

Southern Regional Hub-funded project

Project Report



Work Active: Supporting the “forgotten learners” in their journey to work

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SkillWise

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1. Aims and Objectives

The aim of the Work Active project is to develop a practice framework for an internship-based employment training programme for people with an intellectual disability. The intention is to develop a learning programme that combines a classroom component with workplace experience (in the form of an internship). Importantly, this project sets out to develop a teaching and learning model and toolkit based on a collaborative approach that maximises the potential for sustainable employment outcomes for people with an intellectual disability. This includes the development of a set of resources that meet the learning needs of adults with an intellectual disability to help build confidence and motivation, develop job specific skills, together with a range of soft skills. In addition, it is hoped that the toolkit developed for this project will be integrated into on-going services of SkillWise and similar service providers

There are five key teaching and learning aims within the proposed Work Active learning programme:

1. Learn the job specific skills (hard skills)
2. Understand general workplace information, e.g. health and safety, payslips, Kiwisaver, holiday/sick pay, and breaks.
3. Develop a range of soft skills, including communication, team work, self-confidence, self-awareness, use of initiative, teamwork, and time management.
4. Develop an understanding and appreciation of work place culture. This involves developing an understanding of the unwritten “rules” of each workplace. For example, where to sit in the lunch room.
5. To evaluate and track the impact of the learning programme on employment outcomes, including degree of sustainability and career development of learners.

2. Need for the Project

Evidence suggests that there is a need for the development of tailored approaches and resources to increase employment outcomes through training and education for people with an intellectual disability. For example, reports from both Statistics New Zealand and the Ministry of Health show there are vast improvements required to lift employment outcomes for disabled New Zealanders. In Statistics New Zealand’s report: Disability and the labour market: findings from the 2013 Disability Survey, they found when compared with non-disabled people, disabled people have lower rates of labour force participation, higher rates of unemployment, poorer representation in high-skilled occupations, and lower incomes.

The Ministry of Health in the Disability Support Services Strategic Plan 2014–2018, sets out a vision for disabled New Zealanders to have a better quality of life. This includes transforming the disability support system to create improved services and improve both education and employment outcomes. Through the systems transformation

process and the re-organising of funding arrangements disabled people and their families anticipate more disabled people will access and participate in a range of opportunities within the wider community. However, there are currently very few tertiary learning opportunities for adults with an intellectual disability. This project offers an approach to tertiary education that better suits the needs of this learner population and with the aim to lead to more employment outcomes.

IHC New Zealand conducted a comprehensive online survey in July 2017 incorporating families, supporters and sector workers, as well as running focus groups for people with intellectual disabilities. An overwhelming three-quarters of respondents felt people with intellectual disabilities do not get the right support to enter the workforce. There were similar results for education where the majority of people felt there is a need for significant improvement in the availability and quality of education options for people with intellectual disabilities.

Brown (2010:2) identifies a number of reasons why tertiary education for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities is important:

- People now live and grow up in the community (not institutions)
- Adult life requires people to learn different and additional skills to function effectively in the adult world

The skills and knowledge gained in training and education relating to social, adaptive and recreation skills can transfer into the employment realm with social skills being recognised as a key component in the successful development of employment (Brown 2010:3). In addition, Vila et al (2007) identified that companies value a range of skills beyond just the technical skills required of a particular job. These include:

- Social Skills (communication and team work)
- Participative Skills (planning and initiative)
- Methodological Skills (problem solving)

Research suggests that there is a correlation between tertiary training and education and employment outcomes (Brown, 2010; Vila et al., 2013). Thus, this project seeks to highlight the importance of including a period of practical work experience prior to paid employment. This enables in situ training of the skills directly related to the performance of the work role (Vila et al 2007:17). Put simply, this relates to increasing employability through tertiary education. This idea is firmly embedded in thinking associated with career development for non - disabled people, however, it appears to be somewhat absent in respect of career development for adults with an intellectual disability (Grant 2015).

3. PAR Project Design and Process

This project is based on the qualitative methodological approach of participatory action research (PAR) with the aim to develop a learning programme and learning/teaching toolkit that will enhance the learning process and maximise the outcomes for

learners with an intellectual disability. PAR research is fundamentally an approach that is collaborative and reflexive, to identify an issue/problem and seek to solve the problem collaboratively. This inevitably involves an agenda for social change that embodies the belief of pooling knowledge to define a problem in order for it to be resolved (see Greenwood & Levin, 1998). PAR provides an alternative approach to traditional social and scientific research moving social inquiry from a linear cause and effect perspective, to a framework that considers the contexts of people's lives (Kral, 2014; McTaggart, 1997; Valliantos, 2015), drawing on a cyclic process of research, reflection, and action for change (Burstein, Bryan & Chao, 2005; Bradbury-Jones, Isham & Taylor, 2018; Higgenbottom & Liamputtong, 2015). We use a 'collaborative' approach that combines the skills of academics/researchers with the insider perspectives of people with intellectual disability, and service providers to generate new knowledge of the type that neither group could do alone. Central to a collaborative approach is the commitment to according equal value to each member's contributions and to use resources and time in a way that gives equal attention to the diverse purposes that members have for their participation.

The project design was guided by five steps that constitute the cycle of collaborative (or 'cooperative') inquiry according to Higgenbottom and Liamputtong (2015)

1. Bringing together the group of participants – this constitutes the service provider, service users, employers, and academic to establish preliminary inquiry, determine focus, and needs for development of the internship learning programme.
2. Form an advisory group – define the focus of the inquiry and agree actions – identify the needs, gaps, opportunities for service provision. The advisory group included: service provider general manager, employment service coordinator, learning programme facilitator (researcher), and academic (principle researcher) – to meet through the project stages
3. Develop and implement course and learning toolkit, begin data collection and initial focus groups (learners, employers) and on-going participant observation.
4. Continue data collection and analysis, begin process of reflection: final focus groups (learners, employers, service provider) reflect on group experiences and findings, and discuss implications/recommendations
5. Document learning and recommendations and disseminate findings

3.1 Advisory Group

An advisory group was formed at the beginning of the project and consisted of key members of the service provider: the general manager, the employment service coordinator, the learning programme facilitator/tutor (researcher) and an academic (principle researcher). The advisory group sought to represent stakeholder interests and raise issues on behalf of the service users/learners (learning programme facilitator), employers (employment service coordinator), service provider and funders (general manager). In this way, the advisory group attempts to, acknowledge and represent the different expertise of all project participants and stakeholders.

The advisory group met regularly throughout the project. The frequency of meetings was dictated by the needs of the project, in other words, the group would meet at certain phases of the learning programme implementation and research process, to

develop participant recruitment criteria and strategies; to refine the themes to be covered in the research; to choose and adapt methods of data collection; to discuss ongoing learning programme and internship progress and learner feedback; to discuss and reflect on data analysis and findings.

3.2 Recruitment

A purposive sampling approach was used for the recruitment of all participants for the project. Recruitment of service users (learners) for the project was undertaken by the service provider, drawing from a pool of current jobseekers. Potential participants and their guardians/care givers were provided with information about the Work Active learning programme so that they were able to make an informed decision whether or not they would like to be part of the project. Potential participants who indicated an interest in being part of the Work Active Learning Programme were asked to complete a pre-course questionnaire supported by the tutor. The questionnaire was used to determine learners' 'readiness' for participation in the Work Active Learning Programme by gathering information regarding: the history of each learner, the level of social skills, health and well-being, management of personal appearance, confidence, motivation for work, work history, reading comprehension, digital literacy, general numeracy and literacy, and their support system. Additional information was provided to participants with the opportunity to ask further questions, and consent was sought from participants for the research component of the project in accordance with the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Canterbury.

The recruitment of six employers for the project was undertaken by the service provider's employment support coordinators. Employers who were currently on the service provider database were approached and asked if they would like to be part of the Work Active project. For the large part, selection criteria were met by virtue of being on the service provider database and/or part of the wider network of employers, in addition, employers were required to be able to offer a 12 week internship opportunity with the possibility of employment at the conclusion of the programme. Employers were provided with additional information regarding the research component of the project and consent was sought in accordance with the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Canterbury.

3.3 Methods: Data Collection

The research methods used in this PAR project have been drawn from qualitative traditions. When choosing methods to use in PAR research, the characteristics and capabilities of the researchers and participants must be considered (see Vallianatos, 2015). The choice of methods for this project was influenced by the value placed on the inclusion of participants in the process of research, reflection, and action for change.

The data was collected in two main ways: focus groups and participant observation (undertaken by the learning programme facilitator and internship tutors). The implementation of both methods took into account the need for support, and the existing skills and knowledge of focus group members and researchers. Further, not only are focus groups or group discussions frequently a central part of PAR, they are

also typically used within the daily activities of the service provider as a means to engage with and draw on the expertise of service providers. In this way, data collection could be described as being what Bigby refers to as a “process of dialogue” (2015:152). Thus, the choice of methods was not only driven by the research questions and the commitment to participation and collaboration of participants and researchers but also had to fit with the cultural ethos of the service provider.

3.2.2 Focus Groups

Focus groups are considered a socially orientated process, a “form of group interview that capitalizes on communication between the research participants in order to generate data” (see Kitzinger, 1995, p.299). This fits with the PAR principle to ensure that all involved in the research process are active participants (Greenwood & Levin, 1998). We specifically used focus groups to create an environment in which all participant viewpoints could be heard and valued, and importantly, in which participants had an opportunity to communicate and reflect as a group (see McTaggart, 1997).

Three separate focus groups were created, comprising of learners, employers, and support staff from the service provider. Five focus group sessions were undertaken in total, two with learners and two with employers, one at the commencement of the Work Active learning programme and one at the conclusion of the programme.

One focus group was held with employment coordinators and tutors of the service provider at the conclusion of the programme. All focus groups were audio recorded, transcribed and analysed. The duration of each focus group was between 1.5 – 2 hours duration. Facilitation of the employer’s focus group and the service provider’s focus group was undertaken by the principle researcher. Facilitation of the learners’ focus group was undertaken by the (principle) researcher and the learning programme facilitator. In this way, the researcher was able to provide an etic perspective, and the learning programme facilitator was able to build upon her prior knowledge and rapport with participants to provide an emic perspective to the data collection and analysis process (see Daley et al. 2010 for further information).

All focus groups started with a very open-ended approach to enable focus group participants to

refine the themes and questions to be discussed. This approach worked very well with the learner’s focus group, beginning with a learner driven brain-storming session for developing topics/themes for discussion. It was important that this was an inclusive activity, that no voices were marginalized, that the focus groups was experienced as a ‘collaborative’ activity in which the topic(s) for discussion were decided collectively. We emphasized that all opinions and ideas were valid, including negative ones, since we were there to learn from their experiences and ideas for developing the learning programme. Krueger and Casey (2009) drew our attention to the idea that for young people, youth peer pressure can be powerful and heavily influence the opinions that are expressed. In addition, they suggested that young people may feel that they have little to offer in discussions, and may therefore rely on common answers to questions – such as ‘I don’t know’. However, though the learners’ focus group, comprised mainly of young people within the age range 22-40 , we found them to be proactive in determining group discussion and participation, raising pertinent and unanticipated discussion topics.

3.2.3 Participant Observation.

Participant observation is an innovative qualitative research method of inquiry and a rich source of data collection that is commonly employed in PAR (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; MacDonald, 2012). It provides the researcher with privileged access to the research participants within their social setting and with the idea of capturing the context in which individuals function by recording subjective and objective observations (Gillis & Jackson, 2002; Mulhall, 2003). It is quite common for the researcher to be part of the process both observing and being immersed within the setting (Spradley, 1980). In this way, the researcher as a participant-observer not only observes activities, participants, and physical aspects of the situation, but also engages in activities appropriate to the social setting (Spradley, 1980). Thus, within this study, the learning programme facilitator, an experienced tutor for the service provider, undertook participant observation and was able to attain first-hand knowledge of social behavior and activities as they unfolded over time within the classroom internship settings, and critically reflect on her own participation in the learning programme

Field observations were recorded by the Facilitator and internship tutors for the entire 12 week learning programme and discussed in weekly research meetings. These field observations were drawn on to inform potential focus group discussion topics and were key in the development and analysis of focus group data. Our decision to combine data collection methods: participant observation and focus groups was useful for checking tentative conclusions from focus group data analysis and for reflecting on possible changes to be recommended.

3.3 Data Analysis

The purpose of data analysis in participatory action research is two-fold: to produce an understanding of the phenomenon (or produce a theory - if possible), and more importantly, to inform action. This critical reflection process of the PAR research cycle builds collective understanding. Thus, as understanding increases, more effective actions are then able to be devised. Key to note here, is that qualitative data analysis is an inductive and emergent process, as participants work to improve a situation, their understanding of that situation slowly improves. Thus, action-oriented theoretical explanations/understandings are often favoured over academic theory in PAR studies (see Higgenbottom, 2015). For example, practitioners/service providers want to know how to 'act' in the specific situation they face. To do so, they proceed to review and reflect on the assumptions made about a situation, outcomes and action. These assumptions are further scrutinized/analysed when acted on (MacDonald, 2012).

To begin with, careful reading and rereading of all data - focus group transcripts and field observation notes - was undertaken to identify thematic content and patterns as they emerged. This reading was done with an awareness that the focus of analysis was the text itself (an inductive approach). Thus, we were not reading 'for gist' but rather a reading that is concerned with the properties of participants' accounts, for example, the language used, the discursive process of constructing their accounts. Transcripts and field notes were initially coded, and a digital codebook was used to keep track of the coding practice and for the retrieval of codes and patterns. Substantive codes and

strong themes were brought together conceptually. Identification of patterning in data is key to developing explanatory frameworks, that is, paying attention to who says what in which context.

It is worth noting that analysis of focus group interview data (alongside observation field notes) should ideally be approached differently from individual interviews because of the group/collective work undertaken in constructing stories/experiences. The identification of 'process' (see Roper and Shapira, 2000) in data analysis can be an important factor in facilitating a deeper understanding of not only what is being said, but how it has come to be said. This attention to process is an important area of focus, as participants may often change their viewpoints during focus group discussion, for example, in what they may consider as sensitive issues or areas. Helman (2001) offered that the changing of participants' viewpoints can reveal public and private accounts. By identifying repeated words and phrases can help to foster an insight into participants' worlds in relation to what may be the significant issues for them. Thus, by following process, we can begin to explore how participants change or alter viewpoints during the course of the focus group. We followed the flow of ideas throughout the focus group data, attending to consensus, dissensus and resonance (see Lune et al, 2009). In section 5 we present the findings, divided according to emergent themes.

4. Design of Work Active Learning Programme Structure and Delivery

4.1 Overview

The following section outlines the Work Active Learning Programme and rationale. The approach taken for the framework of this internship-based employment training programme is grounded in experiential learning, whereby classroom work informs work experience and vice versa. In this way, the tutor is more of a facilitator and learns from the students (primarily from their work experience) and adapts the classroom material and delivery accordingly. The Work Active PAR project is underpinned by values of empowerment, self-determination and solution-focused, together with being personalised and learner centric. The guidelines, tools and framework developed for the Work Active learning programme are intended for a disability provider and/or an adult community education training provider to work in partnership with an employer to support the transition for job seekers with an intellectual disability.

Both the learning programme and research components of the project commenced at the same time. The following sections detail the development and underpinning ethos of the Work Active learning programme and outline the modules of the 12 week learning programme.

4.2 Experiential learning foundation

Experiential based learning plays an important role in ensuring meaningful and effective teaching and learning opportunities for learners with an intellectual disability. Andersen, Boud and Cohen (2001) outline a number of defining characteristics

associated with experiential based learning, all of which apply to some degree or other to the learning process of adult learners with intellectual disabilities. This includes ensuring the involvement of the whole person, that is intellect, feelings and senses. Active use of the learners' relevant life and learning experiences as a mechanism to maximize understanding is another key component. Continued reflection upon earlier experiences is important in terms of being able to add to and transform learning into deeper understanding and apply learning in different ways within different contexts.

The use of structured activities including simulations, games, role play and visualizations are used for effective experiential learning, thus providing the means by which the first step in applying the learning from previous experience can take place.

4.3 Facilitated learning approach

The classroom-based materials and activities of the Work Active learning programme build on the experiential learning approach. The facilitated approach to learning enables a more personalised approach to teaching and learning, by ensuring there are a range of options and opportunities for people to reflect on and talk about their experiences. Wise (2017) describes a number of key characteristics that set a facilitated learning process apart from more traditional teaching approaches. These key characteristics are incorporated into the Work Active learning programme:

- Facilitator focuses on learning process
- Participants' expertise is just as valuable as teacher's
- Major responsibility for learning is placed on participants
- Activities provide practice in obtaining information and using it for making real-life decisions
- Real-life problems are addressed
- Interaction occurs beyond the classroom
- Facilitator identifies and draws on expertise of participants

In the Work Active learning programme, the role of the facilitator is to help guide the learner through their learning journey in order to bring out the best qualities in the learner, ensuring learning is individualised, relevant, has depth and meaning. As a provider of information, the facilitator ensures a starting point in the learning journey, providing a foundation on which individual experiences of the learners can be built. The facilitator assesses each learner's development through formative and summative assessment in the classroom environment. Feedback is given throughout the class time informally and at the end of the class time, formally. In addition, the facilitator may be required to take on a "counsellor" type role to work through challenges and issues as they arise. For example, learners may experience challenges within home life and the work placement. The facilitator can assist the student to take the learning from these challenges. Within this project, the facilitator role has also been that of "inquirer", as researcher collecting data from participant observation, capturing the learning context and taking part in focus groups. Facilitator observations have been a valuable contribution, recording class-based and work-place activities, interactions and social setting. The facilitator/ researcher was able to engage in the process of knowledge-building and reflection with learners.

4.4 Twelve Week Learning Programme

Work Active is organised into four separate modules to maximise the learning with the aim to improve the potential for an outcome of paid work. The classroom component comprised of two morning sessions, from 9 am to 12 pm, a week. The following sections outline the contents of each module.

4.4.1 Preparing for Change/Learning/Work

- Relationship building
- Setting priorities and understanding the approach to learning and associated resources (resources)
- Setting personal priorities
- Clarify roles and expectations (learners and tutor).
- Introducing the realities of paid work, routines, people's motivations
- Reflective learning – promote self-reflection
- The approach to learning, resources and assessment.
- Daily routines, travel, hygiene, appropriate dress code, work environment.
- Role play.

4.4.2 The Work Day

- Exploring routines of each workplace
- Roleplays and their function in understanding various aspects of the workplace
- Job specific skills – including reviewing video of each participant in their workplace.
- Workplace routines – including reviewing video of each participant in their workplace.
- Toilet breaks, work breaks.
- Use of technology and cell phones.

4.4.3 The Work Environment

- Technology and their use in the workplace
- Workplace culture
- Employment contracts
- Workplace relationships.
- Health and Safety.
- Payslips, Kiwi saver and banking.

4.4.4 Career Pathways

- Practising interview skills
- CV's and job applications
- What options are there?
- Planning for the future
- Moving from one job to another.
- CV review and update.
- Interview Skills – role play.

In terms of the learning process itself, this was enhanced through the use of technology. Firstly, each participant was given an iPad and this enabled the potential for some self-directed learning. The establishment of a Facebook page proved to be a valuable resource. This enabled participants to interact with one another outside the classroom, was used as a communication tool, as well as recording and posting role-plays and internship experiences. Typically, the role play scenarios would emerge from discussions relating to actual experiences in the workplace, for example dealing with a “grumpy customer”. This was indicative of the experiential learning approach focused on the individual experiences of the participants in their respective internships.

4.5 Internships

The workplace internships are a vital component of the Work Active Learning Programme and can vary with each learner depending on their employment aspirations and the agreed framework of internship that has been negotiated with the host employer. Learners undertook a minimum of 5 hours work placement a week, over the 12-week period. This allows the learner time to get into a rhythm of work and establish a work ethic and work habits appropriate to their workplace.

The classroom learning component of the Work Active Learning Programme relied very heavily on what experiences the Learner had in their workplace, and what they identified as areas of improvement. Feedback from workplace observers is incorporated into this learning process and identified as areas to explore/develop further. Observers could be workplace management, workplace peers, SkillWise Employment Support in their support capacity as workplace tutor.

5. Findings

The following sections discuss the key themes that emerged from the analysis of focus group and field observation data collected for this project.

5.1 Class-based Learning

5.1.1 Reflection

Reflection, sharing work experiences and providing feedback in group discussion is a central feature of the classroom based work. Students discussed what was working well and explored why and what wasn't. These discussions also helped to inform the role plays that students recorded and posted on the closed Facebook page. Learners described these class reflections in terms of 'helping you to think about the day'. One participant commented:

I thought it was quite cool that we could get to see what everyone was doing at their jobs. We get to sit there and talk about everyone's job, where they work and who they work with and what they have to do

In addition, learners were required to complete 'My Day' and 'My Diary' templates using their tablets, these activities encouraged further self-reflection on the workplace:

It helps you to think about your day, what went well and what didn't go well, just express how you are feeling during the day, and you can put tiredness or stressed or happy or sad or whatever

The class-based reflection process also encouraged learners to think about the potential for personal issues, (home, relationships etc) to impact on their work experience. For several participants the reflection activities and the completion of 'My Day' and 'My Diary' was described in terms of school work and personal learning, whereby they were able to unpack and make sense of an incident, remark or interaction. Some of the outcomes of reflection activities and discussions were confidentially conveyed to employers by the class facilitator or intern tutor when visiting the work placement. Employers in turn, appreciated being informed of the potential impact on work performance. For example, one participant was able to reduce their work hours from 8 to 12 hours due to being stressed by a home related issue. This enabled the participant to be more relaxed and able to manage class work, the internship and home related issues.

Role play activities further explored work experiences and understandings of work issues and activities and encouraged learners to reflect. Learners regularly engaged in role play as part of the class-based learning framework. The focus for each role play was developed from class discussions. For example, one role play explored self-management techniques in a customer service scenario and issue that was raised by two participants in documenting their work experience. Role playing was referred to a means to work out difficulties that were experienced in the workplace; how they had responded and how they might respond differently in the same situation and why; a problem-solving activity and as a way of helping to build confidence:

....now I've confidently got used to when a customer needs some help, I confidently can now find where the items are and if I don't know then I'm allowed to confidently go up to a worker I don't know well and say a customer needs help, I learned that when we did that (role play)

Importantly, reflection activities were undertaken by all learners, with some learners exhibiting a greater ability to problem-solve and come up with a solution or a means to make sense of workplace experiences. Though a couple of learners struggled with problem-solving, reflection activities such as role playing helped in building confidence such as in articulating their experiences. Similarly, in their discussions, employers noted the value of class-based reflection activities in helping learners to navigate not only workplace tasks, but the nuances of workplace culture. One employer specifically highlighted that learners came to the workplace more prepared, which he believed contributed to better integration in the workplace.

5.1.2 Technologies

The use of technology was observed to be a key component in the learning process for learners. At the beginning of the programme, all learners were provided with a tablet to undertake their classroom work: using Microsoft Word documents; creating PowerPoint presentations to document their learning and work experience journey; using Dropbox to share resources; interacting on a closed Facebook page specific for the programme. Learners used the tablets both in the class environment and at home. For some of the learners, they were also expected to use technology in the work place, drawing on their digital skills as part of their work tasks. Indeed, for a couple of employers, being digitally literate was an advantage within the workplace. While all learners were digitally literate to varying degrees, having all class-tasks in digital format encouraged a consistency in the completion and format of tasks. Moreover, learners were undertaking their class activities and tasks using the same learning platforms used within the university context, and this was perceived by learners to affirm their 'student status'.

Learners frequently engaged with the Facebook page for the programme, it became a central point of inquiry regarding the programme and activities; a space for informal dialogue amongst learners and support staff; an opportunity to post videos and photographs of their workplaces. Similar to other closed Facebook pages, learners and support staff felt comfortable to share stories and pictures, however, support staff also used the page as a surveillance resource to monitor whether learners were experiencing any difficulties at work or in their personal lives: if a learner was feeling sick/unable to attend class; struggling a bit with class work or issues/questions regarding the work experience.

5.1.3 Learning Spaces

The class-based learning component of the programme took place in a central building in the University of Canterbury (UC). In addition, two students undertaking a UC Arts internship took part in class-based learning as class assistants. Both Arts interns were key in introducing learners to UC spaces (libraries, cafes, student study areas etc.), and resources and explaining university culture. Learners were observed frequently utilising UC spaces on their own, during class breaks and before and after class, and often referred to themselves as students and what they did as study.

5.2 Internships

5.2.1 Capacity building

For employers, internships provided the opportunity to measure/assess the employability of learners – to see if there was a 'fit'. Thus, timeframes of the internships

became important for the employers – to ensure that there was enough time for learners to get accustomed to the workplace setting, for the employer to assign tasks to fit learner’s abilities and to measure their progress.

Employers highlighted the importance of managing expectations (both employer and intern/learner expectations) within the 12 week timeframe to avoid a ‘negative experience’ and to nurture the potential of each intern/learner. In this way, workplace training was managed on an individual needs basis to avoid overwhelming interns:

I had guys doing direct training, the direction I gave them is that I don’t want them to train on too many things each day. So I want them to – I’d rather they spend a whole day doing one or two tasks and we get them to the level of training multiple tasks and then doing the same multiple tasks the next day and so on. That’s how we would normally do it, depending on the person, but I just didn’t want them to feel overwhelmed, it can be overwhelming for anyone as everyone can learn differently.

Employers also discussed the importance that tasks given to interns had a purpose – that they were meaningful – that they were real tasks, as one employer commented:

...what they’re doing has to have a purpose and you have to explain the purpose or significance of that job – that task that you have assigned, and its meaningful in that sense

One learner commented:

The way they explain things is really good, it’s not just ‘go over there and do that’, they actually explain things really well, they do, and they show you how to do it and why we have to do it that way

For learners, it was important that the internships or work placements were meaningful, in that, as one learner suggested ‘they were doing the same jobs as everyone else’. Thus, the majority of the employers endeavoured to integrate learners into their work systems and this included for a couple of workers, undertaking health and safety online courses. However, due to the size or structure of the business or organisation not all employers were able to provide a formalised means of capacity building or integration into the workplace.

5.2.2 Moving Forward

For some learners, getting work experience through the internship component of the Work Active learning programme signified moving forward towards a goal of paid employment – a stepping stone towards their goals. For a couple of participants, the internships were seen to provide experience of work that they had not contemplated undertaking previously. For example, one participant had not considered working in a supermarket until the internship experience, and found that the variety of work, being

part of a team was an unexpected surprise. Another, participant discovered that retail is an area that they would like to pursue both in terms of further study and paid work:

If I can get an opportunity to do that I would (do a retail course), get a part-time job and study, then that would help me pursue the retail things.....I could learn more about retail, it's my pathway to a retail job.

For one learner moving forward from the Work Active learning programme represented undertaking more study, partly inspired by being within the university environment, but largely driven by the goal of achieving permanent employment and further study was considered the best way in which to do this. For another learner, moving forward was discussed in terms of building on what they had learned through the programme and workplace experience and further developing those skills to be 'work ready' in the future.

5.3 'Job Ready'

Being 'job ready' was a prominent theme within focus group discussion. The following sub sections explore the key themes within the conceptual category of being 'job ready'

5.3.1 Realising potential

When discussing being 'job ready', employers noted that though there are general requirements of undertaking and completing job specific tasks, they also looked for individual qualities of the potential employees and what they may bring to the job and workplace:

We measure scan rates at checkouts, every supermarket does that, measure how fast people scan. I don't need everyone doing the same, say 16 items per minute, what I need is some at 16, some at 14 and some at 18, some at 20.....I can afford to have someone at 14 because they might offer exceptional customer services, and that's the way that you look at it.

Another commented:

So it's about, you know, realising potential but not putting unrealistic pressure on each one (intern) what do they bring with them, what can they contribute

Realising potential was also discussed in terms of having a 'duty of care' to avoid setting learners up to fail. Thus, the timeframe of the programme or the number of internship hours that learners were able to do per week was identified as an significant issue for employers. A minimum of 3 days per week was identified by one employer as crucial in their ability to measure and assess progress of each intern/learner. Similarly, another employer noted that learners not only needed to learn workplace tasks and ethos, but also be introduced to what part-time and full-time work looks like. The issue of the ability to assess progress and potential of learners differed for some

employers depending on the nature of the job/tasks and the structure of the business/organisation, with some having formal strategies in place compared to small business employers. Time, was a factor that all employers identified as being significant in this process, and the length of the internship and though initially the internship timeframe was considered adequate, at the end of the programme and placements employers suggested that placement hours and duration should be increased.

5.3.2 Being Prepared

For learners, being 'job ready' was described in a number of ways, such as, being motivated for paid work, preparing for job interviews, having a sense of workplace expectations, and the ability to manage multiple tasks and their own stress levels. For example one participant noted:

I think for me, I've learned to manage my stress levels, definitely, when there was so many people coming through that place and I prefer to do a specific thing and like there was so many different parts to the job lots of different parts. So just self-managing myself was definitely the strongest point for me to learn how to do that.

Job interviews were identified by a couple of participants as being a potentially stressful experience. Thus, the in-class 'mock' interview exercises were described as being important for learners to manage future job interviews:

I had a friend who had an interview but it was the worst and hardest interview because it had questions that made it very hard. That's why when R came in and did interviews with us, it gave us a chance to see what we can expect when you go for a job interview.

Participants also highlighted a motivation to have paid work as being 'work ready', particularly since completing the Work Active programme. For a couple of participants, the Work Active programme solidified their confidence and motivation to move forward to paid work, they felt they had reached a point of readiness and no longer wanted to engage in volunteer or work experience. For others the Work Active programme provided the opportunity for them to step outside their comfort zone to experience a work environment that was either outside their choice of job or location.

I wasn't quite sure how well I would go and the prospects of working at X and stuff like that, but definitely I changed my prospects a bit to keep working there as much as I can because I liked it.

Another participant commented:

The first time that you said I was working at Y, I thought wow, cool, but I was like what am I supposed to do? How am I supposed to do this? I was so panicky and so nervous to start with. I had to serve customers. It was

so easy, I got it straight away which was good, learning new stuff all the time, it was great

For one learner, the Work Active programme helped to identify that they were not 'job ready', stating that the experience of work placement had been harder than they had expected, and raised some issues that they needed to work on further before they would consider permanent work.

5.4.2 Meaning of Work

The meaning of work for learners was described by drawing on the concept of identity – being a worker – provides a sense of belonging to the working population. Paid employment was described as 'proper work' and was considered a means to gain some independence; to make their own money and be able to save that money for future plans. Learners also drew on a comparison with their experiences of volunteer work to describe how they understood 'proper work'.

Proper work was also described as negotiating timeframes/work hours and the physical demands of working:

The hardest part of it is getting used to be on your feet, because you have to be on your feet all day, and it hurts, but you've got to get used to it

Another participant commented:

You've got to get yourself organised before you start the job, be sure you've got everything you need and you haven't left anything at home, to be prepared. Like being on time is a big step in your work and you have to be on time in your workplace because it's not just you, you are working with other people who need you to be on time.

The notion of responsibility was described by learners as they recounted their daily tasks and activities within their work placements. Some learners acknowledged that there was a responsibility to themselves to be a good worker, to take responsibility to be prepared for work. Other learners considered responsibility in terms of their colleagues and employers describing themselves as members of a team and as such others relied on them.

5.5 Consultation

A strong theme that emerged across the data was the conduction of consultation. Further to the 'information gathering' aspect of consultation, service provider staff described consultation as a fundamental component of programme development, that could also be understood and experienced differently between those involved. Building on this notion, employers stressed that consultation can be understood in terms of being involved in the process of developing a programme, in this way, helping to increase knowledge of learners' capabilities, enabling more informed understanding

of suitable expectations and the ability for them to be able to problem-solve, and ensure the suitability of workplace tasks for their interns.

5.5.1 Bridging Gaps

Employers were curious about the class-based component of the Work Active programme and the fit with the internships – the tasks that are set in class, progress measurement and how this might contribute to the workplace setting. Though employers had received an overview of the aims of class-based learning, they expressed an interest in having more input into the relationship between class learning content and how this might translate into work tasks and their ability to assess potential of each intern.

I think that there are always going to be a variety of people coming through and they will have different strengths and different weaknesses, I think there needs to be some communication between the course and us what they need to work on and how we can help that

Among the different sections of the service provider staff there was some confusion regarding the conceptual ‘workings’ of the Work Active Programme. Some considered there to be an overlap between the work placements that the service currently offers and the internships of the Work Active programme. Many of the staff discussed that they experienced a lack of clarity in terms of the definition of the internships and briefing of the project, this in turn led to some confusion. The overall aim of the of the Work Active programme was initially identified in terms of resulting in paid employment for the learner after the completion of the programme and internship/work placement. Therefore, the potential of securing employment was considered to be a key ingredient (and outcome) for the programme (and learners). However, for service provider staff there was confusion over the notion of internship or work placement and how work experience was being framed within the Work Active programme compared to the day-to-day operation of employment service provision. Staff described their confusion over the aim of the programme – were they to place learners in a work placement (essentially a version of an internship) or to secure a job opening/offer for learners? This then became a point of tension for staff, as one member comments:

It felt like we had to find a job that wasn’t a job that wasn’t advertised that wasn’t going to be a job but might be a job, confusing.

The vision for both the Work Active programme and service provider staff is to secure employment/employment experience for learners. However, though there is consensus on this issue – there was incongruence in terms of understandings of process. For service provider staff, the internship component of the Work Active programme was initially considered to be an overlap rather than an addition to services currently provided. An overlap represented added pressure on service provider staff; to recruit additional employers to provide for the Work Active programme. The recruitment of potential employers in general consistently emerged as a point of tension for service provider staff and described as soaking up the majority of their time. All staff acknowledged that a gap had emerged in terms of communication the requirements

understanding of the internship component and the corresponding class-based learning for the Work Active programme. Indeed, the Work Active programme was perceived as being a separate entity. Bridging this gap between the service provider's sectors emerged as a means to move forward.

5.6 Relationships

Relationship building has been discussed as a significant factor throughout the project.

5.6.2 Team work

The concept of teamwork was frequently drawn on by learners to describe the types of relationships they developed within both workplace and class settings. In the workplace, relationships were described in terms of being part of a team and the associated responsibilities of being part of a team and to their colleagues, such as turning up on time, completing and doing tasks well. In the class setting, relationships were discussed in terms of sharing their experiences and feelings, and helping to support each other to navigate workplace culture

Three of the 5 employers drew on the concept of team to describe their working environments with variations in the size of the team. Integration into the team was discussed as being important for the internship to be successful with specific spaces within the work setting to facilitate this. Learners were found in these cases to fully utilise these spaces and integrate with other workers. One employer noted:

T will come in about 20 minutes before they start work and goes upstairs and sits down in the team café and with everyone around and sits at a table with them and has a coffee, and people up there come and say 'how are you going'

Another employer described the intensity of their working environment in a busy restaurant and the importance for the team to work well together under pressure. Similar to other employers, pairing learners with paid employees has helped in their integration into the team:

At first B was a bit shy but the two guys that he works with get on with him and he's come out of his shell and he has fit in really quickly. So we're really busy, and nobody gets a break really until the end of the night, then they can cook whatever they want to eat and he will try all kinds of food.

I think our guys have fit in well in the fact that they've found a number of people that they can talk to and interact with and things. And like I said, they go up and have their breaks in the team café, you know, whereas it could be just as easy for them to go out into the mall.

Learners and employers both discussed how the physical/visible identification was important for them to feel that they are part of a team. Both groups considered uniforms to be a significant symbol of inclusion. Learners were provided with the

same uniforms as paid employees and which further cemented their identity as workers. In addition, the tasks/jobs that interns were assigned were the same jobs that some paid employees were expected to do:

They're all doing jobs that anyone else would do, for me there's no point in having someone come in and do work experience where they're doing jobs that you wouldn't normally do. If you're sitting there having to create stuff or make stuff up for someone to do, it's no point, you know?

5.6.3 Building Civic Responsibility

Service provider staff and employers drew on a discourse of civic responsibility as a means to explain their relationship with each other and the project. One employer commented:

I guess the things we wanted to get out of being part of this project was, 1. We wanted to assist with the project because it's hard for people to get opportunities like this, and we are a big organisation and it's part of what we should be doing. And 2. we wanted to, it's good for the team and it's good for the people to be coming into our team to be exposed to diversity and it's good for the store and obviously number 3, good for the person if they work out, it's someone else we can employ.

For service provider staff, building relationships was described as a fundamental aspect of the work undertaken by the service. Specifically, staff described nurturing relationships with employers as being a prime task, and convincing potential employers to provide work experience and paid work opportunities was considered to be an ongoing endeavour. One staff member commented:

We kind of need to move on from just networks, doing footwork and knocking on doors to getting your network so big by marketing so that employers get in touch with us.

The importance of educating potential employers, to try to get past the notion of service users being an 'inconvenience' to realising that as an employer, they have the potential to make a social difference or contribution was emphasised by one service provider member in terms of:

It's getting that understanding, you know, this is a value add. There's a lot of value to add by having one of our guys on your work team. It's about educating people

This notion of a 'value add' was raised not only by the service provider staff, but also by the employers who described their involvement in the programme in terms of an education process for themselves and their employees. Employers suggested a shift was needed with regards to ideas of civic responsibility in general, moving from the linear notion of moral duty, to raising awareness and building inclusiveness. However, though both service provider staff and employers agreed on the potential of a 'value

add; the employers nevertheless emphasised that this was at a cost, that to be involved in the project is initially labour, time and financially demanding.

6. Reflections and Recommendations

6.1 Determinants of Success

The determinants of success used for the Work Active project were based around three key questions:

- How much did we do?
- How well did we do it?
- Is anyone better off?

To try to achieve our aims we kept cohorts small. The project involved six learners and this enabled an intensive approach both in the classroom and in terms of workplace support. Learners connected well with a learning process based around flexibility, engaging in regular reflections on personal experiences of internships, and sharing video material of work placements and class-based role plays. Focus groups were undertaken to provide the opportunity for group members to reflect and discuss the learning programme and work placement experiences at the commencement of the project and at completion of the class-based component (12 week course). As a research methodology, PAR is a good fit for diverse population groups and we found it to be well suited to adult education for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that it seeks to empower people through reflection, data collection and action (Baum et al 2006). Learners were integral in the research process providing insightful reflections, observations and commentary.

In terms of internships, the flexibility of employers made a significant difference regarding the quality of the work placements and the type of work that learners were assigned and support provided within the workplace setting. The learning programme facilitator was initially able to take on the role of workplace tutor and was later assisted by an employment support specialist. These workplace visits facilitated a smoother transition into the internship for learners and enabled the facilitator to observe the work environment and behaviour.

The location of the programme within a tertiary institution provided the opportunity for learners to mix with the university community and generally participate in university life – to feel comfortable to ‘inhabit’ university spaces. In addition, partly due to the classroom component of the project being based within the University of Canterbury, and the relationships made with the University of Canterbury (UC) departments/sectors, a job seeker from SkillWise employment support service gained paid work with the UC Students Association (UCSA).

The development of relationships as part of the undertaking of the Work Active project have resulted in further opportunities for job seekers currently enrolled with the SkillWise employment support service. For example, after completion of the Work Active project, Pak n Save (who provided two internship placements for the project) recently made contact with the SkillWise employment support service to offer two job opportunities for job seekers.

Since completing the Work Active learning programme, three learners have gained employment in a range of occupations.

A draft set of teaching and learning guidelines (including a comprehensive range of resources) has been completed and submitted for review.

6.2 Limitations

The collaborative approach we used for this PAR project is shaped by the research aims and questions, and driven by the imperative to be informed by the lived experience of the participants (learners) with intellectual disability to enable them to draw on their 'expertise' to inform, review and reflect on the Work Active learning programme. We sought to match the expertise of all participants with the research aims. Our research groups comprised of members with and without intellectual disability. For example, six people with intellectual disability (learners), five people without intellectual disability (employers), several other people working for the service provider for people with intellectual disability (service providers) and an advisory group. Each group member brings distinctive skills and experiences and made their own distinctive contribution to the project.

Our practice of PAR in this Work Active project revealed a number of challenges and points of tension. Some we had predicted, such as difficulty in enrolling employers, but others we had not, yet all were viewed as part of our learning, and integral to a process to effect change. These tensions are important lessons for future use of PAR if we are to move forward. For example, a reconsideration of the type/level of inclusivity for the PAR approach is an area that could be reviewed as a means to set and achieve project goals, specifically in the consultation planning process prior the project. Specific issues noted include:

- Within the Work Active project aims, there is a clear expectation that the work experience will translate into a paid job once the learning programme is completed (if the learner achieved the required standard). However, the 5 employers who participated in the project were not able to guarantee that a paid job would be available at the completion of the learning programme. Nevertheless, the employers played a crucial role in providing work experience and an introduction to workplace culture through the internships. The internship alongside the class-based learning could be better framed as a first step to paid employment
- To find work placements proved to be difficult with the criteria set for the internships (the expectation of paid employment at the conclusion of the internship). Employment service coordinators were unclear in terms of the difference between an internship and work placement. Clear communication and consultation between sectors would have improved the selection of internships for the project
- Consult more broadly with all key stakeholders to discuss specific research aims pertinent to stakeholder groups as part of the planning stages of the Work Active project. For example, employers were not aware of the content/ aims of the class-based learning programme and how they might build on class learning within the workplace or suggest 'work-ons' for class-base sessions.

- Include more opportunities for the broader team of the service provider and engage in reflexive discussion throughout the project
- Clearly identify roles for all collaborators throughout the PAR process – revisit membership of the advisory group and ask how well we are representing all key groups/stakeholders' interests.
- One employer was unable to commit to the project and one internship was terminated half way through the project. The student continued with class-based learning component of the programme.

However, we would like to state that while the idea of involving all stakeholders in all stages of a project might be appropriate to some research aims, in actual practice, a major issue with this approach is the sheer volume and scope of resources required to do it properly – time, money and commitment of service users (people with intellectual disabilities), employers, academics, and service provider personnel. Further, a fully inclusive approach to knowledge generation requires the practice of providing equal attention to the multiple purposes of group members, social roles, organisational norms and agendas, internalized expectations and the production of multiple outputs.

6.3 Moving Forward

With many positives being observed from the Work Active learning programme, it is important to ensure that this momentum is maintained, for example, to make sure that the learning and training toolkit is shared among service providers and potentially made a key resource within the context of adult training, learning and employment for adults with intellectual disability. As the PAR approach is by its very nature an ongoing process of observation and reflection on practice, learning from experiences and applying this knowledge to practice (i.e. the continuous action research spiral) it is the intention to further develop and integrate the Work Active teaching and learning programme into wider SkillWise teaching, learning and support processes. Moving forward and building on the findings and experience of the Work Active project, key aims include:

- Explore options to integrate an employment internship programme into SkillWise's support services as an on-going activity.
- Work towards the development of the teaching and learning toolkit into an on-line learning resource
- Influence Education Policy to help ensure more tertiary learning opportunities of this nature are a feature of tertiary institutions.

7. Conclusion

The Work Active project used a participatory action research (PAR) approach with the aim to develop a programme and learning/teaching toolkit that will enhance the learning process and maximise the outcomes and the employability for learners with an intellectual disability. PAR was chosen because it is fundamentally an approach that

is collaborative and reflexive, to identify an issue/problem and seek to solve the problem collaboratively. This 'collaborative' approach combines the insider perspectives of people with intellectual disability, service providers, employers and the skills of academics/researchers to generate new knowledge of the type that neither group could do alone. The project sought to develop an innovative approach to teaching and learning (with an employment focus) for adult learners with an intellectual disability with experiential learning as its foundation. Work Active has a number of distinct features and components: it is a collaboration between an employer and a specialist disability provider; the delivery of course material is based on an internship type model making the workplace the "classroom"; learning extends beyond just the tasks of the job to include the social environment and workplace culture of the work placement.

The Work Active Teaching and Learning Framework will assist SkillWise in the quest to increase the employment outcomes for jobseekers. This will involve selecting a small cohort of job seekers to experience an "in house" version of Work Active with the classroom component being on-site at our facility. Moreover, SkillWise is in the process of establishing a commercial café on-site. A key feature of developing this initiative will be an internship programme utilising the Work Active Teaching and Learning Framework.

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