



Behavioural Change With Long Term Unemployed People

About the DWP

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is responsible for welfare, pensions and child maintenance policy. They are accountable, among many things, for encouraging people to work, making work pay and encouraging disabled people and those with ill health to work and be independent. They also provide the state pension. One of their priorities is to run an effective welfare system that enables people to achieve financial independence by providing assistance and guidance into employment. As the UK's biggest public service department, the DWP deals with around 20 million people annually.

The Challenge

Many people, who are long term unemployed, struggle to live healthy and useful lives. Within the DWP's harder and hardest to reach groups, people can often be unemployed for over 10 years. Applying for jobs and being rejected, combined with living on a very low income for a long time, can be energy sapping and damaging to mental health. It provides an experience and a set of conditions that can lead to unhelpful behaviours and attitudes.

The DWP wanted us to work with their hardest to reach groups to start to change behaviours, to make a helpful change to their lives.

For some people, this is a return to training or getting a job. Whereas for others, it is recognising the emotional and behavioural problems that prevent them from working and accessing the services they need to flourish.

Our solution

PEAR's solution was to design a series of interventions focused on changing attitudes and behaviours.

We developed a core programme (Bedrock) for people who had not managed to find a job for many years. Typically these groups had experienced significant life events (bereavement, divorce, illness, family problems, multiple redundancies, drug & alcohol problems). These problems had often profoundly affected their mental wellbeing, their beliefs and behaviours.

We also developed a number of specialist programmes. They included those who experience chronic physical health problems and associated mental health problems, and a programme for lone parents looking to return to work after long periods out of the labour market.



Our solution

Psychological education formed a key part of these programmes. We looked at family systems and early life experiences. We provided models that allowed people to make sense of their own behaviour and ways of thinking. We made extensive use of applied theatre to bring to life the experience of participants. We created characters that were typical of the people in the room without being any one individual. We created situations typical of the experiences that long term unemployed people had encountered. This allowed us to work at one step removed from the people in the room. We created a safe environment to explore the situations that created difficulties.

Over the course of the programmes, we worked with people to devise behavioural solutions that they could apply to their journey back into work or training. PEAR worked with participants to develop a realistic action plan based on their individual needs. Following the main interventions, we offered one-to-one coaching with these groups, often over an extended period to support their transition.

For these programmes, PEAR worked with the DWP, the NHS, multiple voluntary and charitable organisations such as Christians Against Poverty and drug and alcohol organisations to highlight the services and opportunities they could access.

The programmes ran over three years at multiple locations in the South East.

The Impact

We ran 69 programmes for 1094 participants for the DWP. Participants' behaviour changed significantly during and after the programmes.

In conjunction with the DWP, we created a series of metrics to assess the impact of the interventions. We assessed those people who had found a job within three months of completing the programme along with those who had gone into training. Our partners also monitored those who had begun treatment for mental health problems and those people who had started to do voluntary work. One other metric that the DWP was keen to measure was the number of people who completed the courses (these often ran over two to eight weeks).

Figures varied for the different programmes linked to the aims of the cohorts. Typically, 20% of participants had found a job after three months of completing the programme. 15% of people had started full-time training programmes.

For these groups, completing any programme was often very challenging and typically more than 50% would drop out of any programme. For the 1094 participants involved in 10 day programmes, we had an 88% completion rate.



Participants' Stories

"L"

L found it very difficult to be in a room on her own with men, having been subjected to sexual and physical abuse by her ex-partner, the father of her child. She had suffered from acute anxiety and depression as well as struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). She made it clear that she didn't want to be left in a room on her own with any man and definitely couldn't cope with being touched. She was also coping with life by controlling her food intake to a point that was negatively affecting her health.

Three years after participating in the programme, L has now completed the degree she had put on hold, married and is working full time.

"T"

The morning I met T in Stevenage Job Centre, she cried when I spoke to her. She told me that it had taken her all her strength just to get herself there and that there was no way she would be able to participate in a group-work programme once a week for 12 weeks.

She grew up on several traveller sites around London and was subjected to sexual and physical abuse by some members of her family. By the time she left school at 13, she was already involved in criminality and violence. And at 16, she ran away from her family.

She spent the next ten years continuing to run from them whilst trying to protect her two small children. Having settled with their dad, she was then subjected to domestic abuse that culminated in her being doused with petrol and stabbed. She finally managed to leave him and this was the point at which we met. She had never had a job in her life. What she did have was acute anxiety and PTSD.

T completed the programme and was coached over an extended period of time following the course. T has held down a job at a school canteen for two years, has had treatment for her mental health problems and avoided criminal activities.