

Interim Summary of Local Research Report April 2007
*Quantitative and qualitative data on worklessness of people 50+;
the use of employment and enterprise related services by people
50+; and views of service users 50+.*

It is thought necessary to produce this summary of work in progress to contribute to the consultation workshops on the new Bradford Economic Strategy being held on April 24th 2007.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 A report by the Council's Regeneration Department (*Worklessness in Bradford, 2006*) suggests the proportion of older people in the District who are workless is greater than the national average and has risen slightly over the year. Around one third (32%) of all those in the District aged between 50 years and retirement age are economically inactive. This compares to 27.2% in Great Britain as a whole. Many in this group have retired early and may not wish to re-enter employment, but there are also many in this age group who are not retired and would take a job if a suitable one was available. They might also be interested in enterprise, volunteering, mentoring, or social enterprise.
- 1.2 In Bradford 44.5% claimants of Incapacity Benefit (IB) and Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) are between 50 and 65 years of age. The Pathways to Work programme should start in 2007 and will provide a service to people on Incapacity Benefit. A co-ordinated local response would help make the programme more effective.
- 1.3 An analysis of recipients of Job Seekers Allowance in Bradford District found that:
- As of December 2006, 9830 people were claiming Job Seekers Allowance 1445 were over 50 (14.7%)
 - There was an average of 131 people per year aged between 50 and 59 ie 131 aged 50, 131 aged 51 etc
- 1.4 Despite some targeted effort, initial un-audited figures suggest that while 27% of the workless population are over 50:
- Of 145 users of Remploy in Bradford none were over 50
 - Of 492 'beneficiaries engaged' on Fair Cities only 9 (2%) were over 50
 - Of 57 'beneficiaries' on the Fair Cities JAWS programme obtaining jobs only one was over 50 (1.75%)
- 1.5 The Bradford District Older People's Partnership have worked with the Economic Partnership and established a 50+ Employment and Enterprise Group (50+EEG). This group includes representatives of the Economic Partnership, the Older People's Partnership, Careers Bradford,

Jobcentre+, Remploy, Age Concern, the Chamber of Commerce, Local Enterprise Growth Initiative (LEGI), and the Learning Partnership.

1.6 Supported by the Economic Partnership, the group commissioned some research, carried out in March 2007, from Àreté Business Services Limited to establish quantitative and qualitative data on worklessness of people 50+; the use of employment and enterprise related services by people 50+; and views of service users 50+.

1.6 The research involved

- A telephone survey of 106 people aged 50+
- Interviews with 6 service providers.
- 8 focus groups involving approx 80 people from across the District.

1.7 This report gives a brief summary of the key findings, the recommendations in the research and initial work for an action plan.

2 Summary of Findings:

2.1 Telephone Survey of People 50+

- Of the 106 respondents, 37 had secured employment, 9 did not want work and 60 were still seeking employment.
- Most of those that were in employment were below the age of 65 (84%).
- Where people have secured employment, 17 out of 37 of those surveyed are working under 35 hours a week.
- Most people have sought help in looking for work – 92% of those looking for work and 81% of those that have found work, and this is across all ethnic groups & postcode areas.
- Those who have worked in management or professional and office roles are more likely to be in work, whereas those in more manual work or previously employed in the public sector seem to find obtaining employment when aged over 50 more difficult.
- 77 (80.2%) people had used recruitment agencies to try and find work. The next most common source of help was Job Centre Plus with only 28 (29.2%) people (the sample may have been partially biased by the very welcome help received from recruitment agencies to identify people willing to be interviewed).
- Contact data for some of the respondents had been provided by some of the public funded bodies but many of these respondents did not mention that they had sought help from those organisations

- The main helpful aspects of service provision identified were one to one support (37 out of 96 people = 38.5%), how service providers had understood their needs (32 people = 33.3%) and the attitude of staff (31 people = 32.3%).
- A lack of one to one support was the most common complaint (23 people = 24%), closely followed by a lack of or inappropriate work experience / placements and a lack of regular support & feedback (both cited by 22 people = 22.9%)

The main areas where respondents thought change was needed were (in order of priority):

- 1. One-to-one support**
- 2. Value me and my experience**
- 3. Regular contact and feedback**
- 4. IT skills training**
- 5. Show me how my skills can be transferred to a new job**

2.2 Interviews with Service Providers

Interviews with 6 service providers; Jobcentre Plus , Jobs@, Horizon Recruitment , Millennium Renaissance Consultants, Prime50Plus , Careers Bradford.

Service Providers suggested the following barriers to older people:

- Most service providers felt that age discrimination was a key factor in the work place for over 50's.
- Staff shortages and cuts meant face to face contact was reduced thus affecting service provision.
- Being out of work for periods longer than three to six months could be a greater barrier than any other factor.
- Older workers need to understand that it may be beneficial to lower expectations about the type of work they should apply for. It may be unrealistic to expect similar roles and salaries compared to their main working life.

Service Providers suggested the following ideas for improvement:

- **More scope for soft skills work for over 50's who have been out of work should be encouraged.**
- **More support was needed for those coming from A8 countries (the new members of the EU from Eastern Europe) in relation to language support.**
- **Flexible working hours would be helpful for those over 50.**

- **Short term placements would be a good way of building confidence.**
- **The skills and wisdom of older people offer should be valued.**

2.2 Focus Groups with People 50+

8 focus groups involving approx 80 people from across the District took place at ; Khushboo Group Leeds Road, Shipley Newstart Shipley, Anand Millan Centre Clayton, Gateway Centre Ravenscliffe, Horizon Recruitment, Grey Panthers Bradford University, New Horizons Wyke, Hindu Cultural Society of Bradford Leeds Road.

The focus groups all highlighted the huge differences in recruitment and availability of jobs when participants first started work compared to now. A number of key themes also emerged during the focus groups. These views, specifically from the focus group attendees, are summarised below:

Perceptions of employers

- The prevailing attitude amongst all the focus groups was that employers do not value older workers.
- Employers seem to place greater emphasis on speed of work over care and diligence.
- The experience and skills of older workers were dismissed in favour of younger less experienced workers.
- There are high levels of age discrimination within the work place.
- Some people expressed the view that employers try and 'catch out' older workers in higher bands of pay so that they can be replaced by younger less expensive workers.

Benefits of employing older people

- Older workers are more punctual, diligent and hard-working working than younger workers and can offer mentoring and support to their younger colleagues.
- Older workers also have the advantage of not needing time off for maternity or sick children.

Barriers to older people

- It must also be stressed that older workers from South Asian communities may be caring for elderly relatives and this may need to be understood by potential employers.

- Older workers have many years of experience but don't have certificates to show for it. Sometimes older workers with relevant experience ignored in favour of younger workers.
- There are now so many forms to fill in and questions to answer. Many of which are irrelevant and inappropriate.
- Health issues affect many in the older age group, and some feel that if they disclose any illnesses they are less likely to be employed.
- Almost all focus group members felt that the financial gap between not working and receiving benefits and working is too small. People would sometimes rather not work or do lower paid jobs.
- Fears were expressed that "Plumbers from Poland", for example, may be willing to work at £2 an hour whereas those from the UK would charge at least £6 or £7 an hour.
- Some of the focus group members were willing to do any kind of work, but those with previous management or sales positions were reluctant to lower their target jobs.

Feelings of older people

- One woman spoke of her despair of trying to find work and described it as 'begging' for work.
- Older workers are being made to feel 'past it' and that after age 50 it is a 'full stop'.
- Eastern Europeans feel they are not valued and are not utilizing their talents as they feel they should.

Service provision issues

- Whilst the respondents felt that it should be the Job Centre rather than other agencies that should be responsible for finding people jobs, various criticisms were expressed:
 - That intensive help was only available after 6 months unemployment (regarded as often "too late" as this length of unemployment is seen as a negative factor by potential employers)
 - Respondents were of the view that Staff were sometimes not aware of all the services available.
 - Feedback was highlighted as almost never being given from the Job Centre and other agencies.
 - There were suggestions that service is sometimes not consistent at Job Centres within the Bradford region.

Focus groups suggested the following ideas for improvement

- **There is a need for basic skills in interview techniques and confidence building.**
- **Perhaps the job centre and other support agencies should employ more older people. It should be normal to see an older face who understands your point of view and in most walks of life older workers are better at communicating with older customers.**
- **Respondents felt that organisations should be given incentives to employ older people and trial periods could be offered. Those who employ older workers should be championed and others must follow their lead.**

3 Conclusions and Recommendations from the Research Report

- Both service providers and focus group participants felt that age discrimination was a key factor in the work place for over 50's.
- Some of the focus group members were willing to do any kind of work, but those with previous management or sales positions were reluctant to lower their target jobs, which it seems will limit their chances of success.
- Whilst older workers have many years of experience, they often do not have recognised qualifications.
- Roles and application processes have changed significantly since the 1960's-when older people first started work and they can remain unclear as to what to do and where to seek support.
- Health issues can affect many in the older age group, and some feel that if they disclose any illnesses they are less likely to be employed in spite of current Disability & Human Rights legislation.
- People value face to face interactions to encourage the development and confidence of individuals but this is less a feature of Jobcentre+ and other agencies processes today.
- It has been suggested by older people that support in looking for work is typically not offered until the person has been out of work for six months and is only offered to those in receipt of benefits. Ironically, however, being out of work for periods longer than three to six months has been identified by service providers and older people alike as being a greater barrier than any other factor.
- **A lack of one to one support was the most common complaint of survey respondents, closely followed by a lack of or inappropriate work experience / placements and a lack of regular support & feedback.**

- There is a need to address age and disability discrimination by raising awareness of the 2006 Age Discrimination Laws and what this means for employers
- Employers need support and encouragement:
 - To tackle misconceptions within their workforce around the capability of older people and the contribution they can make to the organisation.
 - To understand the benefits of employing older people, and the demographic changes which will impact upon the workforce and how they need to be managed.
 - To question whether traditional work practices in terms of working hours and short term targets which rely on speed of work over diligence are inappropriate, damaging to business and may be excluding employees with valuable skills and experience.
 - To make adjustments (e.g. working time changes, physical changes to the work environment or role adaptation) to retain older workers for longer-
 - To be shown that health information when recruiting people should not be requested in such a way that discourages job applicants from applying, nor should it be used in deciding who to appoint in the light of current Disability & Human Rights legislation.
- More language support is required for those seeking work from A8 countries and also those from South Asian sub continent backgrounds to assist them in securing employment.
- More soft skills e.g. confidence building courses, form filling, interview techniques and CV writing skills (including how existing skills can be transferred to new job) as well IT training should be made available in the early stages of making contact with the job seeker:
- Ongoing training and development support for the job seeker should be provided throughout their search for employment, for example through the provision of short term work placements.
- Extra support should be made available to those who come from more manual backgrounds as they are currently finding it more difficult to find work than those from professional or office backgrounds.
- There should be an emphasis on one to one support where experience is valued, regular contact is made feedback is given. and support offered that is appropriate to their individual needs.
- The provision of more older advisors at Jobcentres and similar service providers would allow greater empathy and understanding whilst

reinforcing the message that it should be normal to see older people working.

- Outreach work: It has been suggested by focus groups that service providers go out into the community to share information and best practice targeted at different groups of both older people and employers.

The report identified areas in which further research may be beneficial:

- Employer perceptions
- What can be learned from countries where it is normal for people to continue to work into older age.
- The needs of various groups, e.g. recent immigrants from East Europe, deprived White British, South Asian people with poor English skills, manual workers and those who are long term unemployed or on incapacity benefits.
- Service provider issues – To understand the specific issues encountered by users of each service provider in order to improve service provision as well as understanding the low usage of public services and poor recall of public service provision.
- Enterprise support provision – to understand better the service provided to the over 50's in relation to starting up in business and the requirements of this service

4 Current work.

- 4.1 Members of the 50+ Employment and Enterprise Group (50+EEG) are pleased with the research which clearly enables us to hear the voices, and learn from the experience, of so many older people seeking employment.
- 4.2 The group is currently working on proposals for an action plan for the partner organisations involved and for the Economic, Learning and Older People's Partnerships. This will draw upon the problems encountered and the perceptions of barriers which older people seeking employment have identified in the research with a view to providing better assistance.

5 Key Documents

'Not Ready for the Scrapheap' Looking for Work after 50, (2006), Age Concern England.

The Age Agenda, Public Policy and Older People, (2007) Policy Unit, Age Concern.

Worklessness in Bradford, (2006), Regeneration Department, Bradford Council.

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50+ Employment & Enterprise Group