

Steps towards employment

How back-to-work support can be improved for people experiencing multiple needs



Making Every
Adult Matter



The Making Every Adult Matter coalition

Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) is a coalition of Clinks, Homeless Link and Mind, formed in 2009 to improve policy and services for people facing multiple needs. Together the charities represent over 1,300 frontline organisations and have an interest in the criminal justice, substance misuse, homelessness and mental health sectors.

The Making Every Adult Matter coalition currently supports 27 local areas across England to improve the support they provide to people experiencing multiple needs. This includes fifteen areas that are using the MEAM Approach, a non-prescriptive framework for developing a coordinated approach to multiple needs, and 12 local partnerships involved in the Fulfilling Lives programme, supported by a £112 million investment from the Big Lottery Fund. In all the areas we support, voluntary sector and statutory agencies work together to ensure that flexible, co-ordinated services prevent people falling between the gaps.

Introduction

This briefing explores how people with multiple needs can be supported towards employment. It is based on interviews across England with people seeking work, and the practitioners that support them. It provides recommendations to the Department for Work and Pensions to inform the design of new back-to-work support programmes. It also offers guidance for other key stakeholders, including frontline organisations who work with people experiencing multiple needs.

Since late 2015, the MEAM coalition has been speaking to people around the country, including those involved with services in Blackpool, Cambridgeshire, Manchester and Staffordshire, for their views on the different kinds of employment support they have either received or helped others to access. In total, this briefing represents feedback from 15 interviews: eight with men and seven with women.

Participants were chosen from a range of backgrounds and age groups; some had significant levels of professional experience, whilst others had never been in formal employment. Some of these interviews are available to listen to on our website: www.meam.org.uk/voices

The thoughts and feelings of those interviewed as part of this work raise some important questions about the design of current policy and, in particular, its relationship to the individuals that are affected by it.

The next section provides some background on the current policy situation. This is followed by a summary of the key findings and recommendations which are explored in the rest of the briefing.

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Policy background

It is universally recognised that employment is a good thing, but as a society we remain less sure about how best to help those who struggle to find and stay in work, including people with experience of multiple needs – overlapping problems with homelessness, substance misuse, poor mental health and contact with the Criminal Justice System. Employment can bring specific benefits for people with wider support needs: for example, clear evidence exists on the contribution that work can make to an individual's desistance journey from crime, and how to facilitate this journey through initiatives such as Release on Temporary Licence.¹

In attempting to find solutions, a series of national policies have been implemented. Typically, they have relied on grouping people together in different categories and then attempting to provide them with the right mixture of support and incentives. Yet, as the Work and Pensions Select Committee recently concluded, whilst these solutions – including the current Work Programme – are relatively successful in helping those without additional needs into employment, they are “not working well for people with more complex or multiple barriers to employment.”²

This is especially true for groups that experience wider inequalities, including women and people from black and minority ethnic groups. Social enterprises and other voluntary sector organisations providing specialist employment support, including those designed to meet the needs of those with ‘protected characteristics’, often assist people to overcome these barriers, increasing the likelihood of effective engagement with employment opportunities. It is therefore essential that all mainstream employment services learn from existing good practice and take into account any additional needs that people face.

As part of the November 2015 Spending Review, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) announced that it would be introducing a new Work and Health Programme, designed to improve its efforts to support those with health conditions and disabilities into work.³ However, as the new programme is intended to have a small cohort, it is likely that people with experience of multiple needs will continue to have significant interactions with mainstream services and their staff. There is, therefore, an urgent need to evaluate how people with experience of multiple needs are supported in these services, and where investment in more specialist help is required.

As the scale and scope of devolution deals continue to evolve, local areas will enjoy new powers of ‘co-design’ in reference to employment support for ‘harder-to-help claimants’.⁴ In an effort to make employment support more flexible, the government will also continue in its efforts to encourage social investment, including a promised £25 million in Social Impact Bond funding for homelessness, mental health and employment. Although at present little is known about the specific details of these changes, they represent a series of openings for people with experience of multiple needs, and the staff that support them, to contribute to the design and implementation of these new initiatives.

Key findings & recommendations

In this section we outline the key findings and recommendations from this briefing. These are explored in the rest of the paper, and will:

- Challenge the use of traditional 'staircase' models of employment support
- Provide recommendations for improving mainstream employment support for people with experience of multiple needs
- Inform policy influencing around employment by the MEAM coalition partners and their members

We ask that our recommendations are considered by national and local decision makers, including those involved with the design of relevant initiatives such as the new Work and Health Programme; staff working on devolution deals; local authority commissioners; and individual services and partnerships.

What are 'staircase' models of support?

Key finding

At present, back-to-work support is usually offered to people once they have completed a series of preliminary steps and are therefore considered to be 'work-ready'. This approach is inappropriate for people with experience of multiple needs, as they can quickly move between periods of chaos and relative stability, and vice-versa.

Understanding multiple needs

Key finding

The lack of understanding about how multiple needs affects people's daily lives means people often receive support that fails to meet their needs, is unsuitable, or causes them stress.

Recommendation

The Department for Work and Pensions (in consultation with other departments) must ensure that the back-to-work support people receive takes into account their circumstances and needs, as well as their benefit status.

Coping with fear and anxiety

Key finding

Even for people who are able to achieve consistent levels of stability in their lives, the prospect of employment remains extremely daunting, provoking strong feelings of fear and anxiety, which can lead to setbacks. Because of the way that both support services and specialist employment programmes are currently commissioned, there is very little support on offer to help people overcome these feelings.

Recommendations

The Department for Work and Pensions should ensure that staff from mainstream employment support services, such as Work Coaches, are provided with the relevant training and resources to begin having open and constructive conversations with people experiencing multiple needs about their wider fears and anxieties, as well as their personal circumstances. This should include any additional difficulties that people face due to wider inequalities around gender, ethnicity or other 'protected characteristics'.

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To help people manage the fears and anxieties that accompany returning to work, the Department for Work and Pensions should design contracts in a way that allows services to adopt a more mixed approach, where help with people's immediate needs and support towards longer-term goals like employment are undertaken together.

Voluntary versus mandatory participation

Key finding

Mandatory participation in back-to-work support can add to people's sense that services are primarily set up to serve their own short term interests. Services felt that adopting a voluntary approach led to better outcomes.

Recommendation

The Department for Work and Pensions should expand the principle used under current Work Choice arrangements, and make employment support for people with experience of multiple needs voluntary, rather than required as a condition of receiving benefits.

The need for greater flexibility

Key finding

People become disillusioned with back-to-work support if they believe a service is only aiming to meet outcomes and targets it has defined, rather than their own goals. By contrast, successful services 'hide the wiring': instead of drawing attention to the targets they are set, they focus exclusively on promoting their values, which in turn allows them to achieve their outcomes. It is often easier for smaller, community based organisations to work in this way.

Recommendations

The Department for Work and Pensions should ensure any new employment programmes actively engage smaller, specialist providers, including those in the voluntary sector, who are better placed to provide flexible support.

The Department for Work and Pensions should liaise with the Ministry of Justice to support the wider use of Release on Temporary License to improve employment outcomes for people leaving prison.

The benefits of co-production

Key finding

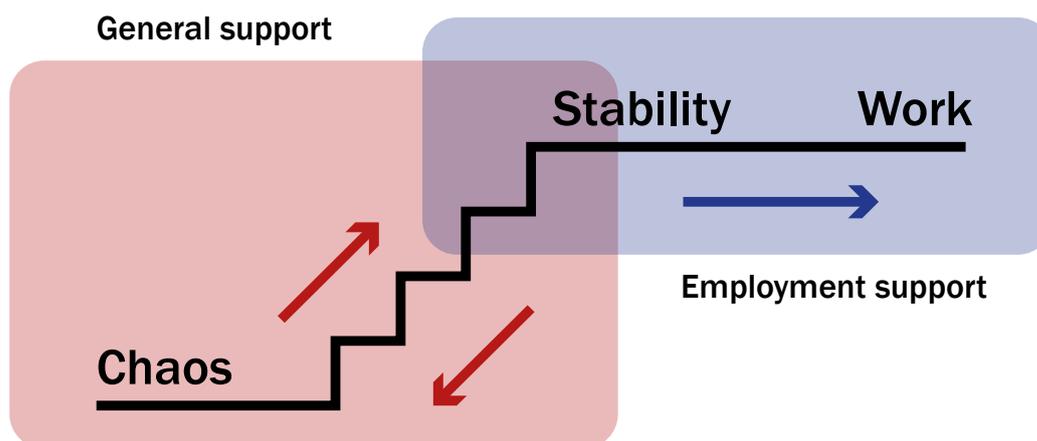
A lack of choice and control over the support people receive can be extremely frustrating and lead them to disengage from looking for work, even under the threat of sanction. By contrast, developing a reciprocal relationship between services and individuals can improve people's motivation to achieve positive results.

Recommendation

All organisations involved in the design and delivery of back-to-work support should co-produce their services with people with experience of multiple needs.

What are 'staircase' approaches to support?

People's journeys from chaos to independence are regularly characterised as being made up of a series of smaller steps. Models of support based on this can be described as 'staircase' approaches: once a person is ready to take a particular step, they can move on to the next one. The below graphic illustrates what a typical 'staircase' approach to employment might look like:



Using this approach, stability represents the point at which people become 'work-ready'. In order to help someone achieve this, they will need a general level of support to secure things like stable accommodation, or to successfully engage with treatment programmes. Once people become 'work-ready', this general level of support can be replaced by more specific forms of employment support.

This approach is not confined to employment programmes, and in recent years people have begun to question the efficacy of traditional 'staircase' approaches to supporting people with multiple needs. One example of this is Housing First. Rather than expecting people experiencing homelessness to progress through a series of accommodation and treatment services until they are ready to access independent accommodation, Housing First provides individuals with an immediate housing solution, as well as 'wrap-around' support to help them maintain it. Although further work is needed, early evidence collated by Homeless Link suggests that Housing First produces positive results for people with experience of multiple needs, where more traditional 'staircase' housing models have failed.⁵

It is also important to acknowledge that employment will not be a realistic opportunity for everyone with experience of multiple needs. Offering people the opportunity to engage in work-related activity does not always have to be about finding a job. For some, simply living an ordinary life, where employment may or may not be an outcome, is a considerable achievement.

We discussed the use of traditional 'staircase' models of employment support with a series of interviewees from different services. In testing our assumptions around the way that employment support is currently set up, we asked people for their thoughts on whether their experiences fitted with this approach, as well as the positives and negatives of seeing people's progress in these terms. Our findings and recommendations are set out below.

Understanding multiple needs

Despite the progress that has been made in recent years, people felt that back-to-work support fails to understand the effect of multiple needs on people's lives:

"[...] how can we expect the Work Programme to understand multiple and complex needs if mental health don't and if housing don't and if the drug treatment services don't understand multiple and complex needs? [...] People just don't understand it and people don't understand how to approach these people. [...] It's not a new thing, these people have been around for years and years and years and we've just labelled them with something else, but partners and other professionals and partners they don't understand what that term means. They don't understand this client group, hence why they can't work with them."

Unfortunately, the use of 'staircase' approaches can sometimes make it more difficult to improve our understanding of these complexities, as they obscure the realities of people's daily lives:

"It's so easy to put things down on paper and say 'They've got multiple and complex needs and they meet three out of four of our criteria' and all of this sort of stuff, but actually when you start to understand that person's life, you begin to realise why they can't access employment, why they've never accessed employment, why they've been unemployed all of their lives."

As a result, we can lose sight of those involved:

"...you do feel hopeless sometimes and you get lost in it as well, 'oh I need to get these people into work, I need to do this, this and this,' when actually there's a human being behind all of this and there's a reason why they don't want to access work and there's a reason why they don't feel able to attend an appointment. We need to try and understand what those reasons are!"

This can be especially true of those whose additional needs are typically overlooked by mainstream employment support services, such as women and people from black and minority ethnic groups. We know, for example, that women in contact with the Criminal Justice System experience additional barriers to the labour market, including "chronic lack of self-esteem and a sense of disempowerment; limited awareness of how to access support, information and advice, particularly in the internet age; and, most importantly, the negative perceptions of employers."⁶ Women are also disproportionately likely to have caring responsibilities for dependents.

This feeling has been echoed by the new Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Stephen Crabb, who in his first major speech indicated the importance of focusing on the effects of policy:

"I am absolutely clear that a compassionate and fair welfare system should not just be about numbers; behind every statistic there is a human being, and perhaps sometimes in government we forget that."⁷

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One person explained how a lack of understanding of their needs had led to an inappropriate change in the kind of benefit they were receiving:

“I was on ESA [Employment and Support Allowance] for ten years. I went for a medical [...] and I failed the medical. [...] So now I’ve had to apply for Jobseeker’s Allowance and I’ve never worked in 12 years so it’s been really daunting. [...] You’ve got to meet all these demands now at the Jobcentre, and if you don’t meet these demands you can get sanctioned, so yes, it’s been horrendous. [...] Drugs, alcohol, my health, loads of different things, but they were saying that no, I was fit for work with these.”

As a result of this change, the person was now expected to undertake certain activities, without any consideration as to whether these activities were suitable:

“I’ve got 72 previous convictions, I’ve been in prison 9 times, so therefore for starters I’m not allowed to work with kids, I’m not allowed to work with the elderly. I’ve been done for fraud so I won’t be able to work around money. What else? A lot of your criminal convictions have to be spent before you can get a job as well. Some of mine are not going to be spent for 15 years. [...] My adviser, [...] she’s saying you’ll get a job, you will get a job [...] so I’ve now got to go and make a CV, register with Universal Jobmatch, get an email address. Now, I’ve got to have all this done by the time I go back next Tuesday, and if I’ve not done it then she won’t pay me my benefits.”

This change had caused the person a great deal of stress, which they found difficult to cope with. The person spoke of how they had dealt with stress of this kind in the past:

“That’s my go-to, can of beer and that’s it. I’m not good at dealing with emotions. I get very teary, and then when that starts – then when you start drinking and getting teary, you then start thinking about your kids and it just goes on and on and on and on and on, until either I’m skint and got no more money to buy any or I’m so ill I can’t get out of bed to go get it.”

Understandably, the benefits system is based on supporting people back into work. The introduction of Universal Credit aims to ensure that work is always the best choice for individuals and families, providing “a route out of poverty and away from benefit dependency.”⁸ However, unless back-to-work support can improve its understanding of multiple needs, it is likely that people will continue to be offered employment support which is inappropriate for them.

A key expectation of traditional ‘staircase’ approaches is that people will eventually reach a point of stability and become ‘work-ready’:

“This [staircase approach] looks so simple in terms of ‘they get to stability and then they start thinking about work.’ We have this expectation that clients move through this process and the reality is that they’re going back, forth, back, forth, probably for a couple of years. And it’s like, how do we deal with that and how do we explain why people aren’t getting into employment? Because life’s just crap for them and we need to offer them something else.”

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One of the main problems identified by staff of using a 'staircase' approach was the idea that people progress in a linear fashion and that once they reach a point of stability they will be able to stay there:

"You know, one day you're working with somebody and they talk about 'oh in five years I see myself having a job, having a partner, having my own place' and then two days later you're coming into the office wondering whether they're alive or not."

Often these changes in people's circumstances can occur within a matter of days. People told us about their personal experiences of these sudden changes, often in relation to their living situations:

"I don't drink every day, but when I drink, I drink and I get myself into all sorts of fights and trouble; quite loud and brash. [...] I get into trouble with the police and this can last for weeks and months. I'll be absolutely fine for months and then I'll get so bored because I live [...] out in the sticks [...] so I'm very secluded there, so I try and behave myself and then I go out, come into [name of town], go onto these binges and I don't go home for weeks on end and I get into trouble with the police, so I'm trying to curb all that."

Sometimes this can be related to aspects of their mental health:

"There are days when I think, yes, this is brilliant, and I've not had a panic attack – well, it's not a panic attack; I would say it's a PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder] attack – for months. Then, just last Friday, out of the blue – if you'd have come to see me last Thursday, we'd probably be having a very different conversation."

These changes in circumstance, and the frequency with which they occur, present a serious challenge to the idea of 'work-readiness', as described by 'staircase' approaches. If someone can be 'work-ready' one moment and in chaos the next, when should they begin to engage with employment support? As one interviewee said:

"Work to me is not as important now. I think it's depending on what time you catch me and ask me the question, because sometimes I could be feeling great and feeling like my life's going good and then work would be better for me."

Recommendation

The Department for Work and Pensions (in consultation with other departments) must ensure that the back-to-work support people receive takes into account their circumstances and needs, as well as their benefit status.

Coping with fear and anxiety

Even for those who might reach a certain level of stability, the prospect of employment can remain daunting, provoking strong feelings of fear and anxiety:

“I think it’s just a case of the last four or five years I’ve been used to just sitting here watching telly every day – more or less all the time with a drink. Obviously, this week not, and not, hopefully, in the future, but you tend to get used to one thing and then – change is not something that I’m very good at, and I think that that’s the crux of the matter really: it’s always change. [...] When you’ve been used to just being wrapped in your own cocoon here [...] there’s an element of it that’s frightening because it’s the unknown.”

People were also anxious around what would happen if they failed to manage their affairs once they were in work:

“What scares me the most about going back to work is bills, because I’ve relied on the state to pay my rent, my council tax, things like that [...] and the thought in my mind would be constantly: what if I can’t pay my rent? That happens, then you end up back on the streets and then you end up back on drugs. I’ve been there, done it, and I certainly don’t want to go back down that route again.”

These fears were borne out by one person who described the difficulties they had faced while in low-paid employment:

“[...] like I was saying, on a zero hour contract, you could have – it’s good during the summer months, but come the winter months, you could have three weeks of bad weather and one week of okay weather, and some of the places where they work are not that busy, so you haven’t got the work to pay your bills. [...] Because I mean, you try your best all month and you come to the end of it, you’re short on your rent and you’re like playing catch up all the time. Then you’re not having time to find to eat or... and then, you’re like [slight hesitation] you get so like depressed. [...] This is exactly what happened to me because I was that depressed and then I turned to the drink and then I’ve lost my place and I’ve ended up back at my mum’s. I’ve tried to keep it together again and it’s like, I can’t live with my mum. I lost my job and I was right back on the street.”

Often people need support to overcome these feelings of fear and anxiety. However, it is not always entirely clear who should provide this support. For example, staff explained the difficulties of continuing to work with someone once they were considered to have reached a point of stability:

“[...] referrals are coming in left, right and centre and we don’t have enough [staff] to key work the clients, so the navigators are only supposed to have six clients on their caseload, but some of them have 17 now. So that intense work can’t be done because there are too many clients on their caseload. So we’ve got to a stage on the project where it’s like right we’ve navigated them into services so if they’ve got a mental health worker, they’ve got this, they got this, right let’s close them because we’ve done our job. So that sort of diminishes any possibility of me working with them to get them into employment. So those pressures

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have an impact on us meeting our outcomes and getting people into ETE [education, training and employment] stuff, which is a shame really because it's like the work's not completed."

At the same time, employment services such as the Work Programme also face pressures, which mean they too are unable to work with people towards overcoming their wider anxieties around work:

"[...] employment advisors, they have so much going on, they don't have the time to spend with these clients, they have like ten minute appointments and it's almost like a GP's surgery, isn't it? Someone goes in, they've got seven minutes with their GP, they're depressed, the easiest thing is to prescribe them with anti-depressants rather than to send them to a therapist, for example. [Likewise], you've got ten minutes to sort their CV out, tell them about what opportunities there are, book them on a couple of courses, right, that's it – you're done and out of the door."

One person spoke of how their experience of the Work Programme had been affected by these pressures:

"My impression was that they had quite high workloads and there's not a great deal of time that she could put into things – the stuff that I felt I needed, I suppose, and I also didn't, perhaps, feel by her, in particular, that I was understood, that she understood, really, how I'd come to be where I was."

As a result of these distinct pressures, it appears as though neither the services supporting people's immediate needs nor those helping with employment issues are able to help people overcome their wider fears and anxieties around returning to work. If the new Work and Health programme is unable to incorporate people with experience of multiple needs, it is vital that staff from other mainstream employment support services are equipped with the skills they need.

Recommendation

The Department for Work and Pensions should ensure that staff from mainstream employment support services, such as Work Coaches, are provided with the relevant training and resources to begin having open and constructive conversations with people experiencing multiple needs about their wider fears and anxieties, as well as their personal circumstances. This should include any additional difficulties that people face due to wider inequalities around gender, ethnicity or other 'protected characteristics'.

This echoes MEAM's previous suggestions to the Work and Pension's Select Committee as part of our submission to the Welfare to Work Inquiry.⁹

Having identified this gap, people were asked if they had any views on how best to address it. One suggested a more mixed approach, where support with people's more immediate needs and with longer-term goals like employment were approached together:

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“So obviously the main part of the project is [moving from chaos to stability] and [moving from stability to work] is almost an afterthought. So [...] that’s why I feel it should all be mixed in [...] because otherwise you get to [stability] and we have to close them, we can’t work with them anymore because we don’t have the manpower to work with them [...] but if it was all intertwined [...] if it was all interlinked, I do feel the outcomes would be much stronger, because we’d be appreciating all of these other factors and elements within the clients lives that we forget sometimes.”

One of the main attractions of a more mixed approach was the ability to focus on people’s existing skills and aspirations:

“I think there’s the presumption, when you picture somebody in work or involved with something like developing a business, you presume that they need to have stability to be a valuable part of something like that, but you can still be in relative chaos and bring something really valuable to the table.”

Similar to the philosophy behind Housing First, some services allowed people to engage with employment-related activities without the need to achieve other goals first:

“It doesn’t matter if they’re clean or not because I think that’s where the gap is. If you’re not clean you can’t access anything, a lot of these programmes are abstinence based and there’s a hell of a lot of work to do to get someone to a place where they are abstinent. So why does it mean that people can’t access opportunities because they’re not abstinent? Why can’t we inspire them enough to get to a stage where actually they think ‘I want to be abstinent?’”

This created opportunities that could lead to work more accessible to participants:

“[...] I think the other obstacle, really, is that if somebody’s got no GCSEs, no educational background, no work experience whatsoever, even if they believe that they could achieve X, they just see this massive mountain ahead of them. They have to go and do their Maths and English; they have to go and do this [...] – and it must seem so far away, like there’s so much in between here and there. So yes, coming back to [name of service], so that’s one of the things that I think [name of service] just skips over. It’s like: ‘Let’s do this now; let’s see how far we get.’”

Although this approach brought new challenges with it, services had already seen people confound expectations and achieve positive results:

“They were like ‘but what if they steal the money, what if they do this, what if they do that?’ You know, it was all like ‘risk, risk, risk,’ and they proved every single person wrong. I think it’s because we showed them a different type of respect and showed them that actually they are capable of doing something that doesn’t mean you have to get clean, get housed, attend mental health appointments, go to a work programme. Why does everyone have to follow that typical route?”

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Many voluntary sector services already offer more holistic forms of support to people. For example, Women's Centres will often provide employment related support, as well as specialist support to help women address more immediate needs. However, this support is generally offered separately from more mainstream forms of support, such as the Work Programme. One of the major difficulties for people using a 'staircase' approach is when they are required to switch from one form of support to another, without any real continuity.

Recommendation

To help people manage the fears and anxieties that accompany returning to work, the Department for Work and Pensions should design contracts in a way that allows services to adopt a more mixed approach, where help with people's immediate needs and support towards longer-term goals like employment are undertaken together.

Rather than expecting people to make steady progress towards becoming 'work-ready', this mixed approach should focus on what people are immediately capable of, building on their existing skills and aspirations.

Voluntary versus mandatory participation

A fundamental aspect of this new approach adopted by services was that people should participate voluntarily, rather than be required to as a condition of receiving benefits:

"[...] the approach that we took [...] it didn't matter if they didn't turn up, no one was going to get sanctioned, it didn't matter if they came up with a crazy idea, no one was going to judge them and it didn't matter if they turned up high or drunk. It didn't matter because we were saying to them 'look, we know you're living in chaos right now and we know that some days life's going to intervene and that things are going to get a bit crazy sometimes, but we're going to be here for you no matter what.'"

One member of staff spoke about the importance of voluntary attendance to the success of their service:

"[...] people come to us because they can and it's not a sanction if they don't. So, it's completely voluntary. We work very, very closely with the Jobcentre. We work very closely with lots of other agencies and communicate with them but, at the end of the day, the people who come here to [name of the service] come because of our values."

By contrast, people's experiences of mandatory programmes were less positive:

"It's not like I can go there and sit down and actually talk to them, they'd still tell me to do something and if I say no, that's it, my benefits are stopped. [...] They just go, 'Go work at [name of employer] for a month for free, you might get a job at the end.' Yes, I did that half a year ago; I didn't get the job... You don't have a choice. You get sent there so they can get their funding; as long as you turn up they get their funding."

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The benefits of voluntary versus mandatory participation are particularly relevant in the context of the DWP's independent review into the impact on employment outcomes of drug and alcohol addiction, and obesity. Although the results of the review are yet to be published, the author, Dame Carol Black, has indicated that she will not be making recommendations in favour of mandatory treatment or support programmes, which carry a penalty of reduced benefits, as "there is no evidence that being in treatment gets you anywhere nearer to the labour market."¹⁰

This is consistent with the evidence that MEAM submitted to the review, and we recommend that while treatment and employment experience are vital for people's journeys, voluntary participation should be a key principle of all future employment support options for people with experience of multiple needs.

Recommendation

The Department for Work and Pensions should expand the principle used under current Work Choice arrangements, and make employment support for people with experience of multiple needs voluntary, rather than required as a condition of receiving benefits.

The need for greater flexibility

The role of targets and outcomes in supporting people with multiple needs has been a feature of MEAM's work with frontline services and people with lived experience over the past two years.¹¹ In addition to discussing the types of outcomes they were expected to deliver, staff also discussed how they approached working towards these outcomes:

"[...] so when you think, Jesus, I've got to sell so many or achieve this in that month then actually all you end up thinking about is the target, not the individual or the work that you've got to do. Maybe if I was selling slippers [laughs] – can't think of anything more exciting – I might have to say to the team: 'right, team, today, we need to go out and sell 100 slippers each', or pairs at least, then actually maybe target driven is the right thing for that but actually if we were target driven with [...] people, I think they'd notice."

The ability to prevent their targets from becoming the main focus of their work had enabled one service to focus exclusively on promoting its values, which in turn had allowed it to successfully achieve its outcomes:

"[...] so a [a member of staff] wouldn't go to a [person] and say, 'oh, I've got to meet my target, so can you get a job this week or go into volunteering?' So, from that point of view, they would not be aware. As far as I'm concerned, what we call it is 'hide the wiring'; [...] people don't need to know the ins and outs of what our targets are. We meet our targets because of our values."

The ability to focus on their values was part of a wider cycle, based on adequate funding:

"If you have got some money, it allows you to have freedom of choice. In our instance, we have the funding [...] and because we're meeting our targets, we have that lack of tension. Because we have the lack of tension, we can work very closely to our values. Because we

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work closely to our values, [...] people feel it. Because the [...] people feel it, then actually we're going to achieve our targets. It really is as simple as that. There's no other magic."

In addition to adequate funding, people also identified other factors that had allowed them to 'hide the wiring' from those using their services. For example, services that have the flexibility to try new things are often better able to focus on their values, rather than their targets, even if they remain part of a wider national initiative:

"Each individual [service that our organisation runs] is set up and run independently of the others, so what we've got is 21 slightly different [services], and that's good in some ways because actually it meets the needs of the local people. So, you might have a rural [service] and then an inner city [service] and so on and so forth, a large one, a small one, so we've actually got lots and lots of different [services] all doing slightly different things. Then what we are doing from that is we're learning, as a group, different ways, different models, different things that work with people, things to do, things to try, things to avoid. [...] We're also mindful that what works today might not work tomorrow, so we're not afraid of changing again. [...] We do have to flex and change with the needs, really."

Interviewees suggested that the ability to 'flex and change' was often easier for smaller services than for larger entities:

"[...] so what works for our business and what works for the DWP, it just has to be individual. It can't be really compared, because our business is small and bespoke to the individual [...] so, we're equivalent of a speedboat and the DWP is the equivalent of, I don't know, an aircraft carrier [laughs]. You couldn't turn it on the spot but actually a speedboat, you could turn it on a hairpin."

There is, of course, nothing to prevent larger organisations, such as the DWP, working with smaller, more flexible services. In theory, this is how the original Work Programme should have operated.¹² In reality, however, the pricing structures and payment mechanisms used made it extremely difficult for smaller specialist services to engage with the programme.¹³

In recognition of these difficulties, the Work and Pensions Select Committee has recommended that the "DWP should take steps to encourage a greater role in welfare-to-work delivery for smaller, specialist organisations, which are often more innovative and effective at supporting people with more complex barriers to working."¹⁴ Part of this process will involve designing contracts which place a greater emphasis on prime providers to bear more of the risk for outcome payments. Clinks has recommended that commissioners should break large contracts into smaller lots to promote a diversity of providers.¹⁵

This recommendation is also relevant to devolution deals, as although local areas will enjoy greater powers to vary the national approach to employment support "based on local priorities, the Department for Work and Pensions will retain its core responsibilities for setting the amount of funding, the high-level performance framework, contract arrangements and managing the performance of providers, who will be solely accountable to the department."¹⁶

Recommendation

The Department for Work and Pensions should ensure any new employment programmes actively engage smaller, specialist providers, including those in the voluntary sector, who are better placed to provide flexible support.

The need for more flexible providers is particularly acute in the context of services for people with multiple needs because their journey towards employment will often be a long term one. For instance, for many people in contact with the Criminal Justice System gaining employment is an important factor supporting their journey to desistance (the process through which someone may offend or reoffend before they stop altogether).

Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) is a key part in the process of resettlement and rehabilitation for people serving custodial sentences, enabling them to gain training and education, find jobs and housing and establish contact with their families – all factors which help them to reduce their risk of reoffending. It is important that people with multiple needs who are serving prison sentences are able to access ROTL opportunities. There has been a decline in the use of ROTL, and recently Clinks and the Prison Reform Trust have made recommendations to the National Offender Management Service on increasing the use of ROTL for resettlement and rehabilitation.¹⁷

Recommendation

The Department for Work and Pensions should liaise with the Ministry of Justice to support the wider use of Release on Temporary License to improve employment outcomes for people leaving prison.

The benefits of co-production

People told us that the less choice and control they have over the support that is on offer to them, the more aware of the service's targets they become. One interviewee spoke of their frustration at being asked to work in roles where there was no chance of the position being made permanent:

“[...] most of the time they just say, ‘you’re going on this, you’re doing this.’ They don’t tell you no information, why, what it’s going to get you. All the things the Work Programme and that send you on, you don’t get nothing. No bit of paper, no certification, nothing saying you’ve completed, well done. You just get told, ‘well done but I’m sorry, you didn’t get the job.’ All these companies don’t want people to work, they want the Work Programme to send people to do work experience for free, that way they can cover full shifts, like they don’t have to pay no-one for months because everyone working there is Work Programme.”

By contrast, interviewees were clear that allowing people a greater say in the support they received – and where possible, co-producing it with them – was an essential part of any successful attempt to “hide the wiring”:

Steps towards employment

“[...] we’re actually managed by [the] people [who use the service]. So they’re involved in decisions: when we choose what we spend our money on or how we deliver something, we ask people and I think that’s really important. Of course, that takes extra time and resource in doing that, but actually it means that we get it right the first time rather than thinking that we know what we’re doing.”

Co-production also helps to develop reciprocal relationships between services and individuals, which can help to improve people’s motivation to achieve positive results:

“Well, it’s give and take. They’ve given me a lot say, so I feel like I need to give back and I think that’s the way things should be, but, like I say, it’s just nice to be appreciated for what you say and what you do, and because they feel that it’s valuable, that in turn makes me think to myself – oh, they think that was valuable. Maybe I’m not so bad after all.”

The MEAM coalition has previously argued that co-production should be central to the design and delivery of services for people with multiple needs. For example, in our report *Solutions from the Frontline* we recommended that: “services should involve staff and people with multiple needs in designing programmes and the environments where they are delivered. They should give practitioners the freedom to build rewarding relationships with those they work with.”

Recommendation

All organisations involved in the design and delivery of back-to-work support should co-produce their services with people with experience of multiple needs.

Next steps

The MEAM coalition partners will continue to work on these issues over the coming year, and welcome opportunities to discuss them in more detail. We will explore with local areas what models are most effective in supporting people with multiple needs towards employment, and offer feedback on the design and implementation of successors to the Work Programme.

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Notes

¹ Clinks & The Prison Reform Trust (2016), *Inside Out: The role of the voluntary and private sector in providing opportunities for rehabilitation for people on temporary release*

² Work and Pensions Select Committee (2015), [Welfare-to-work: Second Report of the Session 2015-16](#), p. 4

³ *Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015*, para 1.129

⁴ National Audit Office (2016), [English Devolutionary Deals](#), p. 20

⁵ Homeless Link (2015), [‘Housing First’ or ‘Housing Led’? The current picture of Housing First in England](#), pp. 2 – 4

⁶ Clinks, Social Firms UK & the Home Office (2014), [Working chance](#)

⁷ [Speech by Stephen Crabb MP](#), Hansard, 21 Mar 2016, HC Deb vol 607 col 1268

⁸ DWP (2016), [Universal Credit and employers: frequently asked questions](#)

⁹ MEAM (2015), [Submission to the Work and Pensions Select Committee Inquiry into Welfare-to-Work](#)

¹⁰ Drink and Drug News (2016), [Barriers to work](#)

¹¹ MEAM (2015) [Solutions from the Frontline](#), pp. 17-18; MEAM (2015), [Representation to the Spending Review](#), p. 3; and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation & MEAM (2015), [Individuals with multiple needs: the case for a national focus](#) all provide examples of where the topic has been discussed in depth in relation to multiple needs.

¹² DWP (2011), [The Work Programme](#), p. 3

¹³ Institute for Government (2013), [Making public service markets work](#), pp. 40 – 62; National Audit Office (2014), *The Work Programme*, pp. 7 – 8; and Work and Pensions Select Committee (2015), [Welfare-to-work: Second Report of the Session 2015-16](#), pp. 18 - 25

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34

¹⁵ Clinks (2014), [More than a provider](#), p. 38

¹⁶ National Audit Office (2016), [English devolution deals](#), p. 20

¹⁷ Clinks and Prison Reform Trust (2016), [Inside Out: The role of the voluntary and private sector in providing opportunities for rehabilitation for people on temporary release](#)