant and recruitment this one year project the main expenditure will be from partnership funds. There is no detriment to Council funds as all the match funds were sourced from one off pots of money available to partners.

#### **6. Risk Analysis**

**6.1** The project has enabled 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 The Work Connect Project, building on employment support initiatives in Learning Disability Services since 2002, has very much 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 being provided by staff on the ground in Land, Catering and Cleaning Services to the supported employees has been excellent.
- 7.2 A successful outcome in the partnership European Social Fund bid for 2008 -2010 would enable sustainability over the next two years.
- 7.3 In the event that the bid is not successful, match funding would enable the project to continue, albeit on a smaller scale.

## 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) approve work on sustaining and extending this and similar initiatives and
  - iii) instruct the Director of Social Work and Health to bring forward progress reports.

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William W Clark  
Executive Director of Social Work and Health

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| <b>Background Papers:</b> | <p><b>'Same As You'</b>, (Scottish Executive, 2002) Recommendation 16 states "Local authorities need to give greater priority to developing a range of employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities. And, with health boards those authorities should lead by example in employing more people with learning disabilities."</p> <p><b>'With Inclusion in Mind</b> – the local authority's role in promoting wellbeing and social development' (Scottish Government, 2007)</p> <p><b>Healthy Working Lives</b> – an action plan (Scottish Executive, 2005)</p> |

**Wards Affected:** All Wards.