**Work for Yourself - Executive summary.**

**Introduction.** The Work for Yourself project supporting local people with limiting long-term health conditions to move from unemployment to start their own businesses ran from June 2012-June 2015 with funding from the European regional Development Fund plus Bolsover District and Chesterfield Borough Councils. The project met and exceeded all the key targets, on time and within budget while gaining high visibility for the concept of self-employment for disabled people via local and national media.

**Background.** Disabled people are recognised as being interested in self-employment as an alternative to getting a job but, often, mainstream employment and business support programmes are not adequately tailored to meet their more complex circumstances. A specialist programme is particularly appropriate in these two areas where there are high levels of disabled people and high proportions of ESA claimants compared with JSA claimants. However, many factors make client engagement and success within Bolsover District more difficult.

**Headline achievements.**

* 76 businesses launched (plus at least 6 more).
* 51 part time and full time jobs were created (plus at least 7 more).
* 97 local disabled people took part in at least 2 days business support (plus at least 1 more).
* 5 existing businesses were assisted to improve their performance.

**Businesses started.** Clients demonstrated considerable imagination and creativity in building on their previous work experience or life interests to start a variety of businesses, predominantly sole traders with a few limited companies. Some established partnerships with other family members and one has become VAT registered. To date, at least 70% of the new businesses have been trading for over 12 months while some have used their experience of business as a stepping stone to getting jobs.

**Client characteristics.** The client profile was that of more being aged 41+, most not having qualifications above Level 2, most having not worked for over two years, about half claiming incapacity benefits and sizeable proportions living in deprived LSOAs. Many therefore faced complex barriers requiring holistic support.

**Delivery**. We delivered in accordance with our well-established client-focussed and holistic Work for Yourself model. This was essentially on-going one-to-one non-judgemental support provided at locations and/or via communication channels preferred by clients, offering them personalised information to enable them to progress at their own pace without time limits and introducing group sessions once their business idea and confidence had developed. Throughout, we recognised that personal factors (health, finances, family commitments) could have a significant impact alongside the viability of their business ideas.

**Promotion.** We used a multi-channel promotion strategy that enabled the project to meet the overall goals. Throughout, recruiting sufficient numbers of clients from Bolsover District was the major priority.

*“I wasn’t able to work for nearly two years due to my health: one day I came in from the garden dripping with blood but didn’t know how I’d cut my arm. After lots of tests, I was eventually diagnosed with non-epileptic attack disorder that had been causing blackouts of which I was never aware. Relying on benefits was horrible after a successful career. I wanted to work but couldn’t so my anxiety got worse which caused more blackouts.”*

**Programme.** The Work for Yourself programme has been specifically developed for disabled people over many years and was further refined for this project using client feedback. The four-person delivery team was very experienced with both the project and the client group, and the Business Advisers had relevant professional qualifications/accreditation. Even with Equality Act compliance, alternative “mainstream” provision may not have met the varied needs of these clients.

Businesses assisted to improve performance. We had a small target of delivering two days support to four businesses to improve their performance – five forecast increases in their modest profits.

**Client satisfaction.** Feedback was consistently positive throughout the project regardless of whether from surveys or documentary evidence.

**Social value.** As covered by the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 regarding the responsibilities of public sector bodies when spending public funds, consideration of wider benefits (improvements to the social, economic and environmental well-being in the local Bolsover District and Chesterfield Borough areas) was relevant. The project was particularly successful in achieving additional social benefits for local residents.

**Project management.** The project could have been even more successful if it had been able to start, as originally planned, at the beginning rather than the end of a school term. Having all project processes, templates and documentation available in the manual, a remotely accessible and comprehensive client database plus a well-trained and experienced delivery team created a very strong foundation for the project and kept costs down.

**Conclusions.**

* This was a successful project that exceeded all targets, on time and within budget. It also achieved extra positive outcomes, high customer satisfaction and strong promotion of the concept of self-employment through local and national media.
* Self-employment is an important work option for disabled people who perceive little chance of getting a job: it can lead to a new business, a business that provides transition to getting a job and more positive attitudes towards employment prospects.
* People with long-term health conditions/disabilities often have other significant barriers to work. Effective business start-up support for these clients needs to be holistic, person-centred, flexible, and adjustable to meet their needs while being proportionate and relevant to their aspirations. “Main stream” business support has tended not to address all these issues.
* “Back to work” provision for disabled people should include delivery of both self-employment and getting a job support to allow clients to move easily between these two options as their ambitions develop. Often these two specialist strands will require partnership working between different expert providers and the strong engagement of local Jobcentres.
* Robust project planning, management and monitoring engendered confidence at every level and focussed support on clients.

**Recommendations.**

* Both Bolsover District and Chesterfield Borough Councils should continue to give high priority to employment support for the significant numbers of disabled people locally, working closely with all Jobcentres.
* Such employment support should include a specialist self-employment strand within overall holistic, individual and localised interventions.

