

PETROC

In-Work Support

STRAND 7



HM Government



COMMUNITY
RENEWAL FUND
PETROC



Contents

Introduction	4
Chapter 1: Understanding barriers	5
Challenges around supporting individuals	5
Challenges in the workplace	8
Chapter 2: Interventions that worked	9
Preparation for employment	9
Passport to employment	9
Bespoke employability approach	10
Advocacy and self-advocacy	11
HR and finance advice	12
Tester visits	12
Routine preparation	12
Preparation for individuals with SEND	13
Preparation for employers	14
Chapter 3: In-work support	18
Maintaining contact with employees	18
Maintaining contact with employers	19
Case studies	20
Conclusion	24
Appendices	25

Introduction

This practice model is the result of collaborative work focusing on a strand of activity (strand 7) of a larger project called “*Innovation for Youth and Community*,” funded by the UK Community Renewal Fund, in which Devon County Council is the lead authority. The purpose of this document is to: 1) share best practice amongst organisations and employers; 2) develop and pilot innovative in-work support for those who have been unemployed or economically inactive; and 3) improve their ability to sustain employment and prevent repeated instances of unemployment.

Petroc has produced this document based on the research and collaborative work conducted from June to September 2022 by four Devon based organisations: *Seadream Education CIC*, *Young Devon*, *Whiz Kidz UK CIC* and *Battling On CIC*. These organisations have met during partners meetings to discuss the strand’s objective and collaboratively identified the areas and challenges the individuals they support face in relation to accessing and sustaining employment. The research has focused on exploring these topics via conversations with colleagues, third party organisations (other support organisations or statutory services), businesses and with individuals they support, thus consolidating the findings and learnings into this best practice model.

The document includes three sections. The first section highlights the challenges and difficulties around supporting individuals and in the workplace. The second presents successful interventions used to support individuals considered as ‘work ready’ and able to sustain employment, but also interventions employers can develop when employing new staff. A number of case studies are included to illustrate successful interventions from the organisations involved in this research.



Chapter 1: Understanding Barriers

Challenges around supporting individuals

When working with unemployed and economically inactive people, it is important to be familiar with the difficulties and barriers they may face in the workplace. Relationship building prior to the job, along with providing support and reassurance, are a key means to equip individuals with relevant skills and build confidence. It is also essential to understand their **individual personal circumstances** and any additional information relevant to the provision of adequate support. This is particularly crucial when working with individuals with SEND where paperwork and the number of actors involved can be a challenge.



Paperwork is usually seen as a hurdle. As mentioned in strand 6, it is crucial to have processes that capture accurate information and include the level of detail necessary to understand an individual’s personal circumstances by using the **appropriate paperwork**. It needs to be flexible, yet evolutive and user friendly. Mentors or support workers can then ascertain what is achievable for the individual they are supporting and avoid instances of failure by setting unattainable expectations.



Transport is a major barrier for young people and individuals living in rural areas of Devon where the lack of access to public transportation can disproportionately affect them, e.g. for wheelchair users with a lack of adaptive transport. Decreasing mobility due to the unaffordability of transport fares and inadequate infrastructure (e.g. taking longer routes), can prevent people from accessing their jobs, education and support services on a daily basis and create further economic disparities. Transport can also be a source of anxiety impacting a person’s mental health.



A **lack of suitable job opportunities** that match with young unemployed individuals’ specific skills set, alongside the **limited industries and sectors available in rural areas**, means seasonal employment tends to be the most common employment in some areas in Devon. Consequently, many individuals, especially with SEND, face vulnerability and insecurities due to short-term contracts, and cannot maintain long-term employment. In addition, changes to routines linked to shift work, and long breaks between seasonal starts are often very hard for individuals,



particularly for those with additional needs or autism, and can be detrimental to their mental health and capability to adapt to change.

As demonstrated by two youth mentoring projects currently operating in Devon, Experience Works, part-funded by the European Social Fund, and Empowering Enterprise, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and the European Social Fund, **mental health** is the largest single issue affecting young people.

The organisations involved in the development of this practice model, stressed the shortage in mental health services and highlighted the long waiting lists when signposting individuals they work with. One partner stated:

"We saw an increase in referrals of individuals who suffer from anxiety and mental health issues, while referrals are taking longer and longer because of COVID backlog and long waiting lists. ... We maintain the contact with them to ensure that they are not forgotten and that we care for them. It is our only way to keep them engaged and avoid them from slipping away from the system."

Whiz Kidz UK

Support workers find it increasingly challenging as the **length of support** varies between participants with some needing only a few sessions or phone calls, whereas for others it required a longer-term plan. An increased number of organisations feel a need to train their staff in topics around mental health, anxiety or learning difficulties and disabilities to equip them with while supporting individuals.

Childcare is a barrier for young parents. The lack of affordable childcare or access to grants influence greatly their accessibility to employment.

Additional challenges for individuals with SEND

Whilst support is offered during the transition process of young people and individuals with SEND, this provision might not materialise in some instances due to a **lack of suitably trained support workers**. In some cases, the young person is referred to a service outside of Devon Locality (Cornwall or Plymouth) where they have available trained support workers, adding complexities in terms of paperwork and responsibilities that sit within the local authority.

"Within the CAMHS teams within the South West, there are no specialist staff trained to deal with young people with learning difficulties and disabilities. There are none that can use British Sign Language to support young people who are non-verbal who have mental health issues. Many young people with SEND therefore cannot get the support they need."

Battling On

For additional details about the referral process of individuals with EHCP, see Strand 6 Suite of data: Youth Workers Navigating Support Services.

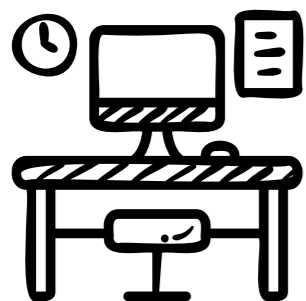


Challenges in the workplace

Employers are struggling post-COVID, inflation and the cost-of-living crisis in rural areas, this meant that they are naturally very nervous about taking on any new members of staff. They are especially anxious about taking on young people, in particular those with SEND, due to the perceived increase in investment in terms of time and cost that it would take to get them working independently and efficiently. The organisations we spoke with work with all types of employers, but with SMEs in particular.

When employing a young person, employers need to factor in a number of costs including adjusting the workplace and investing time before the start date. Some of the challenges that employers face when employing a young person can be related to:

Lack of understanding	Management and staff lack of understanding of the nature of young people, especially those with SEND, and how it translates into the workplace.
Language used within the workplace	Is it appropriate, jargon free, direct and not open to misunderstanding? Briefing work colleagues should be considered.
Adaptations to the workplace	Does it have the correct adaptations to meet the young people's needs? e.g. wheelchair access, signage, specific clothing, correct technology installed, etc.
Induction paperwork	Is it appropriately designed? In terms of colour, font, imagery (Makaton-based), etc.
Sensory sensitivity	Staff awareness about sensory sensitivity and its impact on the new member of staff, e.g. noise, colour, clothing, etc.
Interactions with other staff	Has it been organised to suite the young people's needs? The first day at work can be overwhelming for some young people, particularly those with SEND or suffering with anxiety.
Length of time	Another factor to consider is the length of time it may take to successfully transition a young person with SEND successfully into the workplace. Realistic expectations on timeframes to integrate a young person into the workplace should be considered.



Chapter 2: Interventions that worked

Here are some best practice recommendations from the organisations we spoke with, based on the conversations and feedback from both their mentors and participants. Firstly, the interventions that worked when preparing individuals for employment and secondly those that took place once they moved into employment.

Preparation for employment

Young people often don't understand the world of work and lack the confidence to ask questions. To maintain employment once they start a new job, it is important for a young person to have the right skills and be properly prepared to face the new environment and understand the job requirements. Taking the time to prepare young people for employment is key and can take place a long time before they start a new job. Depending on the level of support the individual needs, this can last between 2 to up to 12 months.

Passport to employment

Looking at what information will help a new employee in the workplace, some organisations have developed sheets to cover different topics, such as:



- Understanding types of employment contracts and contract clauses
- Understanding the individual's rights and responsibilities in the workplace, e.g. simplified staff handbooks
- Understanding a payslip
- Understanding a workplace structure

To develop a 'Ready for Work Passport' or 'Passport to Employment' (see appendix 1), organisations need to dedicate time and work closely with mentors for a successful preparation to employment. This step is paramount for getting young people work-ready by developing their confidence and motivation, providing them with the relevant information, and coaching them to become independent in the new workplace.

The passport includes sections on:

Routine health-check	Not a physical health-check but a health check for the young person's routines (sleep, diet, daytime commitments, hobbies, etc.).
Employability modules	What it means to be employed – CV and cover letter writing, job searching, interview skills and preparation, etc.
Understanding working environments	Sector, industry, premises, facilities, equipment.
Finance	Understand a payslip, deductions, budgeting income & expenditure.
Understanding the workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structure of organisation Self-advocacy, rights and responsibilities: know where to go, who to ask Job descriptions, roles and activities
Interview preparation	Mock interviews, employer encounter, tester visits

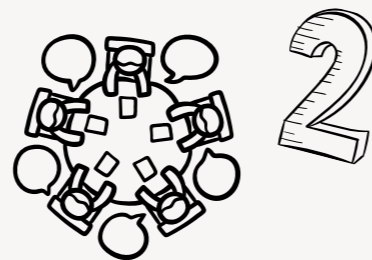
Bespoke employability approach

For a successful preparation, a bespoke employability approach on one-to-one basis is vital. What works for one individual may differ from another. However, it is helpful for the individual to explore:



Job searching, writing CV's, covering letters, applications

Interview skills and how to sell yourself



Understanding the working environment

Advocacy and self-advocacy

Having someone to support and assist a young person in navigating the various things they need to address, e.g. completing paperwork, or supporting them in their job search is crucial. Furthermore, encouraging them to express their views on the difficulties they may face, and providing advice to empower them to make their own choices is key. With encouragement and support, they can speak and act on their own behalf.

Mentors' role should also encourage young people to self-advocate. They should:



- Use information that makes sense to them, using **their own language** which is relevant to them. For example, avoid using acronyms or over-developed language.



- Ensure that they **assert their voice**. Ask them what they think about the process, if they are happy with it or if they need something to change to accommodate for their needs



- Involve them in the decision-making and listen to what they have to say.** Pay attention to the conversations and to any signs that can reflect an element in their life or behaviour that could affect their involvement

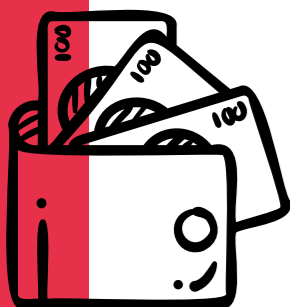


- Give them time to process** information and make decisions. After sharing information with a young person, it is important to leave them some time to reflect and share that information with a trusted person, before they can make their informed decisions



- For young people with SEND, personalise the information** so it is contextualised and has relevance – e.g. social story. Ask questions such as “*What information would you give a new person to make them feel safe and welcome when starting a new job?*”. Build on the information given to explore what is important to the individual.

Although the idea of having a standardised advocacy process can be attractive for many organisations, it often needs adjustment to keep it bespoke and flexible to the young person's needs.



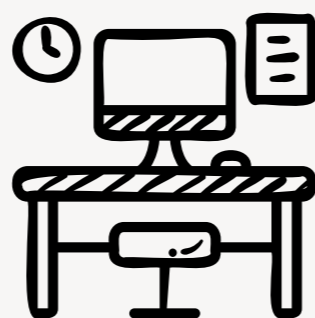
HR and finance advice

It can be overwhelming for a young person to try to make sense of employment law and work legalities. Some young people may never have seen a payslip and might not understand how pay works. Providing an explanation of pay systems, what a payslip looks like, why we pay deductions and what they mean, is essential. Equally important is to explain to the young person who they might approach in a workplace if they have questions about their pay and explain the role of human resources.

To help individuals assimilate and manage their finance, the 'MAS (Money Advice Service) Budget Planner' (see appendix 2), budgeting tool developed by Young Devon, has been particularly popular with both staff and young people. This budgeting tool ascertains whether the new salary will be better than remaining on benefits, what deductions may be taken and includes tabs to consider household bills.

Taster visits

Workplace tours and taster visits are great ways to offer young people the opportunity to see how a working environment looks and feels. They offer an opportunity for the young person and the employer to meet. Mentors can support the young person in identifying different employers in their local area that the young person would be happy to visit. They can also arrange conversations or mock interviews wherever and whenever possible.



Routine preparation

Finding and starting employment is a big step that comes with its own changes. Depending on the job, there are different parts of the individual's current routine that may need adjusting. Healthy eating, good sleep and a focus on wellbeing are all key components to feeling better when they start work. The mentor can support the young person in developing a new routine and arranging their daytime commitments and priorities to facilitate the adaptation to the new workplace.



Preparation for individuals with SEND

As explained above, successful preparation needs to be bespoke and based on a one-to-one approach, in particular when working with individuals with SEND. The preparation for employment might last longer and it is crucial that the process is flexible and explained throughout. In many cases, multiple meetings, calls, and visits are needed to get the right job or employer for the young person. Mentors, in collaboration with CSW, parents, carers and guardians, should provide a range of support to aid a successful transition to employment. To facilitate this process, the support should:

- Use **simple information** with clear English avoiding complicated words
- Understand the **individual's needs and abilities**
- Involve **parents, carers and guardians**
- Work closely with **Careers South West (CSW)**
- Present information in a **variety of formats**, e.g. Picture sequencing (step 1, Step 2, Step 3 etc), Now and Then approach and Widgets, picture cards.
- Promote an **empathic, approachable** approach and a sense of **humour**
- Provide support in early stages to help with **transport** to work. Envisage Access to Work Scheme to fund the travel to work.
- Organise **interview practice**. Practicing interviews helps young people with SEND to familiarise themselves with the whole interviewing process and reduces their anxiety. Consider offering mock interviews over a period of time to normalise it taking the fear out of them.
- Offer taster days to ascertain correct employment path. Support the individual to explore a variety of suitable opportunities, provide **employers visits**, small **taster sessions**, **role plays** and **informal discussions** about placement options can help the individual to engage positively with the process
- Provide support in the building of **workplace relationships**.
- **Work with employers and staff** to understand the nature of the LDD
- Create Information Packs for young people.
- It is vital that the **process is not rushed**, in some cases this might take months



Example of employment preparation for individuals with SEND:

"In terms of the role play and tutorials, they are either done on an individual basis or within a group setting. In the first instance, we tend to do generic work just to get young people used to the idea of interviews, work experience and work placements. As the young people get more confident, the mentor arranges to take them out volunteering using a variety of organisations and different venues. The aim is to build their confidence and get them used to working in different situations with different people. When a young person has a specific interview or placement trial, their mentor will practice questions with them and run through the planned activities for the day (if a work trial) this is to reduce stress and set up realistic expectations of the day."

Battling On

Preparation for employers

Creating contact

Building relationships with employers to ensure a smooth start to employment has been invaluable. Mentors have been able to make contact with employers prior to the interview stage and provide bespoke coaching, advocacy, advice and support to young people. Providing employers with all the necessary advice and guidance they need to employ an individual and their personal circumstances (e.g. SEND, housing, mental health/triggers, communication skills, ability to mix with others, travel and access to work, etc.) was vital for a successful employment. In some cases, mentors arranged for employers to meet and informally interview the young person before they were offered a work placement or employment. This is a perfect opportunity for the mentor to manage both parties' expectations and work with the employer to create a safe environment that integrates the individual's needs and abilities.

Some employers might find information packs useful to:



Identify **additional support** the young person will need moving into employment and staying in employment – in particular for those with EHCP



Access **personal information and individual circumstances** the young person is happy to share with the new employer



Identify what **realistic support** the young person can expect from their employer and manage their expectations



Identify **opportunities and suitable jobs**

These information packs can be comprised, but are not limited to, of forms which include (for more forms see strand 6 – suite of data):



Risk Assessment



EHCP Risk Assessment. This form outlines how LDD impact abilities



Key Skills Assessment. This is for employers to identify numeracy and literacy levels



SEND outline. This is a document to define what the EHCP means, e.g ADHD, ODD, etc.

Whereas some employers found information packs useful, other found them overwhelming comprising excessive and complex information. A tick box sheet with key information covering the topics below could be more appropriate:

- Skill Set
- Communication Skills
- Academic Levels
- Support needed in workplace
- Support needed travelling for work
- For individuals with EHCP:

EHCP Risk Assessment
How the LDD presents itself, identify triggers, etc.



Employers' preparation

Based on the organisations' feedback from both mentors and young people, here are some best practice recommendations that can help employers prepare when employing a young person:

Review **induction paperwork**. Employers need to ensure paperwork is appropriately designed in terms of colour, font, imagery (Makaton-based), etc.



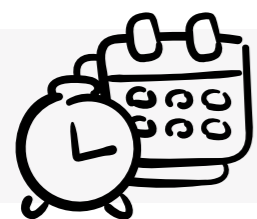
Adapt the language used within the workplace. It needs to be appropriate, jargon free, direct and not open to misunderstanding.

Adopt an **informal approach** promoting, in some cases, casual clothing in the workplace. Some individuals get intimidated by formal attire



Adapt the workplace, e.g. wheelchair access, signage, specific clothing, correct technology installed etc.

Dedicate a staff member from the start to whom the young person can refer back to and ask any questions they might have. Having someone they know present may give them the confidence they need to complete their tasks and develop independence.



Dedicate time. It is vital the induction process is not rushed.

For individuals with SEND:



Train and involve management and staff about the nature of individuals with SEND, and how it interprets into the workplace.



Develop staff awareness about **sensory sensitivity** for example noise, colour, clothing



Has an Occupational Therapists been involved?



Have employers or employees requested funding from the **Access to Work fund** to help facilitate the workplace? e.g. transport to work, support assistant in work, modifications to working environment.



Chapter 3: In-work support

The organisations we spoke with often find that support is still required once young people move into employment, from both the employer and the new employee. This will ensure a smooth transition into work and support the sustainability of the employment.

Maintaining contact with employees

Maintaining continuity of contact with individuals outside their new place of work, giving advice or being a friendly source of reassurance, helps them maintain confidence; find advice independently and make progress.

Suggestions of in-work support provided to individuals to help them maintain their employment include, but are not limited to:

<p>In-work mentoring</p>	<p>Providing support to individuals to understand workplace boundaries, communication channels, job responsibilities (role description, timekeeping, commitment, etc). As explained above, having someone assist and available to turn to when support is needed provides reassurance and helps maintain young people's confidence to voice their own ideas and articulate their needs, e.g. questions about payslips, annual leave, induction or training. Subsequently, it helps them develop independence in the new workplace.</p>
<p>Childcare support</p>	<p>Several participants would not have been able to sustain work without mentors' support in finding manageable, affordable childcare including accessing grants and funding for this.</p>
<p>Travel</p>	<p>Same as above, several new employees would not have been able to get to work without their mentors' help in finding solutions and accessing funding to help with transportation fairs.</p> <p>With the help of mentors and CSW, individuals with EHCP can benefit from the Access to Work Scheme to fund their transport.</p>
<p>Length and type of support</p>	<p>This varies between individuals who only need only a couple of sessions or phone calls to those who require a longer-term plan. It is important to have an allocated mentor during the induction process and first few months of employment – generally 3 months. The mentor should be available through a light touch approach or more involved depending on the level of needs of the individual, to ensure both parties – young person and employer, are satisfied.</p>

Most organisations we spoke with stated that their doors remain open albeit the end of their support. In some cases, receiving news and updates from the individuals they supported who are still in employment. And in other cases, being a source of reassurance or confidence, a friendly face to turn to.

Maintaining contact with employers

Maintaining an ongoing, informal and light touch approach to support employers for at least the first three months should a young person struggle in early stages of employment is fundamental to ensure the employment is successful in the long-term. Contact is usually maintained by phone, emails or online. Depending on the need, face-to-face meetings are arranged.

Since initial contact, organisations have established a symbiotic and continuing relationship with employers. This contact offered mentors the opportunity to impress upon employers the need to consider travel issues new employees might face and envisage ways to support them to travel to work, e.g. identify available bus routes in rural areas, adjust working hours, provide transport for staff, etc.

For organisations supporting individuals with EHCP, the staged transition to the workplace doesn't end their involvement in most cases. A flexible review of progress at regular stages once the individual is working unsupported, including the employer, the individual, and where appropriate their parents, carers and guardians, is key. This ensures the person has transitioned correctly preventing any potential issues from happening.



Case Studies

The organisations involved in this strand of activity provided an array of stories that are brought to life over the next paragraphs. The case studies illustrate examples of individuals who have been successful in gaining employment, or those reflecting the organisations relationship with employers.

Case study 1



MS has autism, ADHD and partial hearing.

“MS wanted to work within the construction industry, but no builders were willing to give him a chance. An apprenticeship became available with a Highways Maintenance Company which he applied for, upon learning of his difficulties they cited Health and Safety being a huge concern to employing him as they were concerned, he would not hear where the heavy equipment was or be able to hear instructions.

In discussion with the company, we were able to demonstrate that he had the technology to overcome this problem via hearing aids attached to his phone via Bluetooth. We also discussed how his autism and ADHD presented itself and how to communicate with him to get the best results.

We convinced them to give him a two-week trial which went well, and he was offered an apprenticeship. His supervisor praised his work ethic and willingness to stay on task regardless of the weather.

The company has subsequently been in touch with us to establish if there are other young people who would be interested in working for them and stated they were now aware that disabilities do not preclude individuals from being able to enter their sector”.

Battling On

Case study 2



“We would approach employers with the young person’s consent around the time of the interview or shortly after. It is useful at this stage for some young people as interviews are very daunting and they may need reasonable adjustments made in order to attend. Where we have supported young people with applications and employer contacts, they [employers] may already be aware of us. It’s a very light touch and we are there for holistic support rather than to manage the process. We would normally approach them [employers] by phone or email. In one case RA was struggling to contact Sainsbury’s. His mentor organised a visit to the store. This visit has helped him overcome his apprehension and start his new job”

Young Devon



Case study 3



“BD’s support spanned a 7-month period in all. She self-referred ...after seeing a social media message exchange we were having on a public forum with another individual who was asking for assistance. Initial contact was made by private message but then response was on/off for some weeks before eventually confidence was raised enough for a face to face. This was carried out ‘mobile’ outside her house.

Profile:

- *BD had left school at age 14 with no qualification*
- *She was not on any benefit and was at home supported by mum.*
- *Very quiet with anxiety and very rarely left home and did not go into areas with a high density of people.*
- *Did not use public transport.*

“After initially collecting and dropping her back for meetings, we eventually used bus buddying and ‘shadowing’ the bus by car until she was confident enough to meet at the office unassisted. We used our own internal projects in the community to give her volunteering opportunities and experiences and added to her skills with online courses to build her CV. She undertook a Maths/English assessment and scored highly and from that attained functional skills in both. We got her on a construction based multi-skills taster course which after initial wavering of confidence she attended and enjoyed. We were approached by a company [Universal Fire & Safety] we know as to whether we had anyone looking for summer work. They install, maintain and supply a variety of equipment and services including: Fire and Safety, CCTV, Access Systems and more. The work was to help put new cable infrastructures into schools during the summer holiday and they would work alongside trained engineers. We outlined it with BD who was unsure, but we convinced her to at least be interviewed if only for the experience. The interview we arranged with the company was held at our offices where she was comfortable, and they were made aware of her anxieties, and it was conducted by 2 people (as it

happened directors) and in a quite informal manner.

We were contacted after the event and told that unfortunately she had not interviewed well and they felt it would be too much for her to cope with. We discussed the outcome with BD who was disappointed as she said it sounded interesting. We contacted the directors, discussed the position and convinced them to give her a 2-week trial and see how she coped. Following that initial trial she did the summer work and was subsequently offered an apprenticeship.... We maintained contact with the company and they with us as she has been quoted by them as their best apprentice ever! Whilst there she has taken driving lessons, passed her test and now has her own fully equipped van for work and personal transport to and from work. They are very supportive and she has time out (paid) to attend CBT which is helping her further on her anxiety. She contacts us periodically and her last text was; “SOMETIMES THE SMALLEST STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION ENDS UP BEING THE BIGGEST STEP OF YOUR LIFE. Saw this on a site today. And it made me think of you both. I will always be thankful 😊”

The path was not easy and much of the support was not ‘captured’ as it was text or message exchanges made when she felt low or needed to ‘talk’. ... Not all cases end like this unfortunately, but it illustrates that with the right level of support to the client along with the ability to reach out to and negotiate with employers, the chance of overall success (for both parties) is raised considerably.”

Whiz Kidz UK



Conclusion

From the research and work achieved by the four organisations mentioned above, it is evident that in-work support provides huge benefits in helping individuals sustain their employment in the long-term as well as developing employers understanding of young people's needs and abilities. This approach helps manage both parties' expectations and identify further ways to work together.

This model is a guide for organisations and can be presented in different ways that suit the organisation and the working practice. Each organisation can adapt the model or create different versions depending on the employers they are working with. Due to the nature of young people, particularly those with SEND, and uncertainties associated with working with them, this model needs to be more bespoke. Youth organisations need to develop and encourage flexibility within their workplaces to respond to the needs of these individuals. Additionally, they need to be honest with themselves to have the resources and deliver the support it requires beyond the life of the project.

Interestingly, these organisations highlighted the need for employers to seek support outside of their businesses to access specific information or training for their management and staff to help them adapt and understand the requirements of young people. This is pertinent today when some partners see an increase this year of referrals for young people already in work as employers' attitudes swing more towards supporting individuals to remain in post.

Although establishing a relationship with employers has been vital in ensuring a successful start to employment, it is important to emphasise that this is especially challenging for the organisations we spoke with. This is particularly difficult in the current economic climate where businesses have a high turn-over of staff and are struggling post-Covid, with rising inflation and the cost-of-living crisis.



Appendices

Appendices include documents shared by Young Devon.

Appendix 1 Passport to Employment

Click on link below to open the document.



Appendix 2 MAS Budget Planner

Click on links below to access





PETROC