

Journey Enterprises



Stephanie (client) and Hub Manager Sarah Smith showcase Journey's Job Coaching programme



CEO Elspeth McPherson

Bringing communities together through an ethos of “seeing learning ability”, Journey Enterprises work with individuals with complex conditions such as Down’s, Williams and Prader–Willi syndromes; cerebral palsy; fragile X syndrome; and autism. Fifty per cent of its clients have Down’s syndrome, a significantly higher ratio than the condition prevalence, which speaks to the organisation’s reputation within the field. CEO Elspeth McPherson explains more.

With a vision to enable people with complex needs to live happy, socially inclusive and fulfilling lives in their own community, we have worked through years of significant health, social care, education and welfare transition, changing the landscape of third-sector service provision and partnerships. We remain regional and community based, working from three wellbeing bases and through small social enterprises in the North East. Now hosting 171 clients aged from 17 to over 70, our focus is on enabling people with learning disabilities to gain the skills and experience to live and work successfully.

Values at heart

At the heart of our delivery are five key values: accountability, person-centred delivery, openness, inclusivity and creativity. Shaping all aspects of operations and practice, the application of the central tenet of personalisation across an organisational culture demonstrates how disability practice has driven innovation.

The same philosophy has been applied to our service differentiation. Working in a context of poor employment outcomes for people with learning disability – England has an average of six per cent, and the figure drops to a low of 1.2 per cent in areas that

FACTS ABOUT JOURNEY ENTERPRISES

- » CEO: Elspeth McPherson
- » Established in 1983
- » Based in Hexham, Newcastle and Bishop Auckland
- » Services: Life and work skills training for people with complex learning disability
- » No. of employees: 25
- » IIP, BILD (PBS) and Disability Confident quality marks
- » www.journeyenterprises.co.uk



Fit for Work: Paul (client) focuses on his boxing skills as part of Journey's popular sports & exercise programming

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we serve – we have pioneered a new model of employability programming. Underpinned by initial funding from the European Social Fund, the Job Coaching Service has successfully achieved 63 per cent progression into volunteering or employment for clients on its programme.

This unique model has worked through transforming its established relationship with care managers and social care commissioners, proposing the transfer of care and support packages, and moving days of purchased “group day service” to hours of one-on-one job coaching and work experience. This shift in design gives clients opportunities to gain and practise work skills while also working on health management, daily living skills and travel training, which has resulted in client aspirations for working lives and reductions in social care expenditure.

The discernible difference from existing models is the blend of part day service retention combined with part-time work transition. By keeping some of the allocated care packages in place, people with learning disability are able to maintain friendships and continue to have support for health and life skills development as their lives change. Supporting not only their clients but local employers, the specialists

who provide these care packages can quickly make recommendations and signpost to additional services so that work outcomes are successfully sustained.

The power of people assessed by the welfare system as non-work capable, to transform and contribute economically, is mirrored in the feedback from local employers. This has focused on the positive cultural and behavioural changes that appointing someone with learning disability has driven in their staff teams.

Key partners

We were a key partner in the Community Partners initiative, the Department for Work and Pensions' flagship programme following Improving Lives. Regional job centres in Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Durham, and Tees Valley were the next stage in developing and extending the initiative. Our clients have given training presentations at local job centres, providing insights into working aspirations for people with complex needs. Job coaches have worked to show how person-centred delivery can work successfully across professional partners.

This collaboration would not have been possible without the insights gained from all participants, from work coaches to disability employer adviser consultants, and from lead partnership managers to employer advisers. We have been greatly encouraged by our experience inside DWP through the Community Partners Programme to build best practice in supporting disability work outcomes.

Reciprocating this partnership, we welcomed Job Centre Plus Northumberland and Tyne and Wear's senior leadership team as volunteers at Acomb Hub, Hexham, in the autumn of 2019.

Key drivers

As we move forward, our key drivers are health, ageing and employability. For the past five years, we have led a focus strategy to increase the numbers of young disabled people in service, achieved by successful partnerships with special schools, colleges and transitions teams. The priority of this strategy is working together to address incrementally the barriers people with learning disabilities will face during their life span. Central to this work is enabling health and wellbeing, ensuring inclusion and equality of access across both service and sector provision.

The Transforming Care agenda has shaped local health and wellbeing strategies, and we see both gaps and opportunities for our services to flourish. A priority is to increase the number of people with learning disabilities registered with GPs and to ensure not only accessibility for primary health prevention and screening services such as learning disability health checks, but also accessible signposting for wider health and wellbeing services. Key conditions we support, such as Down's syndrome, have unusually high prevalence rates for dementia in the region, and we want to ensure our services are shaped to better prepare and support clients who will be ageing with both long-term conditions and acquired comorbidity of acute illnesses.

Moving forward

In the past year, we worked on a new assessment framework to measure client progression across both life skills and employability. This addressed a shortfall in an assessment framework fit for application across the service, breaking social, communication, physical, mental and emotional skills into assessable criteria. The resulting "I Can" framework, for which IP was granted during 2019, enables specialist staff to plan and evaluate skills



Specialist Life Skills Coach, Fatima El-Jellaoui, recently settled in the UK, supports Raju (client) to re-explore the world after Covid-19 Shielding

progression matched either to each client's care support or education and healthcare plan, or to their claimant commitment objectives. We hope to market the framework commercially for learning disability service providers, potentially as an app.

Our new website – commissioned by Northumberland-based marketers Retox, artist Dave Bull and photographer Chris Thompson – takes a Marvel cartoon theme, chosen by clients, and provides a very different platform. Uniquely, the website has been designed in "easy read". Text has been written for a reading age of no higher than 12 years, and an average of 11 years.

Following the website launch, our next aim is to work on a zero-footprint initiative, in partnership with small, local like-minded entrepreneurs. In a world of food poverty, we will develop a project that brings together local suppliers, creating a chain of work opportunities for people of different abilities.

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