

CITY BRIDGE TRUST – Bridge to Work summary progress report

This report provides a brief summary of the first full year's operation of the Bridge to Work five-year programme which aims to support more disabled young Londoners into and in employment.

The programme has funded six individual organisations (below) to deliver the interventions and support which they feel most appropriate for their client group. (Two other organisations - Scope and Royal Society for Blind Children - are running parallel schemes which offer similar outcomes but to a slightly wider age group.). An additional project provided by Autus joined the BtW portfolio in late 2018.

Bridge to Work is being externally evaluated by Disability Rights UK and they have produced the report of the first year's activity which is summarised here. A copy other full report will be circulated to Members in due course.

Project Start Date: Autumn 2017

Projected End Date: Autumn 2022

Participating Organisations:

- Inclusion London
- Mencap
- Muscular Dystrophy UK
- my AFK
- National Autistic Society
- Whizz-Kidz

Purpose of grant:

The Bridge to Work programme aims to increase employment amongst young disabled people in London. The programme has a strong core focus on the positive change that results from opening up opportunities to participate in work experience. Project activities include personalised job search support for young disabled people, advice on employment rights, job coaching, the development of an online resource for job seekers and research and policy work aimed at employers and education providers.

Summary of progress and outcomes to date:

All participants thought that the Bridge to Work programme had improved their employment prospects in future. For some this was because they had more skills to find and apply for jobs successfully. Others had more clarity about the kind of work they wanted, more appreciation of what it would involve, and more confidence that this would be right for them.

- 75 per cent of participant survey respondents agree with various positive statements about the Bridge to Work programme's impact on their self-perception, employability skills and employment prospects.

- 82 per cent of survey respondents reported a positive 'hard outcome' at the end of the programme; 28 per cent progressed into some form of paid employment, 41 per cent progressed into further training or education and 13 per cent moved on to other programmes
- The data so far clearly indicates that young disabled young people think that participation in Bridge to Work has improved their employment prospects.
- Some early success factors appear to be; highly personalised support arrangements; ensuring other background issues and barriers are overcome first; the quality of the relationships with employers and the opportunity to try out more than one kind of work.
- The most successful approaches to employer engagement were based on selling the business case, matching candidates to employer need, job carving, offering in-work support and removing the perception of risk.

Key plans for year next year:

- There is a need for more employer engagement outside of partners' usual contacts with new employers and particularly with SMEs. This could be important for longer-term impact for two reasons. Firstly, according to the Business Register Office for National Statistics, over 99% of all London businesses are SMEs and they account for around half of all London employment. Also, at some point there will be a need to move beyond employers who are already committed to the disability employment agenda and can see the benefits of this, to change wider attitudes and workplace cultures.
- So far, there has been very limited uptake of the Change London bursary scheme which includes awards of £4,000 per person to London based SMEs to offer a paid internship. Greater awareness raising around the bursary is key to increase engagement with SMEs, provide participants access to a wider range of employers and gain valuable learning about the barriers to be overcome to increase the representation of disabled people in smaller organisations.
- Partners could potentially be more proactive about discussing issues and adjustments, not only when participants first start, but also throughout the placement. This could help ensure any issues are addressed when they first arise and reduce the risk of drop-out or negative experiences for placement participant and employer.

Comments/conclusion:

The Bridge to Work programme is taking place in a context where only half of working age disabled people in London are in paid work. Targeting disabled young people is especially vital as, if they fall into the NEET group, they tend to stay stuck in that group for longer and their aspirations dwindle (House of Commons Briefing Nov 2015).

Recent research into what makes a difference has focused beyond the traditional idea of skills and qualifications and much more on the value of work experience and 'employer encounters' to bring the world of work to life. Research by the Careers & Enterprise Company shows that a young person who has four or more encounters with an employer is 86% less likely to be unemployed or not in education or training and can earn up to 18% more during their career.

In this context, with its focus on the positive change that can result from participating in a significant programme of work experience, Bridge to Work is well positioned. Over the course of the five years, it provides an opportunity to generate policy and delivery lessons regarding increasing disability employment.

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