



Phoenix2 Network CIC

Making a difference in the community

E-Plus – Educating, Enabling & Empowering

Hounslow Project Report and Evaluation

March 2018

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Phoenix2 Network (P2N) Community Interest Company (CIC) (Company Number 9156220) was formed in July 2014 to promote projects that make a difference to people in the community, and their opportunities in life. A trademark of the group's projects is the 'painting by numbers' approach: once the idea has been piloted with a small sample of subjects, it can be repeated as widely as there is interest.

For this particular project we would like to thank...

Our Volunteers:

Employer Liaison	Dorothy Reoch, assisted by Anne Hennings,
Mentors:	Carole Atkinson, Kay Brooks, Andrew Brown, Cathy Byrne, Victoria Clark, Julia Coleman, Barbara Diamant, Angela Elkholy, Janet Roberts, Katy Hobbs, John Kirchner, Wilma Vlok, Lucy Walmsley
Assessors:	Jenny Brown, assisted by Monica Collings and Sue Waters
Mentors Training	Valerie Purcell, Sue Waters, Julia Coleman
SU Workshop Leaders	Carole Atkinson, Jenny Brown, Sue Waters
General support:	Valerie Purcell

Other organisations which have provided considerable support:

Department for Work and Pensions,
West London Mental Health Trust,
Best Reception,
Maswell Park Church.

Employers:

RSPCA, Steam Museum, Music Museum, Heathrow Hotel, Novotel, Southall Cattery, Green Gym, Home Farm Trust, Wildlife and Wetlands Trust, Orleans House, Age UK Hounslow, Foodbox Brentford.

Directors of P2N CIC:

Sue Waters, Carole Atkinson, Liz McConnell, Joyce Boorman, Tracy Gardiner.

CONTENTS

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Preparation
- 3 Project Content
- 4 Outcomes
- 5 Project Management and Communication
- 6 Learning
- 7 Conclusions



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 P2N CIC

The Phoenix2 Network (P2N) Community Interest Company (CIC) (Company Number 9156220) was formed in July 2014 to promote projects that make a difference to people in the community, and their opportunities in life. A trademark of the group's projects is the 'painting by numbers' approach: once the idea has been piloted with a small sample of subjects, it can be repeated as widely as there is interest.

E-Plus (educate, empower and enable) is about helping people in recovery from mental health conditions make a smooth transition back to paid employment via a voluntary work experience scheme.

1.2 Background

Mental Health Issues can affect one in four people in Britain. The problems range from anxiety, or depression to more serious psychotic disorders, and many are 'invisible' unlike physical illnesses and accidents such as measles or a broken arm. Mental illness impacts on confidence, self esteem and the ability to cope in social situations. Members of P2N CIC undertook considerable research and spoke to many organisations to ascertain what was available to help mental health sufferers to return to work. It became apparent that there was no programme allowing for people in recovery to experience a work programme involving small steps towards returning to full time paid employment. E-Plus was designed to provide such a programme, where tiny steps could be taken through a work experience programme which could build self esteem and confidence and assist a return to work.

A pilot project was run in the boroughs of Kingston-upon-Thames and Richmond-upon-Thames in 2014, partnering with a charity with funding from the National Lottery. This project became the pilot for a 'roll-out' in the London Borough of Hounslow (LBH), in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

1.3 Hounslow preliminary meeting

Following the pilot project a meeting was held in Hounslow in July 2015 to see whether there would be local support for an E-Plus Project. The meeting included attendees from LBH, Disability Network, West London Mental Health Trust (WLMHT), Twining Enterprise, and Hounslow Recovery West.

Attendees were very supportive of what was being proposed with agreement that the project would be viable in Hounslow as it definitely filled a gap in current provision. They also suggested a variety of employers and organisations that might be interested and receptive in providing work placements. There were no specific leads on possible Service Users apart from contacting the Disablement Employment Adviser at Jobcentre Plus. Maswell Park Church was suggested as suitable for Service User (SU) interviews and preparation workshops, in addition to perhaps church members becoming mentors. From that meeting P2N CIC Directors decided to go ahead.

2 PREPARATION

2.1 Funding Application Challenges

P2N CIC has proactively sought funding for specific projects through sponsorship or short-term grants from the National Lottery Awards for All programme. However, for this particular piece of work, the team was approached and encouraged to apply for a funding initiative run by the DWP, who were funding area managers to develop local initiatives with local providers where possible. The Manager from the Hounslow area had attended a presentation about the pilot project and was keen to develop a partnership.

Because this was a new initiative, the application process was lengthy, time consuming and prone to revisions along the way. However, patience and support from various people within DWP, saw this application through the first and second round until it was finally successful.

The length of time between the original application and the final go-ahead was almost a year. This created a few difficulties as some of the momentum built up through the pilot had been lost. This in turn meant we had lost touch with potential volunteers and due to staff turnover, within both the voluntary sector and DWP itself, the goodwill and familiarity we were hoping would give us a head start with potential partners etc. was lost. There were also a couple of logistical problems around management because P2N CIC's original application was developed in order to front load the workload during a specific timeframe to use all the skills available within the management team. By the time the project was due to start we found ourselves dealing with initial management issues rather more remotely than we would have preferred.

There were some very positive outcomes of our funding application for our own organisational growth. As part of the application we were required to review and update all our existing policies and develop a couple of new ones in terms of risk assessment and support. The process for releasing funding was very different from previous funding as we were paid on results and had to submit claims on a monthly basis. We also found this to be a very positive process as this meant we also needed to have robust reporting and monitoring processes in place. You will read elsewhere the impact this had on volunteers.

Funding by results worked for us in this case and we were able to cover all our projected costs. But, if we decided to do a similar project with similar funding structures in place there were a couple of specific learning points we would highlight:

1. Matching the goals and aims of the funders and their organisational needs with our wider goals and outcomes
2. Lack of up front funds would inhibit us due to a need to recruit and fund specific management solutions because we do not operate with paid staff.

2.2 Research Hounslow

It was very clear that the organisation and provision of services for the unemployed and those with mental health conditions were very different in Hounslow compared with Kingston and Richmond. This was partly due to local government politics, and priorities for funding grants. For example, Mind and Carers in Mind Richmond had a more prominent role than they did in Hounslow. Relationships needed to be built with organisations that might support the project, maybe offering funding, and identifying referral options for SUs who needed extra help, as well as identifying sources for recruiting mentors, and employers who might be willing to be involved.

A few people and organisations had already been identified who could help, and had been invited to the meeting, mentioned earlier, to gauge interest and support. Following on from that meeting, LBH/DWP advised there was a funding package available, and applications were welcome (see 2.1 above). Further contact was made with Damien Witham from WLMHT, who proved to be very supportive, and subsequently resulted in a few very good referrals. He also introduced the project to the Hounslow Mental Health Employment Network which was a good place to network with other service providers. The venue where the first meeting took place, Maswell Park Church, proved to be the ideal venue for all meetings and workshops, having excellent facilities and being very central.

Sue, as project coordinator, spoke at meetings of the U3A, to raise awareness and to generate interest in mentoring. She also attended meetings at the drop-in centre in School Road, Hounslow. Dorothy contacted employers and built up a list (see para 3.4 about voluntary placements and employers), and Valerie painstakingly mapped all relevant provision in the borough, both statutory and voluntary with description of purpose and contact details. This was shared throughout the team and enabled access to support agencies.

2.3 Recruitment and training volunteers

Recruitment proved to be more difficult than anticipated. Several volunteers from the Kingston and Richmond pilot project agreed to mentor on the new project which provided a small pool of experienced mentors. Sue spoke at several meetings including: U3A, WI, and the Kingston club of Soroptimist International (SI). She also left posters in local public places such as the National Archives Kew. This produced no responses. Emails to other SI clubs in the London area were more fruitful. She completed a very lengthy questionnaire about the project and P2N CIC for the Ealing Volunteer Bureau, without any response. As the project progressed new mentors were urgently needed and one-to-one approaches were made to suitable contacts of existing volunteers which yielded good results. An application form and a job description were produced.

2.4 Learning

- The most successful tactic was approaching known people who were thought to be suitable, and asking them to come on board.
- Recruitment strategies and difficulties resulted in an ethnic and gender profile which did not adequately match that of the SUs. However, feedback from SUs did not indicate any concerns about this.

2.5 Training

The training programme for mentors was designed to be participative. It took in some basic information about the kinds of mental health issues the SUs might be facing but was focused on the impact of the illness on people's lives and ways of supporting them. It looked at the importance of confidentiality, of confidence building, and negotiation, and crucially, at the boundaries of the mentor's role. The importance of record keeping and the necessary processes were also included in the training.

The programme started with two morning training sessions on consecutive weeks, held at Maswell Park Church in Hounslow. It proved difficult for some volunteers to attend both sessions so the content was then condensed into a single session. A session in Richmond was arranged for three prospective mentors from Kew WI, but none wished to proceed because of the record keeping requirement. A group of prospective mentors from SI London were seen in a hotel close to where they lived.

As the project progressed, there were not enough volunteers available for viable group sessions and there was time pressure to match mentors to waiting SUs. Therefore a one-to-one mentor induction scheme was set up, which met the need, but the mentors missed out on peer group input. A buddying system was set up, partly to address this, but was little used. Ongoing support was met by the regular monthly team meetings. Questions were often related to the use of Dropbox for record-keeping.

Following training all mentors signed an agreement with P2N CIC about commitment and confidentiality.

3 PROJECT CONTENT

3.1 Assessment

The project needed to be able to sift out the good referrals from the inappropriate and to choose people who were motivated and likely to succeed at all stages, although it was recognized there would be a significant drop-out at each stage. A small interview room at the church in Hounslow was used, because it was relatively easy for people to get to, and was a safe and non-threatening environment.

The process was that the DWP made a referral in the presence of the SU by the Job Coach calling Best Reception who had a list of interview slots, and one was given to the SU with details of the interviewer and the venue. Best Reception was the virtual office company used by the project to manage the diary.

At this stage a professionally qualified person was required, who had experience of dealing with people with mental health problems, and could carry out an assessment. This would be the first person from the E-Plus project with whom the SU had contact. The person who did the majority of the assessment interviews was Jenny Brown, a psychiatric social worker, who kindly volunteered her services on her day off from her job working for the NHS Mental Health Trust. She was helped by a former colleague, Monica Collings, and occasionally by Sue Waters who was a Chartered Counselling psychologist/therapist.

Not all the people who were referred showed up for the interview. Some who did were quite inappropriate for this project. The criteria that had been supplied to the DWP specified that on a scale of 1-10 for being functional, applicants for the project needed to score 5 or more. It was accepted that many of the people assessed would have multiple problems – money, accommodation, health, relationships – but they needed to be functional enough to eventually do some paid work.

Each person interviewed was seen for up to an hour, and if considered suitable, was given the date of the next SU workshop. If there was no mentor available immediately, the assessor would stay in touch.

3.2 SU Workshops

Regular workshops, run by two trainers, were held throughout the term of the project. Each SU had to complete two workshops each of two hours duration. During the workshops, providing a safe, non-judgmental but understanding environment, participants were encouraged to express their hopes and fears of the workshops and inform the trainers why they were attending. Many wanted to return to work but a few were attending as '*DWP had sent them*'. SUs discussed their previous jobs, if any, and their hobbies to enable skills to be extracted which could form part of a CV – which was used as homework after the first session. Challenges against progressing were explored e.g. getting up, effect of medication, travelling on public transport and reaction of work colleagues and coping strategies discussed.

Following a recap of the first workshop, the second commenced with the group sharing dreams, no matter how 'off the wall' they were. Participants then completed an interest questionnaire which provided an indication as to whether they were artistic, practical, innovative, sociable, energetic or organised/administrative; all of this to identify possible work placements. The mentor's role was covered and it was stressed that there was a one-to-one relationship between each SU and mentor with no set pattern on meetings, emails etc. This was the strength of the project, support throughout and interactions between the two being led by the SU.

The Employer Liaison, Dorothy, then ascertained from all of this what types of work participants would feel comfortable with and she gave examples of employers for successful placements. This session was concluded with participants stating one positive they would be taking from the two workshops. Some said they felt more confident and one session feedback was that the participants had felt they were with people who understood the issues and they felt that they mattered!

3.3 Assigning Mentors

A mentor was assigned to each SU, if there was one available. Sometimes mentors agreed to take on more than one SU. When there were no mentors available, due to the ongoing recruitment difficulties, either Sue or Jenny continued to maintain contact until a mentor could be identified. Nobody was left without support at any stage.

The role of the mentor was more demanding than usual volunteer work, due to the vulnerable nature of the client group and the likely length of time the mentor would need to be involved.

3.4 Voluntary Placements

Dorothy had attended one of the two linked preparation workshops for new SUs in order to meet each individual and to get an idea of their interests, needs and expectations. They came from various backgrounds, some were highly qualified, some had no qualifications and in some cases hardly any education. Even so, each person had to provide Dorothy with a CV that she could show to a prospective employer, even for unpaid part-time work.

Experience on the pilot project showed that getting employers on board was a very hard sell, and that the only way was to approach individual employers with details of a specific SU, whom were thought suitable. Dorothy already had contacts with 11 employers from the pilot project and slowly built up a list of new people, with assistance from Anne. All employers had concerns about mental health issues and integrating the SU into the workplace. Those employers who were most supportive and positive tended to be charitable organisations rather than commercial ones.

Normally, Dorothy, the mentor and the SU, would go along to meet a prospective employer who had agreed to offer a voluntary placement. When an arrangement was reached, this was recorded in a formal Agreement with clear instructions regarding the expectations of both parties. All Sus were given an induction in their workplace so they had a clear understanding of their duties. Most Sus found their placements supportive and many have carried on their voluntary work beyond the end of the project. This reflected the experience from the Richmond pilot project where some people are still in placement after more than 3 years.

3.5 Paid Work

Paid work was the goal of the DWP. For the majority of SUs this was a step too far. The voluntary placement contracts tended to be short term (3 months) and very part-time, maybe just 2 afternoons a week, or whatever the individual could handle. The main goal of the project was to enable progression, at whatever rate the SU could achieve in terms of hours and/or tasks. A good example of progression from a voluntary placement to paid employment was the experience of the young man who realised from the preparation workshop that he wanted to be a chef. His only experience was cooking at home. He started off doing a few hours in the kitchen of a hotel. He then moved to a different hotel with more hours and different duties, and then that hotel offered him paid work.

In total at the end of the project, 4 people were in paid work of less than 16 hours per week. This was an incredible success for people who had not been in employment for some considerable time.

4 OUTCOMES

4.1 Hard and Soft Outcomes

The funding agreement with the DWP specified outcomes for which the project would get paid. These were 'Hard' outcomes which were a priority for the DWP, whereas the project was actually more concerned with 'Soft' outcomes which were an indication of the SUs growing confidence and self-esteem. It was anticipated that there would be a substantial drop out at each stage of the project and the targets set reflected this. The outcomes were as follows: SU attendance at an assessment; completion of two linked workshops; completion of a voluntary placement ('Soft' outcome); job offer and paid work; sustained employment ('Hard' outcome).

4.2 Statistics

A spreadsheet recorded numbers of service users at every stage of the process, with percentage outcomes.

There were a total of 58 referrals from the DWP, plus 6 from West London Mental Health Trust and one self-referral.

Of the total DWP referrals, 42 (72%) attended an initial interview with an assessor and 35 (60%) of these were considered suitable for the project. The other 7 were unsuitable because of their physical or mental health, or their ability to attend, and were referred back to the DWP. In some cases those deemed unsuitable were helped by the project to source other avenues of assistance. One person for example had to be helped through the door by his wife, and spent most of the interview time lying on the floor because of pain. He was referred to Disability Network Hounslow (DNH) and the CAB for assistance in challenging a decision of the Benefits Office.

SUs were then invited to attend two introductory workshops. 25 (71%) of those invited completed both workshops. Those who did not attend were referred back to the DWP. Some that could only manage one workshop were then given the opportunity to attend the second at a later stage.

20 (80%) of those who completed the workshops were then assigned a mentor.

11 (45%) of those assigned a mentor were placed in voluntary employment.

(36%) of those placed later obtained paid employment.

Of the non-DWP referrals, 5 were assigned mentors; 1 had a successful placement, 1 was placed but unfit to continue, 1 was placed via WLMHT, and 2 proved difficult to contact.

4.3 Feedback

4.3.1 Feedback from project participants

We worked hard at getting feedback from all partners and participants at all stages of the project. This was done in a number of ways including:

- Regular meetings with volunteers;
- Progress reports for each client;
- Requests for specific written feedback;
- Requests for regular meetings with DWP staff;
- Review of publicity material;
- Evaluation meeting for volunteers.

Some of these approaches worked better than others as we placed a high burden of reporting at the feet of the volunteers. This was highlighted in the evaluation meeting held with volunteers towards the end of the project in June 2017.

Feedback forms were designed for all concerned: volunteers, SUs and employers. Unfortunately, it was a tough job getting information that way. There were many positive comments made orally, particularly during the SU preparation workshops, some of which were captured. A more practical and successful way of obtaining feedback from volunteers was the workshop exercise, mentioned above and introduced into a volunteers' meeting by Liz.

4.3.2 Feedback from DWP

During the assessment phase of the project, regular updates of progress were sent to the DWP, by way of a spreadsheet showing the journey of each SU. Some feedback from the DWP was obtained in rather infrequent project meetings with them.

At one interim meeting, called because a member of DWP staff was leaving and was trying to tie up loose ends, there was some very negative feedback, mostly unjustified, in the opinion of those in attendance, but there was some fair comment too. It was felt that the DWP did not appear to have a full understanding of the project P2N CIC was delivering. The progress of SUs was discussed and concerns were expressed that progress was slow and there were gaps between interviews and the start of workshops and voluntary/permanent placements. It was noted that DWP was target driven rather than looking at the well-being of SUs with mental health issues. It was emphasised that mental health meant that users needed to take very small initial steps if they were to succeed. It was further explained that SUs were given one to one support by mentors and those voluntary positions were a positive way forward in building confidence.

In February 2017, almost one year after the project went live, an Interim report was submitted to the DWP. It summarised what had been achieved and some suggestions about the communication issues.

In July 2017, at the end of the project, there was another meeting with Jaswant (Jas) Lall, Partnership Manager at DWP Hounslow Job Centre, who had originally supported the bid for funding. This was very positive. She felt the project had gone well, but again raised the issue of the time it took for things to happen and the difficulty coaches had communicating with the project team, which was strange considering the arrangements with Best Reception.

A future project was also discussed. Jas agreed that there was definitely a need for what could be offered, particularly because of the mentoring system. A new system for funding was being set up, and Jas said she would forward the details.

4.3.3 Written Feedback from volunteers

The feedback form asked several questions, two of the main ones being about experience as a volunteer, and learning. As mentioned already, most people did not complete the form, so there were very few written comments. Generally speaking completing forms and posting them to Dropbox was everyone's least favourite activity, but it was hard to see how else it could have been done.

Written Feedback examples

Describe your experience as a volunteer

Well-co-ordinated with regular useful meetings and good team communication.

What did you learn/gain personally?

I learned a lot about local organisations and about the enormous barriers faced by the mentees. I gained a sense of community and of care and commitment within the team.

What did you like least?

Some frustration with slow progress and with a few under-motivated mentors.

Service Users

Many of the favourable comments were about having a **personal mentor**:

Xx has been fantastic.

Yy has been wonderful.

Opportunity to talk things through.

On workshops

Talking to others who understood.

Finding like minded people.

Seeing things written down and on the wall made me realise that other people felt like me and I was understood.

Benefits of placement

It is hard to say yet as I do not know if I will be able to pursue this kind of work in the future, but it was still very enjoyable and good to have on my CV.

I have become a little more confident, and have something to do.

That I can learn new things, and do a good job.

It has been helpful as a bridge covering what I am not good at.

Liked the fact they were methodical and organised.

Going to the placement each week made me feel good about myself and gave me confidence.

4.3.4 Feedback comment from employer

One of the aims of our charitable organisation is to foster links with and support our local community and I believe that placements such as this are beneficial to both parties.

4.3.5 Face to Face evaluation meeting

During this evaluation meeting we asked volunteers to reflect on a number of areas including:

- Increase in own knowledge and confidence around mental health after involvement in the project;
- The quality and suitability of training received;
- Areas of success for the project;
- Areas we could improve.

We wanted specific feedback on the following areas:

- Communication;
- Training;
- Support;
- Ongoing Feedback and Administration.

For all these areas, we asked people to complete a number of flipchart sheets using a target and stars to show how close we were to getting it right, as shown in Fig. 1 overleaf.

The second exercise was asking people to rate themselves in terms of general knowledge on mental health issues. There was a clear increase in this knowledge as shown in the Fig. 2.

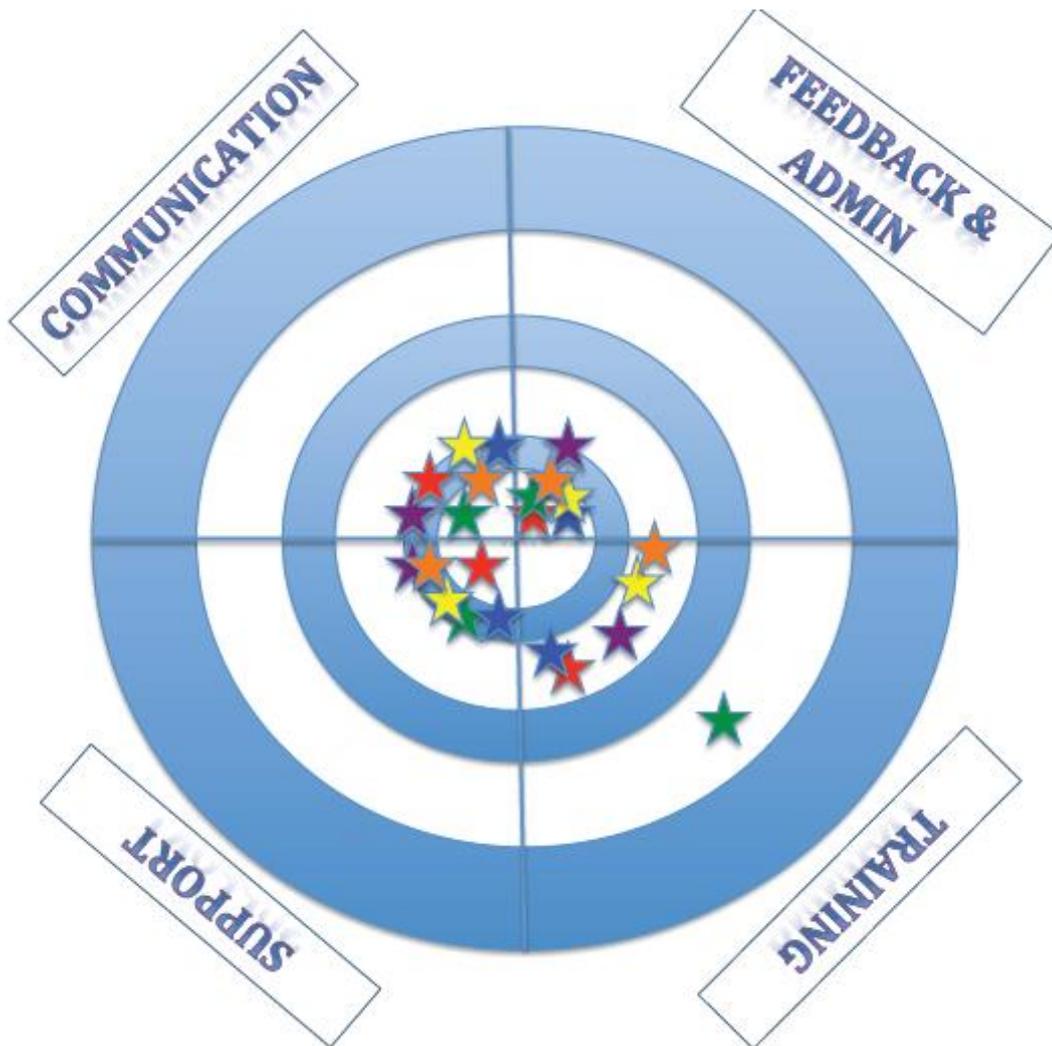


Fig. 1 Target and stars evaluation

Other results included:

General knowledge about mental health at the start of the project (SGK) and at the end (EGK)



Fig. 2 Start and End General Knowledge about mental health

Specific Comments in the 'Could Do Better' Area

access more voluntary work opportunities;
try to encourage clients to be better timekeepers;
need more ways to engage volunteers to engage with the project to get a better ratio of mentors to mentees;
more mentor recruitment;
better DWP referral monitoring;
DWP sending people that in any circumstance would be difficult to find a job;
more communication with DWP;
communication with DWP coaches;
explaining to volunteers about the shared role with the DWP and the emphasis on the DWP demands on EPlus and impact on service users;
DWP job coaches need to be more aware of the project.

Specific Comments in the "Went Well" Area

well organized and regular contact with SW/DR;
team ethos and liaison;
leadership;
support for mentors;
finding placements;
communication and discussion at meetings;
meetings helpful;
growth in confidence in SU's who engaged;
responsive to queries – speedy intervention with placement provider;
meetings helpful – given plenty of information.

These comments were noted during the open discussion part of the meeting:

Administration and form filling – this was the least enjoyable part of the project and did lead to one person dropping out. Despite this there was acknowledgement that much of the monitoring was helpful and necessary to enable accurate and timely feedback to DWP.

Concern about current and potential service users – volunteers felt the project was filling a very real gap in provision for people who needed extensive support and encouragement around employment issues. What will happen to those who are still on the journey?

Long term commitment – volunteers felt this was the kind of work that required long term commitment for some mentor/mentee relationships. This means each mentor should only be asked to undertake one at a time.

5 PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

P2N CIC as the originator of this project, was always in the background offering support, and the Directors communicated frequently via Skype meetings.

On the ground, there was a small team of non-mentoring volunteers which included Sue, as project co-ordinator, Dorothy employment liaison, Valerie mentor training and statistics, and Carole, SU workshops. Communications were primarily by email and phone and occasional face to face meetings. Sue and Carole were the link between the team on the ground and P2N CIC.

A virtual office was set up, via Best Reception, which made it possible for the DWP to make referrals and get an immediate assessment appointment for the service user, during normal office hours. This system worked very well on the whole. Occasionally the referrer from the DWP did not give their full contact details, so subsequently, future contact between the mentor and or the assessor and the DWP was difficult. In fact contacting the relevant person at the DWP was often difficult and frustrating. Sometimes this was due to frequent staff changes.

Dorothy and Sue visited the DWP at the beginning of the project and gave several short presentations with the hope of talking to every job coach who might refer. They were anxious to explain the project and also to identify the criteria for referral. A printed sheet of instructions was left with everyone. In spite of this, many of the referrals were not good and it was subsequently discovered there was often another agenda. They also visited a few weeks down the line to work out a system of getting access to job vacancy information.

It became clear that SUs tended to communicate with their mentors by text, and rarely answered the phone. They also needed extremely clear information about appointments and so on.

There were regular meetings of volunteers where issues were dealt with in the group, and cases discussed. These were very useful. Between times, contact and troubleshooting was by phone and email. The biggest communication/admin issue was record keeping. Because of the nature of the client group and confidentiality, everything had to be recorded and retained safely. Dropbox was used and all relevant paper documents were scanned into files that were only accessible to the volunteers. Volunteers were also required to write up brief notes of their encounters with the SUs. The system worked well, except for those individuals who didn't like Dropbox. Training was given and additional one to one sessions were offered, but not taken up.

Learning:

- The project co-ordinator role was probably too demanding and time consuming for a part-time volunteer.
- Lines of communication and full contact information for DWP coaches should have been sorted out at the beginning.
- More time should have been devoted to explaining Dropbox.
- Best Reception was good value for money.

6 LEARNING

One trademark of a P2N CIC project is the 'painting by numbers' approach: once the idea has been piloted with a small sample of subjects, it can be repeated as widely as there is interest. A critical part of this process is feedback from all participants in the project. Each project has its own learning points as working partners are different. For E-Plus Hounslow the main learning points were:

- Matching the goals and aims of the funders and their organisational needs with our wider goals and outcomes.
- Lack of up front funds would inhibit us due to a need to recruit and fund specific management solutions because we do not operate with paid staff.
- DWP and P2N CIC goals were very different, and P2N CIC should have been firmer/more robust about some of the 'softer' outcomes of the project to gain funding for those.
- Difficulty in finding/keeping mentors/volunteers and these were the key to success of the project. It is a demanding project for the volunteers with the length of the project and commitment to the mentees. The most successful tactic was approaching known people who were thought to be suitable, and asking them to come on board.
- Not all the volunteers liked using Dropbox and more time should have been devoted to explaining its complexities.
- Essential to have a dedicated telephone number (via Best Reception). This was a new venture and worked very well.
- Work Coaches at DWP changed frequently so continuity and communication was difficult. Lines of communication and full contact information for DWP coaches should have been agreed and set in place at the beginning.
- Recruitment strategies and difficulties resulted in an ethnic and gender profile which did not adequately match that of the SUs. However, feedback from SUs did not indicate any concerns about this.
- Concluded that the Project Co-ordinator role very demanding, and perhaps there may be a need to employ someone.
- Communication in general is always problematical and issues are possibly inevitable.

7 CONCLUSIONS

Lack of understanding of mental health issues remain. This point was made over and over again by everyone involved in the project. We were clearly a very small project, locally based, however, if these projects were replicated in other areas they would make an enormous difference.

Charities were more likely to take a risk on a placement. It is very difficult for general employers to offer unpaid placements. Charities and social enterprises are much more geared up to this. This is partially to do with process but much more to do with perception, understanding and education.

If taken forward, in Hounslow or elsewhere, then a paid co-ordinator is required. This was one of our biggest learnings! For this kind of project the major work was communicating and co-ordinating people. Job coaches expected to talk to someone when they had a person sitting in front of them. When a volunteer had a query it was usually urgent. A paid person would have been in a better position to manage these expectations.

The project was demanding for volunteers. It would have run more smoothly if we had found a better way to get volunteers on board as mentors, in a timely manner. This was partially due to timings at the start of the project; we lost momentum and several potential volunteers because of this. However, it is also very difficult to find volunteers with the time and ability to undertake training and take on the responsibility of working with a vulnerable client group. In future, we would build in far more time to recruit and train volunteers at the beginning.

It was worthwhile – those in placements are still there! We really feel we did a good job! We know we are just a tiny drop in the ocean but for those we worked with, volunteers, SUs and placement/work providers, it was very successful. Most SUs are still actively engaged and are now in paid employment or on a long term placement which is benefiting their long term health in many ways. We feel these small local projects are worthwhile and could generate a big difference over time.

All in all, we feel the funding from the DWP was aimed in the right place. Engaging small local providers to work with local people and local employers makes the vast subject of mental health and work opportunities much more personal. However, the inherent bias towards funding one project to take over a whole area, probably means small projects like E-Plus will not receive funding in future.

Equally, small, local organisations need to have an enormous amount of expertise in place to ensure they can meet the administrative and procedural expectations of funders, particularly those from the public sector.

For the P2N CIC board, we can say we are really pleased to have worked on this project, we are proud of the achievements of those we worked with and we will continue to develop pilot projects which we hope will make a difference in future.

There will always be a place for schemes like E-Plus to fit in at local level, or work alongside other similar initiatives.

