ENABLER report: Developing support strategies

Part Three: Phase 4, 5 and 6

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Executive summary

Introduction and aims

ENABLER is a three-year research project funded by Big Lottery Fund (BIG), and delivered in partnership between Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), Action for Blind People (Action) and the Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research at the University of Birmingham. The project harnesses the experience of employment professionals and blind and partially sighted people to develop a standardised assessment model and best practice guidelines, as well as to inform the design of new service interventions that move people closer to the labour market.

This third and final research report of the ENABLER project presents the findings from the project's second research trial. This involved testing new support strategies for people furthest from the labour market, as well as further trialling and refinement of the employment assessment toolkit. The following three research questions were focussed upon in this phase of the project:

1. How does the employment assessment toolkit support employment coordinators (ECs) and clients to design and implement appropriate interventions?
2. What interventions were shown to support clients to get closer or into the open labour market?
3. What does this work tell us about the enablers (and barriers) to moving these clients closer or into the open labour market?

Methods

The action-based research focussed upon work with 14 blind and partially sighted clients who were working with eight specialist employment coordinators (working for Action and RNIB). The clients were judged to be a long way from work. The eight ECs worked as practitioner-researchers, and sought to embed the employment assessment toolkit in their practice and develop innovative approaches to supporting their clients. The trial was carried out over eight months, with many ECs and clients working together over the whole of that period. The project drew on a range of methods of data collection:

- Employment coordinator diaries.
- Client diaries.
- Catch-up interviews via phone.

- Three one-day workshops with ECs.
- Bi-monthly meetings between Action ECs and senior management, as well as the project sponsor.
- Final telephone interviews with clients.
- Data from the employment assessment toolkit (used twice, beginning and end of the trial).
- Employment coordinator work logs.

Key findings

Case study outcomes

Following the eight month trial, 12 of the 14 participants had achieved positive changes in their personal circumstances. In many cases these changes were reflected in changes in the employment assessment toolkit score. The main headline outcomes are as follows:

- Three participants secured paid employment. This included two individuals who attended the new pre-employment programme (PEP), also trialled during this phase of the project. The third person secured paid work after 21 years out of work as a result of volunteering as part of the project.
- Three participants secured full-time education courses.
- Seven participants benefitted from voluntary work as the first important step on their journey into paid employment. One of these individuals, in her 40s, had never worked before.
- Most individuals developed skills in a range of areas: for example, travelling independently through mobility training; computer skills through Information Technology (IT) training; and accessing information through literacy and numeracy courses.
- One person obtained ten hours independent living support and training from the local authority, which has helped him move from a situation of complete isolation to one where he is about to start voluntary work.
- Confidence levels and motivation increased for most participants over the eight month trial.

How does the employment assessment toolkit support ECs and clients to design and implement appropriate interventions?

The ENABLER project has provided ample evidence of the positive impact of using the employment assessment toolkit. The analysis revealed that using

the assessment helped ECs to identify and prioritise interventions for clients – encouraging the EC and client to design interventions which are aligned with the assessment results. The assessment also helped the EC and client measure success and progress. In this way the assessment was used as a method of establishing a baseline which, following intervention, could be compared with a re-assessment of the client. Observing improvement is extremely motivating for the client and the EC.

A positive consequence of the ECs using a formal assessment approach was that the development of a shared language, which supported communication between professionals and clients. This advantage went beyond the EC-client relationship. The consistent use of the assessment approach across the project provided a shared language amongst the ECs which supported mutual support and professional development, as well as easier communication with managers. A shared assessment approach with its associated consistency of language and data provides improved clarity of purpose and communication within the organisation (and potentially for communication beyond the organisation as well).

The project also noted two areas of practice which ECs must guard against: agreeing safe and un-ambitious targets to ensure that positive progress is demonstrated; and missing important areas of intervention not directly linked to employment (that is foundation areas such as benefits, housing and health issues).

Following the trial, the research team re-drafted the employment assessment toolkit to account for the lessons learnt. Most notable, the final draft of the toolkit makes explicit reference to the design of associated interventions. See **www.rnib.org.uk/supportingjobseekers.**

What interventions were shown to support clients to get closer or into the open labour market?

Many aspects of employment services are relevant for all people seeking work or voluntary work, but there are some services which are particularly pertinent or important for blind and partially sighted people. Evidence gathered demonstrated the positive impact of interventions linked to sight-loss specific skills. In particular:

- computer skills, including access technology
- independent travel
- disclosure and communication about disability
- a pre-employment programme designed specifically for blind and partially sighted people.

These were delivered as targeted interventions, or as part of a standard pre-employment programme specially designed for blind and partially sighted people. This programme was highly valued by clients and ECs.

Evidence was also gathered from interventions which were not disability specific, for example:

- job search skills
- training/college programmes
- work experience through voluntary work.

Voluntary work seemed to offer particular benefits. As well as benefits of the work itself, it was often linked to meaningful practice and the development of other skills such as mobility, IT use and confidently discussing their sight loss with work colleagues. The efforts and specialist knowledge of the ECs were important in finding these voluntary placements, and in the preparatory and supporting work to make them successful.

Within this research a number of clients benefitted from their employment advisers referring on to services that went beyond a strict employment remit. Blind and partially sighted people furthest from the labour market often face multiple barriers to employment. Employment advisers sometimes need to ensure clients have access to wider support services, as this may lead to individuals being better placed to seek employment in the future. Using their specialist knowledge and expertise, employment advisers secured independent living training, self-care support and appropriate state benefits as just a few examples of this wider support.

What does this work tell us about the enablers (and barriers) to moving these clients closer or into the open labour market?

The project gathered clear evidence of the positive impact of individually-tailored support strategies. Interventions such as mobility training, the development of IT skills and job search skills, were shown to be **enablers** to moving these clients closer or into the open labour market. By the same logic, the absence of these skills in clients, and the services by which they can develop these skills, are **barriers** to moving these clients closer or into the open labour market.

Employment services for blind and partially sighted people should include the provision of a wide range of interventions. This is particularly the case for those furthest from the labour market. Such services require professionals with a high degree of specialist knowledge. These professionals require an understanding of employment issues, but also must have a clear knowledge of the specific

enablers and barriers to employment which are particularly relevant to blind and partially sighted people.

The ECs involved in with ENABLER demonstrated this range of knowledge, and just as importantly this professional knowledge and understanding developed through the project. The project itself offered a number of structures which supported this professional development – formal training, materials for supporting interventions (most notably from the pre-employment manual), forums for professionals to communicate and shared ideas, and (crucially) additional time for this work. The project provided a framework through the employment assessment toolkit. The toolkit also provided the project with a shared language and purpose, helping ECs to design and prioritise interventions and measure client progress. As described, the experiences of the ECs and clients have helped the research team revise the employment assessment toolkit further, and we believe the final version can be easily embedded within employment services.

Trials of the employment assessment toolkit and innovative support strategies provided evidence of the effectiveness of a **holistic and specialist employment** service for people with sight loss. The toolkit was proven to be an important part of such a service and helps employment coordinators, clients and managers to:

- establish a profile of each client's particular skills and barriers
- identify and design effective interventions which are sensitive to the complex needs and circumstances of people with sight loss
- plan a tailored pre-employment programme
- establish a baseline, which can be compared with a reassessment following intervention
- record evidence of measurable success towards paid employment
- acknowledge and celebrate other meaningful outcomes such as greater independence, or contribution and participation through voluntary work
- gather information about the range and number of clients being supported at different levels of need.

Conclusion

Through this research RNIB has worked closely with blind and partially sighted people and employment coordinators to design and test a new employment assessment toolkit alongside innovative support strategies. We believe that implementing the findings from this research will improve the employment

prospects of blind and partially sighted people. The employment assessment toolkit was found to be a very useful addition to the ECs work, and therefore an important part of employment services for blind and partially sighted people. Designed to assess the particular issues faced by blind and partially sighted people, it serves as a diagnostic tool and is useful for planning the steps required to progress towards work.

1. Introduction and context

ENABLER is a three-year research project funded by The Big Lottery Fund, and delivered in partnership between RNIB, Action for Blind People, and the Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research at the University of Birmingham. The project harnesses the experience of employment professionals and blind and partially sighted people to develop a standardised assessment model and best practice guidelines, as well as to inform the design of new service interventions that move people closer to the labour market.

From June 2010 the ENABLER project developed an **employment assessment toolkit** that takes account of the specific needs of blind and partially sighted job seekers. It supports employment coordinators and their clients to design interventions that help blind and partially sighted people on their path towards employment. The toolkit involves two related approaches:

Firstly, the questions contained within the toolkit are designed to generate assessment information, which helps the employment adviser and client to develop an appropriate action plan. The toolkit covers areas that blind and partially sighted people in this project and in other research have identified as barriers to gaining paid or voluntary work, such as mobility and accessing information. It also includes some questions that provide important context information such as the clients' level of vision and general health.

Secondly, some of the questions in the toolkit have a useful screening function to help understand a clients' level of work-readiness using a segmentation model. The assigned level can be helpful to communicate to clients the steps they need to take that will help lead to paid or voluntary work. Employment advisers and their clients can review progress through these levels, as an indication of the progress clients have made over time.

In April 2011 the project team began trialling the screening tool in all Action regions as well as RNIB Scotland, RNIB College and RNIB Trainee Grade Scheme. Two reports on the development and trial of the employment assessment toolkit have been presented previously (see Douglas et al, 2012).

From April to November 2012 the project focussed on working closely with 14 blind and partially sighted clients who were a long way from work (as measured using the employment assessment toolkit). This phase of work provided an opportunity to embed the assessment toolkit in real practice, allowing eight ECs (working as practitioner-researchers) to use the assessment toolkit to inform their work with 14 clients. Funding for this phase of work provided time for the

ECs to give sustained support to the 14 clients. The nature of the support was negotiated between EC and client, but ECs were encouraged to:

- draw upon the employment assessment toolkit when designing an action plan with the clients
- develop innovative practice if this was deemed appropriate.

This third ENABLER report presents the findings from this phase of work. This report is divided into five sections:

1. Introduction and context
2. Methods
3. Case studies
4. Themes drawn from the data gathered
5. Discussion and conclusions
6. Appendix

1.1 Aims and research questions

The project aimed to address four research questions:

- Is there a segmentation model to support the understanding of the needs and barriers of blind and partially sighted people?
- How can we assess unemployed blind and partially sighted people to ensure that they have access to the most appropriate support to address their individual barriers and move closer to reaching their employment potential?
- What are the most appropriate interventions that can support this journey?
- Will this wider understanding and the development of targeted interventions enable us to support more blind and partially sighted people move closer or into the open labour market?

Previous phases of the project sought to address research questions 1 and 2 (that is conceptualise a client segmentation model and develop an associated assessment tool). This final research phase of the project seeks to address research questions 3 and 4. The structure of the research project was slightly adjusted from the original proposal (with the permission of the funder). The meant that in this final research phase the “employment assessment toolkit” (developed in previous phases) was fully embedded into EC professional practice, which gave an opportunity for further refinement. For this reason, we slightly restructured the original research questions as follows:

- How does the employment assessment toolkit support ECs and clients to design and implement appropriate interventions?

- What interventions were shown to support clients to get closer or into the open labour market?
- What does this work tell us about the enablers (and barriers) to moving these clients closer or into the open labour market?

2. Methods

The main focus of this phase of the study was to design, collect and analyse 14 in-depth case studies drawing on multiple sources of evidence. An action-based research approach has been used from the project's inception and has been further developed in the final phases of the study. Employment coordinators were encouraged to plan – implement – observe –reflect and review their work by:

- carrying out an initial assessment with their clients using the freshly refined employment assessment toolkit
- co-developing action plans with clients, targeting intervention specifically in areas in which the client was found to be furthest from the labour market
- observing how their clients have been coping and meeting SMART goals through regular contact (mainly during weekly meetings)
- reflecting on their work using diaries
- reviewing the action plans and interventions to identify any areas that may need to be changed.

Our participatory action approach drew on various methods to enable the final sample of 14 clients and their ECs to tell us about their experiences. The ECs were in the unique position of being able to dedicate a day a week to each of the clients they recruited. ECs often do not have the opportunity to work with clients who are furthest away from the labour market because of contractual obligations with external funders, whose payment methods are often weighted towards job outcomes.

This phase of the project sought new ways to support the clients in a more holistic way by creating an evaluative space to consider the medical, psychological, environmental, economic and cultural factors when identifying the specific pre-employment needs of blind and partially sighted people. ECs were able to collaboratively and creatively, with a clear understanding amongst researchers and ECs that some of the chosen interventions would not necessarily lead directly to employment; but would support the participating client to reach their professional aim or personal goal.

2.1 Data collection methods

This pilot drew on a range of methods with data being collected from the following sources:

- Employment coordinator diaries.
- Client diaries.
- Catch-up interviews via phone.
- Three one-day workshops with ECs.
- Bi-monthly meetings between Action ECs and senior management, as well as the project sponsor.
- Final telephone interviews with clients.

Additional data was gathered from:

- the employment assessment toolkit (twice, at the beginning and end)
- employment coordinator work logs.

These methods are described in turn.

2.1.1 Employment coordinator diaries

The ECs already used a system which is mainly factual and non-personal to record all interaction with their clients including face-to-face meetings, phone calls and emails. However, we wanted to obtain more personal reflections and commentaries of how they thought their clients were progressing against the action plan's objectives. They also had the opportunity to confidentially discuss any concerns they had about their clients.

We asked the advisers to send an electronic diary every month, addressing the following questions:

1. How is the client progressing in relation to the action plan and screening tool results?
2. What do you think is working well or not working well?
3. What is the project giving you that you would not be doing otherwise?
4. How are you feeling about the project?

Overall, some diaries were more complete than others. In most cases the ECs kept to the four question framework, whereas others used their own format (for example) to give updates for each month. The ECs were sent monthly reminders to return their completed diaries to the research team at the University of Birmingham.

2.1.2 Client diaries

We wanted to obtain first-hand data from the clients; in particular we asked them to describe how they felt about significant moments or instances over the eight months. These recordings could be about their thoughts after a meeting with their EC, reflections on how a job or volunteer placement interview went, or some thoughts about how they were feeling at a particular time of the day. They were encouraged to record these thoughts using either a borrowed voice recorder, or a written diary (using either a note book or email). Seven clients agreed to use a voice-recorder; four clients agreed to keep an email diary, one client agreed to keep a written diary and one client did not respond.

We offered three broad questions to help clients to structure their thoughts:

1. What did you do?
2. How does it feel?
3. What does it mean (in terms of the client's journey towards their goals)?

Of the seven clients who originally agreed to keep an audio diary, four actually used the voice-recorder. Three clients were reluctant to use the equipment and most clients encountered difficulties trying to keep an audio diary. Some clients found it hard to use the technology, which proved more challenging than originally anticipated. Only one client used it on a regular basis and recorded short items frequently.

2.1.3 Catch-up interviews via phone

In addition to keeping their own diary, all the clients were phoned on a regular basis to see how they were progressing with the agreed work plan and to discuss the interventions they had been following. These catch-up interview calls provided the research team with regular updates on what the clients had been doing, as well as how they were feeling at a given time. It was more difficult to contact clients who only had mobile phones. In one case, a client had changed her mobile phone number several times making it very difficult to contact her.

2.1.4 Three one-day workshops with ECs

Three one-day workshops were arranged at the beginning, middle and end of the eight months research phase. The seven ECs met with the research team in order to discuss their clients' profiles. The workshops consisted of individual presentations by the ECs about their clients, plus small group and larger group discussions to share information and to receive updates about the project.

It was hoped, through our collective efforts, that the group would be able to generate some helpful strategies and interventions that the ECs could take away with them to adapt and try. Two out of the three workshops were recorded and later transcribed.

2.1.5 Bi-monthly meetings between Action ECs and senior management, as well as the project sponsor

Regular bi-monthly meetings were organised throughout this phase, to allow Action ECs to report directly to senior managers about their work. These meetings were also attended by the project sponsor. They proved invaluable for ECs, who were able to share their own practice with their peers and managers.

2.1.6 Final telephone interviews with clients

We carried out final interviews with the clients at the end of the pilot, in December 2012. The interviews took around 40 minutes to complete and were recorded with permission.

In these calls we tried to capture the clients' experience of using the screening tool and their thoughts about the levels they were assigned in the two employment assessment interviews (at the beginning and at end of the intervention programme). We also discussed whether they were satisfied with the agreed interventions over the course of the research phase. There was also an opportunity for clients to share their thoughts on the impact of the project in achieving their goals, and to share some of their ambitions, concerns or plans for the future.

2.1.7 Employment assessment toolkit

The ECs were asked to carry out two client interviews using the revised employment assessment toolkit – once at the initial interview stage and again at the end of the project cycle. (See Douglas et al, 2012 for full details about this employment toolkit).

2.1.8 Employment coordinator work logs

These electronic logs contained data about all EC interaction with their clients and other parties over the time period. ECs entered information about face-to-face meetings with the client as well as email and phone exchanges and contacts linked to the client (for example Employment Advisers, local societies, etc.) The logs also contained personal details about the client and their agreed action plans.

2.2 Clients and recruitment

Recruitment was carried out in two steps. Firstly, we identified ECs from different Action regions as well as one from Scotland who had the time and capacity to work on the project over six months. The majority of ECs we approached had been involved in previous phases of the research and so had a firm understanding about the project's aim and objectives. Managers at all levels had to agree to release ECs to work with the project team. ECs were allocated approximately one day a week for each client they chose to work with. A budget was allocated for the advisers' time and to pay for resources and external services.

Secondly, the ECs were asked to identify at least one client, with a maximum of three clients, depending on the number of days they were free to work on the project. These clients would be individuals identified as furthest from the labour market (see below). The original bid stated that the project team would work with ten clients but in fact we recruited 13 clients at the start of this phase.

2.2.1 Inclusion criteria

We targeted clients judged to be furthest from the labour market. These individuals also needed to be of working age and willing to work alongside RNIB and Action teams.

2.2.2 Employment coordinators

We recruited a total of seven ECs; six ECs were from Action teams in England and one was from RNIB Scotland.

2.2.3 Clients

The ECs were asked to select clients who would most probably be assigned to Levels 3 and 4 on the segmentation model. Most ECs already knew which clients they would select, in some cases because they were already working with them on another contract (for example Work Choice). Recruitment was based on the advisers' professional judgement and knowledge of their clients. Two clients were recruited from the previous phase: Wanda (Level 4) and Kelly (Level 4). The ECs recruited a total number of 13 clients (eight male and five female) in April 2012.

2.2.4 Clients dropping out

One EC had two clients drop out within a month of the start of this phase. As they left early in the research we asked the EC to recruit two more clients. Two more clients came on board, approximately halfway through this phase of work (June 2012). We also recruited an additional client in the South-West, when it looked as if another client would be dropping out. However, this client did not subsequently drop-out, and therefore by the end of this phase of work we were able to report on 14 client stories (eight male and six female).

2.2.5 Details about the final 14 clients

- Regions where they live
  - N=13 urban
  - N=1 rural
- Age range: 27 years – 56 years
- Ethnicity: 13 “White-British” and 1 “White-Other”
- Home circumstances
  a) 5 are alone
  b) 2 are with a spouse (or partner)
  c) 4 are with parents
  d) 3 are with child(ren)
  e) 3 sheltered housing
- Registration status
  - N=10 (6 male and 4 female) registered as blind
  - N=3 (2 male and 1 female) registered as partially sighted
  - N=1 not registered
- Additional impairment/disabilities
  - 3 (scoliosis and asthma, diabetes and epilepsy, and a rare disease which impacts on hearing, severe joint pain and obesity), 3 with suspected learning disabilities.

2.2.6 List of Advisers, number of clients and allocated days

The ECs were asked to spend approximately one day a week for each client they were supporting on the project. This resulted in seven ECs working with 14 clients.

1. RNIB Scotland EC: 3 clients (3 days a week).
2. East of England EC (1): 2 clients (2 days a week).
3. East of England EC (2): 2 clients (2 days a week).
4. South West EC (1): 1 client (1 day).
5. South West EC (2): 1 client (1 day).
6. South West EC (3): 2 clients (2 days).
7. London and South East EC: 3 clients (3 days).

2.3 Procedure and timescale

Phases 4, 5 and 6 of the project were scheduled to take place between December 2011 and February 2013. These phases covered the following tasks:

- Phase 4 – the design of new interventions.
- Phase 5 – assessing and tracking clients for six months.
- Phase 6 – analysis of client's progress and report writing.

There was some delay in the start of phase 4, whilst agreements with management teams were put in place and ECs and clients were recruited. This reduced the amount of time available to consider the types of interventions for clients involved in the project. Therefore we agreed with BIG to increase phase 5 – testing new interventions – to eight months. Nevertheless, the work was completed within the time scales set by the funders.

2.4 Ethics

In line with the University of Birmingham research ethical procedures all advisers were briefed about the project, and what was expected, before being asked to consent to this phase of the project. In turn, they were asked to go through the information sheet and the different consent options with each client before asking them to sign their consent. Only when consent had been given could the advisers carry out an interview using the employment assessment toolkit. The Research Committee issued supplementary acceptance letters which were sent to RNIB and BIG.

All EC and clients' views have been treated confidentially (for example the case studies use fictional names).

2.5 Analysis and reporting

A range of data was collected, in a wide variety of formats (for example audio recordings, meeting and EC notes, spreadsheets, emails). Processing this data was a significant task and involved a sustained period of data transcription, collation and reduction by the report authors. The analysis can be summarised as the following stages:

1. Transcription and collation of all the data (see data collection methods above).
2. Construction of 14 summary client case studies (focussing upon beginning and end point).
3. Collation of data linked to each of the 14 clients (including all details of interventions and client and EC reflections).
4. Collation of additional process data (EC workshops, bi-monthly meetings).
5. Adding files to NVivo database. NVivo is qualitative analysis software tool which supports researchers to organise and code qualitative data. This process enables researchers draw out themes from the data.
6. Stage one of the coding involved “open coding” of the data using NVivo.
7. The initial themes derived from this open coding, as well as the 14 client case studies, were shared with the project steering group and the participating ECs.
8. Accounting for feedback obtained from the steering group, Stage two of the analysis developed the themes further and presented and evidenced these themes in this report (gathered within the three research questions outlined in the introduction).
9. Drawing upon this analysis key discussion points were drawn out.

The following section offers a broad outline of summary of key data in relation to the 14 clients, and their start and end point in the project. Individual case studies are discussed and full details can be found in the appendix. This is followed by the key themes, presented underneath the three research questions. Themes are summarised and illustrated with data.

3. Case studies

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this phase of work was to develop innovative support options for people furthest from the labour market. Based on the segmentation model, which was developed as part of the assessment toolkit, these are clients who would be at Level 3 or Level 4. At the beginning of this phase of work, the clients were all assessed using the employment assessment tool. Eleven of the 14 clients who took part in this phase registered at Level 3 or Level 4. Although three clients were assessed as at a higher level by the assessment toolkit, their EC felt that this level did not accurately reflect their barriers to employment. In these three cases, the ECs felt that a Level 3 result for each person would have been a more accurate outcome. EC judgement remains an important component of the assessment process; especially since these initial assessments were carried out when the toolkit was still under development. These individuals were also included in this phase for that reason. The following summarises the different levels at the beginning of this phase of work: 2/14 scored at Level 4; 9/14 scored at Level 3; 2/14 scored at Level 2b; and 1/14 scored at Level 2a.

3.2 Summary of progress

After eight months, 12 of the 14 clients achieved positive changes in their personal circumstances, and some of these changes were dramatic. In many cases these changes were registered by the employment assessment toolkit at the follow-up interview, although in a few cases the toolkit failed to register these improvements. A summary table of client levels according to the assessment toolkit follows, but the main headlines are as follows:

- Three ENABLER clients are now in paid employment. This included two individuals who attended the new pre-employment programme trialled as part of the project. The third person secured paid work after 21 years out of work as a result of volunteering as part of the project.
- Three clients have secured full-time education courses; in Sports Injury and IT, a degree in Criminology and a Certificate in Human Resource management.
- Seven clients benefitted from voluntary work as the first important step on their journey into paid employment. One of these individuals, in her 40’s, had never worked before.

- Most individuals developed skills in a range of areas: for example, travelling independently through mobility training; computer skills through IT training; and accessing information through literacy and numeracy courses.
- One person obtained ten hours support work from the local authority, which has helped him move from a situation of complete isolation to starting voluntary work.
- Confidence levels and motivation increased for most clients over the eight months.

It is important to explain in some detail how 12 people made progress with their goals. As explained, clients were assessed at the end of the phase of work (one client was unable to take part due to ill health). Six of the 13 people (6/13) who had a follow-up assessment were closer to work (that is improved their level). Two of these people are now in paid work.

As well as the six people who moved closer to work (registered by the assessment toolkit) two people who remained within the same level had in fact shown progress in specific areas of the assessment tool (2/13), for example computer skills or independent travel. Equally significant, one of these individuals secured voluntary work, which after six months was converted to paid, part-time employment. This individual had been out of the labour market for 21 years.

Three people remained at the same level and showed no improvements in individual categories (3/13). However, two of these individuals made significant changes in their lives. One person secured voluntary work as the first important step on the path towards employment, having never worked before. The other person started a three year full-time higher education course.

Two people moved further from work according to the follow-up assessment (2/13). In both cases these individuals had just been made redundant at the time of the first assessment. As neither person had found work by the second assessment, this extra period out of work resulted in a change in their overall level, from Level 3 to Level 4. Nevertheless, one of these individuals secured voluntary work, and so took an important step on the path back into employment.

The above describes how 11 of the 13 people who had follow-up assessments made progress towards employment, demonstrated either by the toolkit or through other activities such as starting voluntary work or full-time education. The twelfth person to demonstrate tangible progress is the individual who did not have a follow-up assessment due to illness. This individual had started

a full-time vocational qualification in human resources management, but unfortunately had to put the course on hold due to illness.

A summary of these figures is presented in the table below, and detailed descriptions and explanations of the individual client's work are presented in the case studies in the appendix.

Table: Summary of the client assessment levels at the beginning and the end of the ENABLER phase of work, plus summary of their progress.

Client	Beginning Level (F)*	End Level (F)*	Change in Level**	Change in number of areas Further**
Mandy	3 (6)	3 (5)	Remained within the same level	Closer
Linda	4 (7)	3 (6)	Closer	Closer
Joe	4 (8)	4 (8)	Remained within the same level	Remained at the same number
Wanda	2b (3)	In work	Closer	Closer
Steve	2a (1)	In work	Closer	Closer
Roy	3 (6)	4 (7)	Further	Further
Kelly	3 (6)	4 (7)	Further	Further
Dan	3 (6)	2b (4)	Closer	Closer
Jerry	3 (6)	–	–	–
Thelma	3 (5)	2a (2)	Closer	Closer
Stephanie	3 (6)	3 (6)	Remained within the same level	Remained at the same number
Aaron	3 (5)	3 (5)	Remained within the same level	Remained at the same number
George	3 (5)	2a (2)	Closer	Closer
Shaun	2b (4)	2b (3)	Remained within the same level	Closer

* Level refers to the assessment tool score linked to the segmentation model (five categories: 1, 2a, 2b, 3, 4); F refers to the number of areas the client was judged to be further away from the labour market (maximum 8).

** Simple calculation based upon improvement over the phase of work in (a) level, and (b) the number of areas the client was judged to be further away from the labour market.

3.3 Client case studies

We have written brief case studies for each of the 14 clients. Although individually short, all the case studies together make up approximately forty pages. For this reason, we have placed them in an **appendix**. Each case study has the following structure:

- Background information.
- First assessment tool interview.
- Interpreting the first assessment – EC judgement.
- Key ENABLER project interventions.
- Second assessment tool interview.
- Interpreting the second assessment – EC judgement.

4. Themes

The case studies (summarised above and presented in the appendix) give a clear and accessible insight into each of the client's circumstances and the progress they made during the project. In this section we present an analysis in which we identify themes that emerge from the project as a whole. The themes are arranged under the three research questions presented at the beginning of the report:

- How does the employment assessment toolkit support ECs and clients to design and implement appropriate interventions?
- What interventions were shown to support clients to get closer or into the open labour market?
- What does this work tell us about the enablers (and barriers) to moving these clients closer or into the open labour market?

4.1 How does the employment assessment toolkit support ECs and clients to design and implement appropriate interventions?

4.1.1 Alignment of interventions and assessment toolkit

The study has provided considerable evidence that ECs have been able to successfully use the structure of the assessment tool to help design effective interventions. The focus of the first EC workshop was the construction of action plans which linked interventions to areas of client-need identified through the assessment. All the ECs did this and spoke at various points during the project about how this proved useful (see the case studies in the appendix). As an example, the action plan designed by the EC for Susan illustrates this alignment: each assessed area for which the client was judged to be further from the labour market had an associated objective and action. In the case of Susan's action plan this included the pre-employment programme, employment placements, voluntary work, and mobility training and practice.

The importance of this alignment between assessment and subsequent intervention, and the advantages it brings, proved to be central to the project outcomes and underpins many of the themes that follow. Indeed, the redrafted employment assessment toolkit emphasised the importance of this alignment more explicitly (see Discussion and conclusions).

Many of the key challenges which the EC and client faced were in relation to maintaining this alignment between assessed need and intervention. There were a variety of reasons for this, including the availability and sourcing of appropriate services, as well as changes in clients' lives which meant that other things took priority (for example health). Nevertheless, there was evidence that there was sometimes a misalignment between assessed need and intervention. This is most clearly illustrated in the examples of Kelly and Joe in relation to attempts to find them college places. These examples will be unpacked in detail in later sections, but fundamental to the difficulties faced by the ECs was that client-need did not align with what the college could offer.

A related challenge to alignment was when difficulties faced by the client were not identified by the assessment process. Again, this is discussed further below (see "Other identified needs not linked to employment assessment toolkit").

4.1.2 Shared language

The use of the toolkit meant a consistency of language was used in the project. There was evidence that this supported communication and understanding between professionals (ECs, as well as their managers) and facilitated mutual support. For example:

> "As regards the Action Plan and Screening Tool, [the client] has met one of the objectives on her Action Plan and I feel that she is on her way to moving towards a Level 3." [EC, progress report]

> "And it also does highlight [..] that this approach to supporting people with sight loss [..] takes them so much further forward towards the job market than any of the work readiness contracts. That we get people referred in that are Level 4 that are never going to get there with that kind of structured approach." [Action EC manager, bi-monthly meeting]

The consistency of language as demonstrated by managers and ECs (in Action and RNIB) may have other institutional advantages, eg external communication with partners, shared philosophy of organisational approach, and internal management and data collection. For example, one of the ECs described how much of the current data collection focussed upon narrow employment outcomes rather than broader process and incremental outcomes:

"[The data collection is currently narrow], so there is no data, there is no map of the types of people that we are engaging with, what they do and what they don't do and where the pockets are, lack of services are or difficulties. [..] And that for me is one of the benefits that something like ENABLER could have."
[EC, interview]

The shared language between EC and client also appeared to be facilitated by the toolkit – many clients (although not all) appeared to recognise the links between the assessment, the interventions and outcomes. For example:

> "I went up to 2a! It's great." [Thelma, client interview]

In the second report (Douglas et al, 2012) we present some of the clients' views in the eight case studies.

Paradoxically, Jerry was able to reflect on the ENABLER levels and adapt it to his own purposes by creating his own scaffold. He used 5 levels to describe his progress to employment:

> "It has put me up a level, I have several levels to go yet, but it has put me up a level and given me the sort of inspiration that there is sort of work out there, there is help out there. I think there is probably 4 or 5 levels. If being a scaffold system I'm probably on the first level whereas before I wasn't near any other scaffold."

> "I'm on the first level, foot in the door. The next level is getting through the CPD course. The level after that would be finding employment, be it voluntary or whatever and the next level will be getting employment, and the fifth level would be keeping the employment and being there for more than a year. Even part-time employment. I know there is an access to work programme and I would get used to that." [Jerry, client interview]

4.1.3 Measurable success and motivation

The breaking down of the interventions into smaller standalone targets linked to specific skill areas (mobility, technology) was commonly used to demonstrate measurable progress to the client and the EC. Given the profile of the clients involved in this phase of the project, many of them were faced with a range of diverse areas to develop. This can appear overwhelming, but the breaking down of targets proved helpful and motivating (for client and EC alike), for example:

"I've said to George and all the rest that it is like a jigsaw, you've got all the different little bits and it's about finding them all and putting them all together to make the picture. […] So for example, if we're talking about George, you've got IT skills, mobility, confidence, so it was identifying those where we can get that help." [EC, interview]

> "We also reviewed my ENABLER plan and assessment. It was amazing to see the difference from then until now." [George, diary]

> "This time last year I wouldn't have gone out on my own, I wouldn't have applied for any jobs. [..] I'm in a far better place now than I was 12 months ago." [George, interview]

ECs employed a number of strategies to manage this complex process. The first example highlights the importance of involving the client in decision making and the second suggests that focussing upon a priority can be helpful:

> "Clients always say to me that one of the biggest things [..] when they lose their sight is [the loss of] control of their own lives. I feel part of that is giving them back the control so that is having the discussions, offering a range of solutions and letting them, where possible, make the decisions." [EC, interview]

> "I think one way to do it is to literally pick off these three or four issues and really just focus in on the one issue and try and get some kind of goal at the end of it. So we just think about mobility." [EC, bi-monthly meeting]

Other tactics involved identifying a formal programme of interventions which addressed a number of areas. The pre-employment programme was one such approach that proved successful; it was not simply the formal aspects of the programme which proved useful but also the discipline and skills required to attend, such as time-keeping and independent travel:

"She has also now attended the pre-employment course. She was able to get the bus back on her own for one session but still would like to do the route with me, getting there to feel confident where she needs to get off the bus. We have arranged to do this. She is contributing well at the course and seems to get on well with the other participants." [EC, diary]

Voluntary placements and other activities also offered this multiple-benefits approach. For example, Dan's volunteering involved related travel, computer use and communication, and similarly Jerry worked on his mobility in an unfamiliar area while attending college:

> "I think we are managing to achieve quite a lot in terms of having a focus on volunteering, but also introducing and exploring other issues eg mobility, independent living, typing and JAWS etc. I am really pleased that Dan has wanted to teach [a social work student] braille and believe that this will help boost confidence and communication skills." [EC, diary]

> "I got a taxi there to know where I was going and got a bus back. [He feels confident travelling to the college and getting back]." [Jerry, client interview]

Identifying a formal programme of interventions which address a number of areas can seem very attractive, but they may not always be appropriate. Residential college programmes were identified for two clients that were felt to address many of the issues identified by the assessment, but they did not prove an option when the college rejected their applications. These are discussed further below.

Another tactic was drawn upon for Joe. Mobility was very problematic for Joe and his EC tried to encourage him to develop these skills by travelling independently to meetings. Nevertheless, travel was extremely difficult for the client and alternative transport arrangements organised by the EC proved to remove a significant stress from Joe and increase his attendance. This workaround seemed helpful for navigating a particular problem, but it can be problematic if it is not sustainable or if the particular barrier is not eventually resolved. In the case of Joe this fundamental barrier (which was health related) was eventually overwhelming and prevented any engagement in other aspects of the project.

4.1.4 Reconfiguring overall targets

Linked to the above, there was evidence of significant reflection upon, and adjustment of, how ECs measured success. In part this was linked to a more incremental view of progress in which success could be measured and celebrated by small steps forward (as opposed to the only measure of success being the achievement of a paid job).

Nevertheless, there was also evidence that overall targets were adjusted too – so that relevant and appropriate achievements could be seen as legitimate endpoints (eg suitable voluntary work, and safe home environment with appropriate support). This appeared liberating for ECs, although given their traditional work role it raised some anxiety amongst ECs also (see one of the quotes below). This configuration of client-targets and EC job roles was discussed at some length at the final EC workshop, in the bi-monthly meetings and EC diaries, eg:

> “I feel very positive about the general progress. What I am less confident about, sometimes anxious, is how all this translates into a job for him. I guess, though, that this is the beauty about being part of a team. I feel strongest in the area of skills development, but less strong in the area of knowing the labour market.” [EC, diary]

Importantly, clients recognised their success and felt they could legitimately speak positively about achievement. The two examples below describe how Shaun (who had registered as a fulltime student during the project) was arranging additional voluntary work at Citizen's Advice Bureau, and Thelma who had secured regular voluntary work:

> "I am in the process of applying for a role within the Citizens Advice Bureau. Hopefully I will be given the opportunity to give something back to the community." [Shaun, email diary]

> "It's really good [the job] you know. I'm doing Monday Wednesday and Thursday now, three days. I love it but just wish they'd pay me [laughs]. But I love it. It took a long time to get. Sometimes I have to open up…I love it." [Thelma, client interview]

Managers recognised this reconfiguration too, and acknowledged its importance with reference to previous ways of working:

> "You've gone in there as an employment coordinator but you've had to sort out a whole raft of independent living and other services before you could even get anywhere near the employment work. So to some extent in a remote area where you are not connected to an Action team, you've had to go in there and be an independent living coordinator, an employment coordinator, to some extent a bit of an assistive technology [coordinator] and build all those partnerships with the local organisations. [..] From my point of view as I see it, it takes me back to when our coordinators were all that multi-skilled, but actually it's a really great example of how you've looked at exactly what the person needed at what stage and taken it step by step towards their goals. Good work." [EC manager, bi-monthly meeting]

Perhaps implicit in the previous quote are some of the strategic challenges that this may raise for an organisation. ECs also reflected upon this strategic challenge:

> "There almost needs to be a separate programme whereby individuals go back to basics and have a course that incorporates very basic IT skills, living skills, social skills and counselling. This is even before they can contemplate thinking about volunteer work that could possibly lead on to employment." [EC, diary]

Roy's case study provides an example of the importance of reconfiguring services, and not being trapped by the traditional services offered (or by an employment-focussed assessment). About a year before Roy's involvement

in the project he had been made redundant after 30 years in sheltered employment. This coincided with the death of his partner, who had taken a central role in managing their home, shopping, providing transport, and all aspects of domestic life. At the beginning of the project Roy was vulnerable and had very little support around him. Getting his life sorted out in relation to safety at home, bills and finances, and benefits was crucial:

> "[The EC] said, it is bad, you should be getting help and you have lost your partner and you haven't got anyone and your family are too far away. [The EC] had a word with Social Services and he tried to push it a bit. [..] The [ENABLER] successes were really getting this personal assistant [10 hours per week was secured] and getting this [volunteering] post off the ground." [Roy, interview]

This change in Roy's life was described as "transformational [and] really, really impressive" [EC manager].

Arguably, the reconfiguration of targets so as not to focus exclusively upon securing employment can have associated dangers (for example setting safe and comfortable targets). Roy's example should not be considered in this way as he was undoubtedly in a much more secure situation by the end of the project. Nevertheless, the next stages of intervention are important (most immediately the implementation of the planned voluntary work, but then planning what should happen next, if anything – Roy's case is returned to later in the report).

Kelly might provide a contrasting example. Like Roy she had recently been made redundant after many years working in sheltered employment, although she was living with her parents who supported her a great deal. Part of the challenge for Kelly was that she had placed a lot of hope upon going to a residential college but her application was unsuccessful. As a result, less progress was made in relation to other aspects of her assessment.

4.1.5 Other identified needs not linked to employment assessment toolkit

The previous themes highlight that the re-configuration of overall targets in relation to clients furthest from the labour market was viewed by ECs, managers and clients in a broadly positive way. Nevertheless, the assessment toolkit developed in the project provides an assessment of clients in relation to employment. While many aspects of the toolkit have broader relevance to client independence and welfare generally, it was not designed to assess the broader circumstances of clients' lives.

Example areas ECs identified as being relevant to clients in this phase of work included: client depression (and associated need for therapy or counselling); the development of communication skills; and the development of foundation skills (for example self-care skills, independent living skills).

This tension between breadth of EC role and focus of the assessment tool had two observed consequences:

Firstly, potential progress made by clients in relation to broader targets cannot be demonstrated through improvements in the assessment tool score. Earlier analysis of the clients' progress in relation to the employment assessment (see section Case studies, Summary of progress) illustrated this clearly – some clients had made clear progress, but not in relation to their level within the employment segmentation model.

Secondly, strict application of the employment assessment toolkit may deflect from other valuable interventions or concerns relevant to the client. There was some evidence of this within the project. With hindsight, two clients would have benefitted from interventions which were not, or could not be, explored: Joe in relation to his weight and mental health, and Kelly in relation to independent living skills and supported housing.

We believe that this concern requires no action in relation to the format of the toolkit (given that it is employment-focussed). Nevertheless, it does have an impact upon how the toolkit should be used when working with some clients (and perhaps particularly those further from the labour market). The format of the project placed ECs under a dual pressure of using the toolkit on the one hand, while encouraging client-focussed interventions on the other (and these sometimes did not align). Any rollout of these approaches across Action or RNIB services will require clarity of management and organisational structure if the above negative consequences are to be avoided. This would include clear definitions of the EC role, and referral routes to providers of services which fall beyond these defined roles.

4.2 What interventions were shown to support clients to get closer or into the open labour market?

4.2.1 Client progress – weighing up the evidence

A challenge for the project is that one of our key measures of client progress towards the open labour market is provided by the employment assessment toolkit. The research team must be cautious not to solely and uncritically draw upon the data collected from this source – rather this evidence is strengthened if it is triangulated with other sources of evidence. The following simple hierarchy of available evidence provides additional clarity and objectivity to this analysis:

Table. Evidence of clients getting closer to the labour market

Row	Change observed	Nature of evidence	Clients who have achieved this level of evidence
A	Client is now employed	Objective	3 – Steve, Wanda, Mandy.
B	Client is now engaged in meaningful employment-focussed activity (unsupported voluntary placements, job applications and interviews) – all these activities are known to be associated with gaining employment	Objective	3 – Thelma, Aaron, George [Steve, Wanda and Mandy also provide this level of evidence, but went on to get jobs]
C	Client is now engaged in an educational programme which leads to a qualification	Objective	3 – Jerry, Shaun and Linda

D	Client / EC judge skills have improved following engagement in **informal** skills-based training (for example, the pre-employment programme)	Subjective	1 – Susan [five others benefitted from this, but other evidence was also available]
E	Client / EC judge skills have improved following engagement in **informal** skills-based training, and supported work activities	Subjective	1 – Dan [others benefitted from this, but other evidence was also available]
F	Client / EC judge life has improved following intervention in relation to foundation areas: security, safety and general welfare	Subjective	1 – Roy
G	Client has shown little or no progress in relation to any of the above evidence	Subjective	2 – Joe, Kelly

In keeping with earlier sections (Case studies, Summary of progress), the Table confirms the assertion that 12 of the 14 clients involved in the project made progress. The Table also highlights the complexity of the evidence gathered in relation to moving closer to the labour market. Research literature explored in earlier project reports provides evidence that development of skills (rows D and E in the Table), gaining qualifications (row C), and engaging in employment-based activities (row B) are all associated with improved employment prospects. It also follows that securing basic welfare and safety in people's lives (row F) is an important prerequisite to seeking employment.

Of course, none of these things guarantee employment, but they are important indicators of proximity to the labour market, and arguably prerequisites for securing paid jobs. Importantly, many of these activities and achievements are important outcomes in themselves. Therefore, while clients may not get jobs, there is enormous value in increasing their security and wellbeing, increasing their skills and independence, and increasing their contribution and participation through unpaid work.

Given this argument and philosophy, the following analysis presents evidence of project interventions which led to client progress towards the labour market. The case studies presented in the appendix provide evidence of the progress made by individual clients, and therefore of the project's impact. In the following sections we draw out more general lessons about interventions.

4.2.2 Independent travel

Eleven of the 14 clients identified themselves as having difficulty with independent travel. Of these eleven clients, not all prioritised interventions in this area. Nevertheless, four clients described themselves as making progress in relation to independent travel. Two of these had received significant training from trained specialist mobility staff (Dan and George).

Dan provides an example of a client who found it difficult to travel independently. Dan's EC carried out sustained mobility training over the period of six months. This included using mobility instructors (for indoor and outdoor route training) as well as practise with the EC himself. The mobility practice was also incorporated into other activities such as attending meetings, courses and work placements:

> "Mobility training is now completed. Dan has more confidence in getting here and can get here independently which is great. These are transferrable skills, which he will be able to take into other situations." [EC, diary]

> "We did the mobility work and I'm doing it independently. I'm going to the computer course on my own. I can get the train and the bus to the steps of the building. [...] I can get from here (home) to there (Action) independently. [...] There's been some progress especially in mobility." [Dan, interview]

George also offers a very positive case study. Again his EC arranged mobility lessons and encouraged George to travel to meet other clients and attend a variety of training, meetings and interviews.

> "George is progressing well; he has started mobility training. [He] travelled to our meeting independently by bus last week. This is a huge step forward as he hasn't travelled independently for a considerable time – boosting his confidence." [EC, diary]

> "I was terrified about travelling all that distance without the support of the wife being there. I have to say when we got to the centre I was relieved that we had got there in one piece." [George, diary after an early mobility lesson]

> "[My first achievement is] I'm able to get out and about more now. I was able to travel all the way to [the city] centre for computer training. I would never have been able to do that before and the other is travelling to [the] conference. I would never have done that before. I would have done it in the old days but not this time last year." [George, interview]

Of the other clients who made progress, Susan had received some assistance from her EC and had developed some skills travelling to and from work placements. While Thelma did not prioritise mobility as a target, she was extremely motivated to take part in voluntary work, which involved travelling.

Of the other clients who were identified as needing to develop their independent travel, the majority did not prioritise it as a target. Given the positive impact of specialist mobility training as expressed by Dan and George (the only two clients to receive specialist training of this kind) this seems a pity and something that might be championed more by ECs. Mobility training can be labour intensive for people with sight loss and is most effective if linked to journeys which are meaningful to clients (for example necessary journeys which will be made repeatedly in the future). This can be a challenge for clients who are seeking work because some routes may only be of transient relevance as they are often journeys to temporary placements and short-term courses; therefore, focussed interventions regarding mobility need careful planning.

An additional factor may be that some clients do not feel comfortable being seen as “blind”, and therefore may not prioritise mobility. Wanda is an interesting case in this regard as she refused to use any kind of mobility aid or have mobility training in spite of her EC describing how she regularly bumped into things, fell over and injured herself. Anxiety was also raised about travelling by Aaron, although for different reasons:

> “I’m feeling vulnerable. Since I was mugged a few years ago, I’m afraid of walking out in the dark.” [Aaron, diary]

A different challenge was faced by Kelly and her EC who targeted mobility training but were not able to find a service in the area.

4.2.3 Computer skills

Twelve of the 14 clients identified themselves as having difficulty with accessing computers. Of these 12 clients, not all prioritised interventions in this area. Nevertheless, seven clients described themselves as making progress in relation to using computers: five of these attended specialist courses, and four gained experience though voluntary work and work placements. Dan provides an example of how IT training was incorporated in his work placement duties, while Kelly and Shaun reflect upon IT courses they were involved in (and Shaun practised these skills by keeping in email contact with the project team):

> “I was able to draft in other participants and Dan has really developed his confidence around [administering questionnaires], and his fluency in using JAWS and typing up the results.” [EC, dairy]

> "I had a really good lesson. I learnt how to send emails. I sent Karl an email and a pop quiz where all the answers had Kelly in the title. It was really good." [Kelly, diary]

> "I attended sensory impaired centre yesterday, learning to touch type over four of the next five weeks. Hopefully a skill I will be able to use when I start university in September." [Shaun, email]

As with mobility training, some ECs were not able to find appropriate IT training in the area (for example Mandy). This was particularly difficult for one EC who struggled to get IT training for her clients; her only option proving to be the local society for the blind. Unfortunately, the society was only able to offer assessment and advice when its computer training room was finally open.

Far less commonly described by ECs and clients was the use of low- and high-tech visual aids. Only three clients appeared to have developed skills and received this type of equipment during the project. Given the potential of this equipment in supporting access to information in an elegant and efficient way, this could be a technology (and approach) ECs promote more.

4.2.4 Pre-employment programme

The pre-employment programme (PEP) was recently developed by the RNIB. Six of the ENABLER clients took part in a version of the programme, and three of the ECs were also trained and acted as PEP tutors within this phase of the project. The programme was designed to provide blind or partially sighted people who are not in work with a structured learning environment where they can:

- Determine what knowledge, skills, and work behaviours (soft skills) they have to offer prospective employers.
- Develop the problem solving and communication skills that enable them to successfully compete for jobs and develop healthy relationships in the workplace.
- Refine and practice their job seeking skills, including how to generate on-line and paper applications, produce a CV, and interview successfully.
- Benefit from having a group of people's perspectives voiced through discussion and feedback, which helps participants learn from others' experiences and share their stories in a supportive environment.
- Experience a venue where people who may not have met or worked with other blind or partially sighted individuals have the opportunity to do so, which is of critical importance to people who lose their sight later in life and may believe that without sight they cannot do the things they once did.

As described, the pre-employment programme covers a range of generic employment topics (for example CV development, interview skills), but ensures this is sensitive to disability specific issues. Importantly, it also addresses some key disability specific issues directly, for example disclosure issue linked to clients' vision.

The full programme was adapted by the three ECs who delivered PEP to meet the needs of their clients and suit the location and time constraints on the EC. Two courses ran once a week for between eight and 12 weeks, with each session lasting between three to four hours. The third course had a closer resemblance to the model presented in the training manual, running consecutively over six days, with each session lasting approximately six hours.

Between four and six clients completed the course in each site, although each course witnessed people who dropped out. Client ages at each location spanned more than 30 years, and past employment experience was equally varied. For example, one site included two people who had part-time work alongside two people who had never worked before. However, each site had at least one course attendee who was also part of the ENABLER project (that is one of the clients focussed upon in this report), testing new support options for people furthest from the labour market.

A full report analysing the effectiveness of the programme as part of the ENABLER project was written by one of the ECs who delivered the programme (Vivian, 2012). Each location reported positive results and encouraging feedback from clients, whilst the report contains recommendations that will enhance the effectiveness of the programme in the future. Some clients have been inspired to build upon their skills and have become actively involved in volunteering, whilst three clients have secured new jobs (two ENABLER clients and another non-ENABLER client) who attended the course in the South-West Region.

Drawing upon participant client evaluation forms (Vivian 2012 contains all of these forms) as well as primary data from clients and ECs the following key points are drawn out.

The pre-employment programme was viewed positively by clients in terms of meeting expectations and the skills and knowledge of the facilitators, for example:

> "The course passed my expectations. The programmes, modules and content were excellent, and the presenters knew their stuff."
> [PEP report, client feedback]

> "I would like to complement [facilitator] on her professional manner and how she presented the whole course. She made the course fun and enjoyable, while maintaining a serious nature to the course." [PEP report, client feedback]

> "The presenter was full of information on how to approach eyesight loss to employers. The content, activities and program was very informative useful and whilst was serious it was also fun and relaxing, which helped put individuals at ease and more willing to discuss their conditions." [PEP report, client feedback]

An important aspect of programme was to bring people with sight loss together. This was viewed positively:

> "Thought the course was very good, people with a sight difficulty can show applicants that they can be just as good as a well able person." [PEP report, client feedback]

Meeting other people with sight loss was highlighted as important and helpful by other clients in the project. Some of this was facilitated through PEP, some through work placements in sight loss organisations, some through other specialist training courses (for example linked to IT), and some social events. Examples include:

> "This week I spent Mon, Tues and Wed with EC on [PEP] where I met five other people with the same condition as myself [...] It made a difference being able to meet people like me with their varying sight loss and talking and hearing how they have coped. Looking forward to going back next week." [George, diary]

> "We meet up as guide dog owners in Truro quite regularly. [..] People from all walks of life come along. Sometimes there are half a dozen of us, sometimes there are twenty of us. It's important, we learn about each other, employment. It's inspirational." [Jerry, interview]

> In terms of learning about skills specific to sight loss, issues related to explaining and disclosing information about sight loss was commonly raised:

> "There were some parts about disclosing your disability I found interesting as I have not disclosed it in the past." [PEP report, client feedback]

> "There were two important parts for me. 1: How to approach and explain to employers about my eyesight loss. 2: I was able to meet other people with eyesight conditions and being able to discuss how they handle and manage their conditions." [PEP report, client feedback]

At the beginning of this phase of work, 10 of the 14 ENABLER clients identified themselves as lacking confidence in relation to explaining their vision to potential employers. Of these 10 clients, six described themselves as making progress in relation to this during the project: three of these had attended the PEP (and this does not include two clients who attended PEP and gained employment and therefore were not re-assessed using the employment assessment toolkit).

In keeping with the previous point, gaining knowledge of specialist equipment and access technology was also highlighted as an important impact of PEP. It is encouraging that this also includes the promotion of hand-held magnifiers as well computer equipment:

> "It gave me experience and gave me information about things I didn't know about. I had not been on a course before and I would like to go again if there is the opportunity [...] I heard a lot about computers, magnifiers and other equipment which would help me in work. This was very useful, helping me to understand what I can still do. I felt it was a big step to do this course." [PEP report, client feedback]"

Unsurprisingly, PEP featured in client action plans (when it was available and relevant). The pre-employment programme provided a tangible intervention, which ECs could draw upon following initial assessment, particularly if the assessment identified job search skills and disclosure as needing development. The recruitment of some clients to the programme was not without difficulty however: some were frustrated and suspicious of attending yet another course (for example Steve) and others found the travel difficult (for example Wanda). Nevertheless, the programme allowed these issues to surface and be addressed. Wanda provides a particularly good example in relation to inappropriate behaviour:

> "I raised a couple of issues with Wanda that I have noticed during the PEP meetings. These issues could be very harmful in a work situation and could jeopardise Wanda ability to keep a job. These issues include: talking about very personal issues; taking personal phone calls in middle of the sessions [...]." [EC, diary]

The EC raised these issues with Wanda, and after an initial impasse, the EC and client were able to continue to work together successfully (Wanda eventually securing paid work).

4.2.5 Job search skills

The pre-employment programme, described above was one of the key interventions used in the project to develop clients' job search skills. The merits of this have already been discussed, and clearly PEP provides a structured and effective way of delivering these types of intervention. Nevertheless, clients and ECs engaged in this type of work outside of PEP (indeed, some clients were not involved in PEP at all). For example, Dan was enrolled in a job club provided by Action, which offered some similar content and structure:

> "Today I attended the job club at Action for Blind. [..] [EC and colleague] gave us a talk on the various ways we can job search. Suggestions included, [networking, internet, looking for jobs online, cold calling]." [Dan, diary]

Some of the work involved developing CVs, filling in application forms (for voluntary and paid employment), practicing interviews, and attending interviews (and reflecting upon the pros and cons afterwards – interviews were identified as being a source of great stress for some clients). As examples:

> "In addition preparation of a CV for all clients has worked well, helping the clients to identify and illustrate their skills and experiences and giving a further opportunity to discuss their experiences and doubts about employment." [EC, diary]

> "I've now had a reasonably blunt discussion with George that he needs to be aware of what information he brings to interview, and how to be aware of when he might be providing too much information. We continue to work on his communication and interview skills." [EC, diary]

Some job search skills were linked explicitly to sourcing and applying for voluntary placements. As examples, Linda explored arranging summer placements linked to the course she was about to start and Shaun applied for voluntary work:

> "[..] she has as usual done an amazing job of making contacts and finding potential placements. The one problem she had with some organisations was that they did not know what their capacity for staff or potential work placements was going to be next summer so they asked her to call back nearer the time. She has though secured one potential placement through a friend and continues to investigate other opportunities. She has now got to email the details of these contacts to the college by next Friday." [EC, diary]

> "Shaun has completed and submitted a volunteer application form to Citizens Advice Bureau in Dundee. He is happy to consider any opportunity the organisation may have, however we discussed that becoming a board member may not give him the demonstrable experience employers are looking for." [EC, diary]

4.2.6 Accredited courses

Research literature shows clear evidence that up-to-date and relevant qualifications significantly improve employment prospects (for example Clements et al, 2011). Three clients were supported by their ECs to source and successfully apply for accredited college programmes (Linda: sports massage; Jerry: employment law; and Shaun a degree programme in criminological studies).

Both Jerry and Linda focussed upon programmes which were directly linked to their job aspirations – Jerry's involved updating his professional qualifications following an extended period out of the labour market, and Linda's had associated vocational placements (as already discussed, Linda had enthusiastically sourced these herself). Unfortunately, both deferred the start of their programme because of ill health.

Shaun successfully applied for a four-year degree programme and offers a very interesting and contrasting example. Both Shaun and his EC were concerned about preparing Shaun for the independent-study a degree course demanded, so some energy was put into this:

> "I attended sensory impaired centre in Glasgow yesterday, learning to touch type over four of the next five weeks. Hopefully a skill I will be able to use when I start university in September." [Shaun, diary]

> "When she realised I didn't have a magnifier Ruth wrote to my assessor and the support work at the university and she still working with them today." [Shaun, interview]

> "Shaun is enjoying university, and has joined some of the clubs at university including the debating, drama and mature student clubs. He feels that the university staff have been very supportive and are even organising a support worker or volunteer for Shaun to attend the social activities with." [EC, diary]

Of additional concern to Shaun's EC was that Shaun would be faced with similar employment challenges following his course:

> "Shaun has now secured a place at university […] Shaun and I have discussed that this is a positive step for him, we also discussed [...] if he wants to secure employment he will need to continue to work towards this while at university."

The EC worked hard to instil this message, and put a lot of energy into successfully supporting Shaun into voluntary work which he could do while at university. This imaginative approach, developed over a period of time, can be seen to be bearing fruit through the following extracts from the EC diary over a period of time:

> "[Shaun suggested he is continuing] in education because there are no other options for him. We have agreed therefore to continue working together to move him towards employment, while at university to help him to gain experience and demonstrable employment skills which he can offer to an employer during and on completion of his degree." [EC diary]

> "[Shaun is] hopefully going to be invited to do some training at Citizen's Advice, for becoming a volunteer there. So if it was all to work that would give him some work experience – [and] tied in with his degree would be quite a nice matching set." [EC diary]

> "We have had contact with Citizen's Advice [Bureau] and have been advised that the training for volunteers will now happen in the New Year." [EC diary]

> "Shaun's confidence has continued to grow and I have suggested he contacts the university careers service to see if they are able to work with him regarding summer placements next year." [EC diary]

4.2.7 Voluntary work and job placements

Of the 14 clients, nine secured some kind of voluntary placement. Of the remaining clients, one had planned voluntary work but he became ill, a further two had not prioritised voluntary work as a target, and one client developed work experience by exploring self-employment (as a web designer, marketing his work and doing some work for free). Voluntary work could not be secured for only one client for whom it was targeted.

ECs utilised different kinds of placements depending upon the needs of the client and opportunities available/known to the EC:

- Supported placements. Two placements (Dan and Susan) were based at Action and these clients received support from their EC while there (as well as general support from staff in this sight loss sector organisation). This gave Susan the foundation to do voluntary work in a less supported environment (this looked positive, but Susan's circumstances changed and this was no longer a priority). In the case of Dan, he was trained in data entry work and there was hope that this might continue into the future with reduced support (and an increase in working speed).
- Temporary placements (that is for a number of days or weeks). These had a varying degree of support from the ECs, depending upon the needs of the client and context of work.
- Longer term placements/voluntary work. On occasions these were directly arranged by ECs, but often involved initially developing links with volunteering agencies. Following an interview the agency identifies possible suitable opportunities, and then attempts to link up clients with a chosen organisation. ECs played facilitating roles in this process.

Whatever the nature of the placement, all clients were broadly positive about the placements they were involved with during the project. One volunteer placement led to paid employment in related work (Mandy), but some of the placements were extremely important outcomes in their own right. The following examples of Thelma and Mandy offer positive illustrations.

When the EC first started working with Thelma she appeared demanding and defensive. While she was very determined to get a voluntary post, seemingly nothing was ever quite right (sometimes this was attributed to health, type of work, or the journey). This may have been anxiety and defensiveness about her situation and a previous voluntary post which had ended badly. She was also very reluctant to take on any form of training, having "done it all before". Thelma eventually secured a placement, and the following quotes capture the positive impact volunteering was having, and the sense of responsibility and commitment Thelma has for the post:

> "It's really good you know. I'm doing Monday Wednesday and Thursday now, three days. I love it but just wish they'd pay me [laughs]. But I love it. It took a long time to get. Sometimes I have to open up…I love it." [Thelma, interview]

> "It's [an independent living organisation with] 33 apartments and they live independently but have some kind of medical need, but have to live

> independently. So I'm on the main reception desk and behind the support workers have their desk and there's the manager of the building and then [the boss] who oversees the whole thing and the residents would come down and ask questions. There is always something different happening. I'm the first port of call…they come in to see [the manager] and I ask what is it all about and they are having to get used to it because they never had anyone on the reception. So they're having to get used to it as well." [Thelma, interview]

> "It's surprising what you learn about yourself when you do things and you question things. You know it is surprising and it surprised me what I can do actually. Before I said I can't do that and I can't do that, but actually I can really." [Thelma, interview]

A variety of events may have precipitated this eventual success: her own determination (driven by her keenness to be a role model for her daughter); the determination of her EC (Thelma spoke of her EC extremely positively at the end of the project); an ultimatum to end work on the project was given by the EC at one point which seemed to focus Thelma (and a similar technique worked with another client, Wanda); and also the eventual placement that suited her with a supportive organisation. The following quotes from Thelma capture some of these factors clearly:

> "And also, you know [my daughter] likes it, if that makes sense; I don't say it is voluntary. She loves me being outside working. I call it work really because children think you have to go out to earn money. [..] She was in the playground and said 'my mum goes to work and she can't see very well'. [..] She said 'you love your job' and I do." [Thelma, interview]

> "I'm using the computer at work now. They are trying to get Zoomtext at work." [Thelma, interview]

> "[The EC and I have] had our ups and downs, don't get me wrong, but [the EC] has stuck by me and she was the only one who believed in me... you know, 'I believe in you and I know there is something out there for you'... it's been amazing." [Thelma, interview]

Although expressed in a different way to Thelma, when Mandy started working with her EC she was very anxious about work and lacked confidence. Her EC clearly supported her through this:

> "When I went to the EC I had absolutely no confidence and none with going back to work and she guided me through each stage fantastically. She was firm but no hardness there. She gave me a gentle push in the right direction. She gave it to me all the way and was absolutely brilliant." [Mandy, interview]

Mandy went for an interview with the volunteer centre and came away with a number of opportunities. Mandy and her EC went through them together and prioritised an opportunity within the British Red Cross (a volunteer centre that loans equipment such as wheelchairs for people who have just come out of hospital). Mandy rang the manager, went for an interview and was invited to start as a volunteer. The volunteer placement had initial training before the work started. As with Thelma, the sense of being part of an organisation and having a role with responsibility proved liberating and increased confidence. The placement also gave opportunities to develop new skills (in Mandy's case work with computers, which she has been anxious about):

> "It's been absolutely brilliant the last couple of weeks. I'm no longer doing the training…I'm part of the system now and people are calling and you answer the door and show them. If I have a problem there are other two people who have been there years who are really great. But they let me just get on with it. I've had a little go on the computer; a sort of bug-bear that, but I've had a go. My name's on the system so I've had a go but I like someone to be there when I do it. I don't like doing it on my own. I've got no confidence at all. I've got no worries answering the phone. I feel a bit more comfortable now, may be because I understand a bit more about the equipment." [Mandy, interview]

Both Mandy and her EC recognised the placement as an important outcome in itself, and the EC cautiously hoped that it might give Mandy the skills and confidence to seek paid employment. Since these interviews took place Mandy has been offered paid work by the voluntary organisation.

> "[The voluntary organisation] were saying in the New Year I'd consider doing two days. They suggested it to me. I'm quite positive about it. I said I want to take my time. I want to do it slowly. [It] has enabled me to feel the confidence but I was quite chuffed [..], I thought that was encouraging in itself." [Mandy, interview]

> "[I have discussed with Mandy] another year within the volunteer role and she's going to be looking for opportunities because they have paid employment within that centre as well." [EC, bi-monthly meeting]

4.2.8 Other client-focussed interventions

There were a range of other client-focussed interventions carried out or arranged as part of the project. In the case of literacy and numeracy, this was linked to the employment assessment toolkit which identified difficulty in this area for seven of the 14 clients. Of these clients, only Aaron was referred to and undertook a programme of work with a literacy group. The diagnostic aspect of that programme helped the EC understand more clearly some of the difficulties Aaron had when following instructions and completing forms. Dan's EC also benefited from a literacy and numeracy assessment completed by Dan. Others were offered referrals for literacy support but this seems not to have been prioritised by these clients.

Thelma benefited from a literacy and numeracy test which she took at her local college. Her initial fears of not doing well were quickly allayed when she received her scores, showing she had done very well.

> "Then I did a Maths and English assessment to see where I am and that was interesting. I came up better than I thought I was. That was interesting as well." [Interview with client]

As already discussed earlier in the report, interventions in relation to areas which were not part of the employment assessment toolkit can be important. The case of Roy in relation to benefits and home support is particularly powerful in this regard (see theme "Reconfiguring overall targets"). Another area which falls into this category is mental health. Concerns about mental health were raised in relation to some clients (and for some adjustment to sight loss issues). Some were receiving support in this regard which was unconnected to the project (for example for panic attacks). Another client was advised by his EC to seek a referral for counselling though his doctor (which we believe has since happened); while another was referred by the EC to counselling services within a local society for visually impaired people.

From the early stages of the project as a whole (when early drafts of the employment toolkit were being developed), the concept of confidence was commonly highlighted as fundamental to client progress. Confidence also features in the final version of the toolkit, albeit in relation to specific tasks (for example technology and mobility). Reference to confidence in this phase of the project was common, although it was often used constructively in relation to increased client confidence as a result of an intervention, experience or developed skill. For example:

> "George is progressing well; he has started mobility training, which had been held up a little because of the weather. However he travelled to our meeting independently by bus last week. This is a huge step forward as he hasn't travelled independently for a considerable time – boosting his confidence." [EC diary]

> "In herself Mandy appears a lot more confident. She is finding routine with the volunteer placement and advises me that it is making a very positive difference to her weekly activity." [EC diary]

This can be contrasted with ECs reporting the lack of client confidence as being a barrier to progress.

4.2.9 Non-client-based work, availability of services, and job balance

It should not be underestimated the amount of time ECs spend carrying out preparation and advocacy work for given clients, for example sourcing services and job opportunities, and sourcing work placements and arranging adjustments. This general point is linked to issues raised elsewhere (see EC professional development and EC professional demands and boundaries). ECs' knowledge of available services is critical for their work. Access to well maintained databases of services and contacts is useful, but local knowledge and relationships with local contacts are crucial (for example local societies for the blind). Inevitably some ECs had more developed networks than others and these networks improved as the project progressed – in no small part supported by the communication between ECs, and managerial support in the project (for example the presence of a project manager, EC workshops, and bi-monthly meetings).

Also relevant here is the availability of some services. There was evidence that some interventions were not possible because appropriate services could not be found (for example IT training, mobility) – the services either did not exist or were over committed in some regions.

This discussion is also linked to something more fundamental: the balance of the ECs' job – that is the balance between providing training to the clients on one hand, versus advocating on behalf of their clients to gain access to mainstream services on the other. This balance is illustrated by considering the different types of interventions described in the previous sections. First, the project has demonstrated benefits of services that the EC delivers directly (PEP) or services that can usually be sourced from specialist providers (mobility, IT training). Second, we have also presented evidence that clients

benefit from work placements and voluntary work (and ultimately, of course, clients benefit from being successfully interviewed for a paid job). Finding such placements and employers is by no means easy – ECs candidly discussed in the EC workshops how they must be very cautious not to lose the goodwill of potential employers by placing unreliable clients in those organisations. It is no coincidence that some of the job placements were within sight loss organisations who were more accommodating to the clients (Action and RNIB).

The focus of this project has been upon developing the skills of the clients. Evidence presented above suggests that this is successful at getting clients closer or into the open labour market. Nevertheless, also important is the work the EC must do to get the employer prepared – reminding them of their obligations, organising equipment, and general advocacy work. While not focussed upon in this project, these strategies must not be forgotten. This broader context is revisited in the discussion.

4.3 What does this work tell us about the enablers (and barriers) to moving these clients closer or into the open labour market?

In the previous section we outlined evidence of the positive impact of the project interventions upon the 14 clients. These interventions (for example mobility training, IT skills, and job search skills) were shown to be **enablers** to moving these clients closer or into the open labour market. By the same logic, the absence of these skills in clients, and the services by which they can develop these skills, are **barriers** to moving these clients closer to or into the open labour market.

However, as noted in the final theme in the previous section, “Non-client-based work, availability of services, and job balance”, enablers and barriers to employment go beyond the skills individual clients possess. They are also linked to systems and services around them. In this section we consider the factors beyond the direct interventions clients received; the challenges faced by the ECs involved in the project, and the ways they tried to overcome these.

4.3.1 Complex needs and circumstances of clients

It seems a tautology to state that clients furthest from the labour market have complex needs. Nevertheless, working with the 14 clients over a period of between six and eight months has demonstrated the complexity of the lives many of them lead and the extreme challenges they face. This included a range of health issues (including serious chronic and acute illnesses), disability

issues (including deteriorating vision, learning and mobility disabilities, and mental health issues), and one client had experienced the recent death of his wife. While more positive, but still complex and very significant, another client became pregnant during the project. Complexity also included more socially-based challenges, for example clients who were: carers for an ill parent, a single parent, had difficulty with relationships, and had difficulty with housing. Unsurprisingly, these issues are commonly associated with general poverty.

Such complexity will have a variety of consequences. From the point of view of the EC, the management of caseloads of clients with such varied needs and circumstances is a challenge. Sometimes significant life events (for example illness or pregnancy) mean that priorities have to completely change (including largely suspending the work with the client). This was the case for three of the 14 clients in the project: Susan, Jerry and Linda.

4.3.2 EC Professional demands and boundaries

The ENABLER project demanded much from participating ECs. They needed to be flexible in terms of supporting a range of clients with diverse and complex needs who required a range of services (linked to the toolkit and beyond). The project required professionals with a wide range of skills who could proactively solve problems and think beyond traditional employment issues (see related theme on professional development). One impact of this was the large volume of work which was required when working with some clients. Two examples serve to illustrate this clearly. Dan met with his EC 25 times over the period of the project, each meeting taking between one and six hours (some meetings involved training sessions). In addition, the EC recorded 18 phone calls to Dan, as well as 36 emails (some to Dan, but many to others involved with related work). In contrast, Joe met his EC on fewer occasions (18), but the EC recorded a staggering 131 phone calls in relation to Joe (many of these involved the EC trying to negotiate college places, which ultimately proved unsuccessful).

As highlighted elsewhere in this report, this work can be rewarding when clients make progress; but it can be difficult and frustrating too, for example:

> “[He] needs lots of chasing, reminding and encouragement. This can be very time consuming. [He] has these ideas but is lacking motivation.” [EC, diary]

> “I just feel like I’ve failed him. I felt like I’ve failed as a professional on so many occasions with [him].” [EC diary]

In response to hearing about a similar case a manager commented:

> "The other thing that strikes me is that the EC needs [..] some way to de-brief; somebody to talk to about these issues. You are dealing with really tricky clients, you need somewhere to offload otherwise you take it home and you get ill." [Manager, bimonthly meeting]

Additionally, these demands can stretch the professional boundaries of the EC – that is where should the EC role end and another professional role begin (for example social workers, counsellors, life coaches, benefits advisers)?

> "My concern with Aaron is that he needs additional support outside employment support and he doesn't have a social worker and sometimes my concern as an employment adviser is that we are seen as a one stop shop, do you know, and really Aaron has far greater support needs than just employment." [EC, interview].

4.3.3 EC Professional development

There was significant evidence that ECs developed their professional practice through the course of the project. The time and structures the project afforded required ECs to engage in different and novel tasks and approaches which gave opportunities for professional development. Some processes seemed to be particularly enhancing and enriching:

- **Discussion with other ECs.** There were a number of opportunities to discuss work with other ECs working on the project. The EC workshops seemed a particularly rich and safe environment to discuss progress in relation to clients. The format of the sessions was arranged so that the group discussed ENABLER clients in turn. The discussions were professional but safe, such that ideas and insecurities could be discussed openly in a constructive, cooperative and non-judgemental manner. Ideas and practice were shared and relationships were developed between colleagues which continued beyond the meetings via email and telephone exchanges. As already noted, the shared language provided by the project (and the employment assessment toolkit) facilitated this communication – while all the clients were very different and faced different barriers in their lives, the ECs were able to appreciate how clients fitted into the broader aims of the service and they professionally engaged accordingly.

- **New skills and implementing new programmes.** Several ECs engaged in formal training in relation to PEP:

  "I had training [..] from RNIB. She was very useful and meeting her was very good. Basically she taught us how to look at one unit or module and then gave us a couple of techniques on how to pick out the things that are relevant and make that unit [deliverable] [..]. In the beginning I wanted to learn everything word by word and I was absolutely petrified until she gave me these techniques, so it was easy to get ready. In the beginning it took me a whole day to get ready. And then as I was [learning I got it] down to an hour." [EC, bi-monthly meeting]

Many of the ECs had not delivered training in this way before, yet by the end of the project they were not only working with clients in a different way but they were also training other ECs and presenting their work at meetings and conferences. While PEP was an example of formal training in relation to an approach to working, there were many other examples of ECs developing their knowledge and approaches (for example action plan development; use of the assessment toolkit; understanding college programmes; balancing between challenging and supporting clients; sourcing other services).

- **Discussions with managers/project manager.** The project incorporated some bi-monthly meetings with ECs which included line managers as well as the project manager and other stakeholders. The project also included smaller meetings involving the ECs and the project manager. As with the EC workshops, these meetings appeared to be constructive and positive. They gave ECs a context in which they could seek advice in relation to particular clients, but also in relation to broader working approaches (managing difficult clients, the types of clients services should focus upon, development of the PEP and the employment assessment tool). Importantly the EC had (and developed) clear voices in these meetings – not only in relation to work with their clients, but also in relation to organisational and strategic issues. For example:

  "Can I just say we don't want to get into cherry-picking [clients near to work]. Because then we're no better than any other national prime contractor delivering DWP contracts." [EC, bi-monthly meeting]

  "You need to feel reassured and valued in a sense, and I don't think Work Choice has done any of those for any of us." [EC, bi-monthly meeting]

  "I think the [employment assessment toolkit] is useful. [..] If the person is inexperienced. It is very useful for collecting data as well. But from my own

practice, I don't know, just because of the knowledge of working alongside people. But I think for people who are new to coming in to work with the organisation and as a training tool and method of collecting data, I think it is great." [EC, meeting with project manager]

4.3.4 Knockbacks and significant changes

Knockbacks are times in the project when clients suffered frustrations or challenges to their confidence because plans had not worked out. This might be cumulative (for example multiple unsuccessful job interviews) or a significant single event (for example not getting into college). Personal qualities of clients may make them more or less resilient to these knockbacks. Also the planning of interventions (and communication of these interventions) may also help – that is the knockback can be offset by positive success elsewhere. Knockbacks can be particularly difficult if they are in relation to a single hope.

Perhaps the two clients for whom the project was least successful were Kelly and Joe. Both suffered significant knockbacks in the project – both applied for places on college courses but were unsuccessful. It is useful to reflect upon this to consider why these knockbacks became such significant barriers, although noting this analysis is with the benefit of hindsight.

Using the language developed earlier in the report, it appears that it was the combination of two factors which lead to the problems for Joe and Kelly: (1) the client-need did not align with what the college could offer; and (2) Kelly and Joe (encouraged by the project team) placed too much emphasis and hope upon going to a residential college.

The initial assessment of Joe and Kelly identified that they needed support to develop skills and experiences in virtually all assessed areas. This may have felt overwhelming for client and adviser alike. The courses identified at two specialist colleges appeared to offer an ideal solution – addressing all the challenges the client faced in a six month intensive residential programme. Indeed, for Kelly the programme also appeared to have the potential for her to leave home for the first time and develop independent living skills. In fact neither college programme was suitable as they were for people closer to the labour market and this was revealed when the clients were assessed by the colleges. Therefore, there was a misalignment between the assessment and the planned intervention.

Perhaps of highest priority for Joe was in relation to his mobility (linked to health and weight) and his mental health. Similarly, the priority for Kelly was in relation to independent living skills and supported housing. With hindsight focussing

interventions on these issues would have been more beneficial. The work carried out with Roy offers a contrasting (and more positive) intervention (see "Reconfiguring overall targets" above).

The second factor which added to the problem outlined previously was that so much effort and hope had been invested in the college places, and there were few other interventions in place. George provides a contrasting example. While George was clearly frustrated by persistently being unsuccessful with his job applications, he was able to balance this disappointment with other positive interventions (such as mobility, IT and the PEP). Kelly and especially Joe had fewer positive experiences arising from the project they could draw upon.

4.3.5 When should an intervention finish?

The project generated various examples of the process of drawing boundaries between supporting and no longer supporting a client (and the associated challenges in this decision making). Sometimes the boundary was marked by ultimatums (the EC demanding action or the withdrawal of a service). For example, Wanda's EC made an ultimatum following disagreements:

> "[The project manager had to] call Wanda and speak to her. And I was calling her and saying 'everything I did was for her best interest'. And I don't know what happened –after two weeks she just completely turned the situation over. She came back and she said I was right, she wasn't behaving properly and she's going to change and take everything on board that I said to her. And then she went for a job interview and [got the] job, so…"

In contrast, the successful achievement of a target (for example achieving a college place, finding a part-time job) might still mean that the client would benefit from further support. There are a number of factors which appear to inform the EC when making a decision of how best to continue support (or not): whether it is appropriate to set new targets; accounting for what the clients wants to do; and any workload issues for the EC (linked to how the service is funded). Three examples of this dilemma (and, where relevant, how ECs navigated it) are as follows:

- Shaun successfully gained a place at university on a four year course and it would have been possible for the EC to conclude a natural endpoint of work with Shaun had been reached. Beyond some work preparing Shaun for university which was provided by the EC (most notably the development of IT skills), Shaun would have accepted this as a natural endpoint too. Nevertheless, the EC persuaded and supported Shaun to continue with trying

to secure part-time voluntary work with CAB while studying. The voluntary work complemented his studies well and also gave him valuable work experience which would be useful when he would be looking for work (either during his vacations or at the end of the course).

- Thelma successfully secured voluntary work. The placement is on-going and Thelma is valued by the organisation, and feels she is developing her skills, contributing and gaining confidence. At the time of the final interview with Thelma she felt content and ready to consolidate her situation but anticipated she may want more support from her EC in the future, perhaps when she would seek paid employment:

  > "Even though ENABLER is finished, [my EC] is there for me." [Thelma, interview]

- Roy was in a vulnerable situation at the start of the project and with support he is now is in a much more stable situation in terms of the management of his home and finances. The work with Roy transformed this situation. Roy understandably was anxious not to lose this new found stability and therefore was very cautious about committing to looking for employment. The next natural steps for the EC would be to offer support to Roy so that he could work towards new targets (such as securing voluntary work). Alternatively, the EC should stop working with Roy. Since the end of the project Roy and his EC did continue working together and Roy has secured a voluntary role as a trainer.

Perhaps an even more challenging situation to manage was when little or no progress was made with a client after a sustained period of time. An ultimatum (as set by the EC to Wanda) does not feel appropriate in these cases as the client and EC have not disagreed about anything, but significant progress seems illusive. Two clients for whom this had some relevance (for very different reasons) are Joe and Dan. In the case of Joe, a key barrier was linked to mobility and health – and it was left that Joe should contact his doctor and seek help. In the case of Dan, his EC had supported him in a variety of ways so that Dan could explore his interest in hospital radio and develop administration skills (contacts were made with relevant organisations, mobility training was given so that Dan could attend meetings independently, IT training was given, voluntary work placements arranged). By the end of the project Dan was in a much stronger position to explore opportunities in administration (voluntary or paid work) independently. In his final project interview Dan was torn between pursuing this and continuing his voluntary work in hospital radio.

In both Joe's and Dan's cases the EC had given them the advice (and, in the case of Dan, the training and skills) to take some things forward. To this extent, the clients had some more control in their lives and EC had helped provide this, but it was probably impossible for the EC to take further action. These seem practical and ethical approaches for the EC to navigate these situations and end the period of working with a client. Importantly, given the remit of Action and RNIB, the door must always be open for clients to return and seek further support when they are ready.

4.3.6 Benefit trap

The benefit trap is a much documented and debated challenge: the economic value of gaining paid employment versus the economic value of state benefits (and/or the risk of losing those benefits). Navigating the benefit trap was a common challenge throughout the project and took significant EC and client time. As examples, Roy and Dan discussed this dilemma at the end of the project:

> "If I got a job, a full time job, it would affect me with the [10 hours personal assistant time]. I spoke to [the EC] about it and he said that if you wanted to keep it you would have to get a part-time type of thing and you wouldn't get much money anyway. You've got to watch your benefits and everything else. Having the PA is really valuable because of not having any family near."

> "How much do I value [..] actually getting a job? The answer is two-fold – If I was offered a job I could realistically do and the money was OK, I'd do it. I don't feel too bad financially off. The benefits that stand at the moment are OK. [..] It would be quite nice to have a job in one way, but what is wrong with voluntary work? What's wrong with doing your hospital radio work and you enjoy it? What's wrong with it anyway?"

At least two clients explicitly said that they wanted to work for less than 16 hours to avoid losing benefits. Some ECs made use of a Benefit of Work calculation which seems a useful approach to be able to have open discussions with clients about the dilemmas they face, challenge any myths they may believe, and protect any support or benefits they are concerned about losing.

At the time of writing this report radical changes to the welfare system are being introduced across the UK, including the role out of 'Universal Credit' in 2013 which seeks to "to simplify the benefits system, make work pay and reduce worklessness and poverty" (DWP, 2013). ECs will have to continue to respond to this new climate.

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1 Introduction

The focus of the analysis has been around the barriers and enablers to employment within the context of the work of seven ECs working closely with 14 clients who are visually impaired. This analysis, by design, centres upon the experiences of these ECs and clients and how this action based project served them in their efforts to get closer to the labour market.

For this reason the analysis makes few references to the broader political, policy and economic context – although the reader must accept the importance of these issues. For example, ECs and clients faced situations where there appears to be a lack of suitable jobs. This partly reflects the current economic climate, but also changes in views about sheltered employment (at least three clients had come from sustained periods of work in this environment, but work was no longer available). As already noted, at time of writing radical changes to the welfare system are being introduced across the UK.

In this final discussion we revisit our research questions and draw out the key messages and implications for practice. These implications are inevitably linked to work within Action for Blind People and RNIB (the context of this action-based research), but they also have broader relevance. The research questions outlined at the beginning of this report are as follows:

- How does the employment assessment toolkit support ECs and clients to design and implement appropriate interventions?
- What interventions were shown to support clients to get closer or into the open labour market?
- What does this work tell us about the enablers (and barriers) to moving these clients closer or into the open labour market?

Drawing upon these questions as guidelines we present a discussion under the following headings:

- The important role of an Employment Assessment Toolkit.
- Key interventions to support blind and partially sighted people who are furthest from the labour market.
- Challenges and solutions to designing effective services.

5.2 The important role of an Employment Assessment Toolkit

This phase of the ENABLER project has provided ample evidence of the positive impact of using the employment assessment toolkit. The analysis revealed that using the assessment helped ECs identify and prioritise interventions for clients – encouraging the EC and client to design interventions which aligned with the assessment results. The assessment also helped the EC and client evidence measurable success. In this way the assessment was used as a method of establishing a baseline which following intervention could be compared with a re-assessment of the client. Observing improvement (whether in mobility, computer use, and job search skills) is extremely motivating for the client and the EC.

A positive consequence of the ECs using a formal assessment approach was that there was a shared language which supported communication between professionals and clients. This advantage went beyond the EC-client relationship. The consistent use of the assessment approach across the project provided a shared language amongst the ECs which supported mutual support and professional development, as well as easier communication with managers. Overall then, a shared assessment approach with its associated consistency of language and data provides improved clarity of purpose and communication within the organisation (and potentially for communication beyond the organisation as well).

There are potential dangers of unintended consequences of using assessment procedures in the way described above. Firstly, ECs and clients might (unconsciously or consciously) agree safe and un-ambitious targets to ensure that positive progress is demonstrated. There was no evidence of this in the project. Secondly, inflexible application of an assessment may deflect from other valuable interventions or concerns relevant to the client. We anticipate that these potential unintended consequences can be easily avoided with appropriate management and training of staff.

5.2.1 Implications for the Employment Assessment Toolkit

Following this action-based research cycle, the research team re-drafted the employment assessment toolkit to account for the lessons learnt. In addition to relatively small changes to wording and format, we adjusted the structure of the toolkit. Firstly, we explained how the assessment process knitted together more clearly in the introductory notes. Secondly, we explicitly linked the assessment to the associated intervention – without this the EC and client may not find the assessment meaningful and believe that it is just a data collection exercise

for management purposes. The structure of the toolkit was therefore re-conceptualised in the final draft. The employment assessment toolkit consists of two interlinked parts:

- The employment assessment tool, with its key focus upon assessment.
- The employment action plan, with its focus upon intervention.

Both parts reference each other – the assessment explicitly asks the user what are the implications for the action plan; the action plan explicitly asks the user what aspect of the assessment the intervention is addressing.

5.3 Key interventions to support blind and partially sighted people who are furthest from the labour market

In the first project report (Saunders et al, 2012) we discussed some of the historical tensions between dimensions of disability specialist knowledge and interventions and non-specialist mainstream (or inclusive) interventions. We concluded it was both possible and desirable to reconcile these apparent positions, noting that others in the disability study sector were recognising this balance too. Shakespeare (2006) noted “there seems to be no intrinsic reason why a single-impairment organisation might not be progressive and helpful, given that people with different impairments experience specific issues and problems, both medical and social” (p32).

We concluded then that many aspects of employment services are relevant for all people seeking work or voluntary work, but there are some aspects which are particularly pertinent or important for visually impaired people. We set in the project the task of identifying the specialist areas which increase opportunities for employment and ensure that they are not lost in the services that visually impaired people receive.

A variety of interventions tested in this phase of the project proved successful. Evidence gathered demonstrated the positive impact of interventions linked to sight-loss specific skills. In particular:

- computer skills, including assistive technology
- independent travel
- disclosure and communication about disability
- a pre-employment programme designed specifically for blind and partially sighted people.

These were delivered either as targeted interventions, or as part of a standard pre-employment programme specially designed for blind and partially sighted people. This programme was highly regarded by both clients and employment advisers.

Evidence was gathered from interventions which were not disability specific, for example:

- job search skills
- training/college programmes
- work experience through voluntary work.

Voluntary work seemed to offer particular benefits. As well as the benefits of the work itself, it was often linked to meaningful practice and the development of other skills such as mobility, IT, and confidently discussing their sight loss with work colleagues. The efforts and specialist knowledge of the employment advisers were important in finding these voluntary placements, and in the preparatory work to make them successful.

Within this research a number of clients benefitted from their employment advisers referring on to services that went beyond a strict employment remit. Blind and partially sighted people furthest from the labour market often face multiple barriers to employment. Employment advisers sometimes need to ensure clients have access to wider support services, as this may lead to individuals being better placed to seek employment in the future. Using their specialist knowledge and expertise, employment advisers secured independent living training, self-care support and appropriate state benefits as just a few examples of this wider support.

5.4 Challenges and solutions to designing effective services

Evidenced by the project, and summarised in the previous discussion, employment services for people with sight loss should include the provision of a wide range of interventions. This is particularly the case for those furthest from the labour market. Such services require professionals with a high degree of specialist knowledge. These professionals require an understanding of employment issues, but also must have a clear knowledge of the specific enablers and barriers to employment which are particularly relevant to visually impaired people.

The ECs involved in the ENABLER project demonstrated this range of skills, and just as importantly their professional knowledge and understanding developed through the project. The project offered a number of structures which supported this professional development – formal training, materials for supporting interventions (most notably PEP), forums for professionals to communicate and shared ideas, and (crucially) additional time for this work. Importantly, the project provided a framework through the employment assessment toolkit. The toolkit also provided the project a shared language and purpose, helping ECs to design and prioritise interventions and measure client progress. As described above, the experiences of the ECs and clients have helped the research team revise the employment assessment toolkit further, and we believe the final version can be easily embedded within employment services.

Trials of the employment assessment toolkit and innovative support strategies provided evidence of the effectiveness of a **holistic and specialist employment** service for people with sight loss. The toolkit was proven to be an important part of such a service and helps employment advisors, clients and managers to:

- establish a profile of each client's particular skills and barriers
- identify and design effective interventions which are sensitive to the complex needs and circumstances of people with sight loss
- plan a tailored pre-employment programme
- establish a baseline, which can be compared with a reassessment following intervention
- record evidence of measurable success towards paid employment
- acknowledge and celebrate other meaningful outcomes such as greater independence, or contribution and participation through voluntary work
- gather information about the range and number of clients being supported at different levels of need.
- navigate significant knockbacks in client progress and clients being "trapped" on benefits
- establish when clients no longer require services.

We recognise that the use of the employment assessment toolkit is part of the approach adopted by employment services. By design, the focus of this project has been upon developing the skills of the clients (and the employment assessment toolkit supports this process). Nevertheless, also important is the work the EC must do to get the employer prepared – reminding them of their

obligations, organising equipment, and general advocacy work. This is an important part of any employment service and must not be forgotten. Indeed, any disability organisation concerned with employment must not only put its resources into supporting individuals to develop their work skills, but also into campaigning and bringing about social change so that employers are more inclusive in their practice. We see no problems, and many advantages, to having such a dual approach.

6. References

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7. Appendix – Case studies

1.1 Mandy

7.1.1 Background information

Mandy is 50 years old and has not worked for 21 years. She began to lose her sight 18 years ago through diabetic retinopathy, but is unsure if she is registered [blind or partially sighted]. Losing her sight whilst bringing up her child as a single parent created many challenges. In her EC's view this affected her confidence, although she presents as a strong character. Mandy is now in a position where she wants to find employment, but has not worked with sight loss and does not have many disability-specific skills to move forward. She is not very confident using IT, but is able to use public transport and to travel during the day. Mandy was excited to be part of the project, although she started two months later than most other clients. Mandy was part of the project for six months rather than eight months.

7.1.2 First assessment tool interview

Based upon the first assessment toolkit, Mandy was scored at segmentation Level 3 (Longer term support needed):

Closer to work (2 of 8)	Further from work (6 of 8)
Access to Information	Employment experience
Explaining vision	Education and training
	Literacy and numeracy
	Computer skills
	Independent travel
	Motivation

7.1.3 Interpreting the first assessment – EC judgement

Mandy's EC felt that Level 3 was an accurate level. At the time of the first assessment Mandy had only a general idea where she might want to work: "customer service or working with people." Mandy's EC suggested that Mandy had good people skills, but that her disability-specific skills would need updating (IT, mobility). Mandy also struggled with Dyslexia.

7.1.4 Key ENABLER project interventions

After the initial assessment Mandy and her EC agreed the following targets:

- Arrange a visit to the volunteer centre and explore possible volunteer opportunities.
- Source IT training.
- Consider hiring a specialist mobility trainer.
- Create a CV.

Over the course of the ENABLER project, the following summarises the specific interventions undertaken (and related outcomes).

Employment experience:

- The EC focused on building Mandy's confidence and supporting Mandy to secure a voluntary placement with a nearby charity. The EC has been successful in securing a two day voluntary placement for Mandy.
- Mandy received induction training for her volunteer work placement with the British Red Cross. She really enjoyed the placement and said that it has created a routine for her. She advised that the people are very friendly, welcoming and helpful.
- Mandy gained various certificates whilst volunteering including: induction, introduction to first aid, working alone and working with vulnerable adults certificates.

Computer skills:

- Mandy's EC worked hard to secure IT training at the local society and eventually Mandy had an initial assessment. However, by the project's close training was still not in place, due to a lack of equipment.

7.1.5 Second assessment tool interview

Based on the second assessment toolkit, Mandy was scored at segmentation Level 3 (Longer term support needed):

Closer to work (3 of 8)	Further from work (5 of 8)
Access to Information	Employment experience
Explaining vision	Education and training
Motivation	Literacy and numeracy
	Computer skills
	Independent travel

Therefore Mandy did not move closer to employment overall (both first and second assessments scored Mandy at Level 3). However, Mandy did move closer to work in one specific category within the assessment; motivation.

7.1.6 Interpreting the second assessment – EC judgement

Mandy's EC agreed that Mandy had remained at level 3. However, Mandy's EC felt that Mandy had made progress during the project, and that her confidence had grown considerably. Mandy's EC felt this was evident even in the way that Mandy "walked into the room". She appeared to be thriving in the volunteer placement and was learning many new skills. At the start of the project Mandy's EC did not envisage Mandy progressing so quickly. The volunteer placement asked Mandy to increase her days with them during the course of the project, which highlighted Mandy's improved skills set and confidence.

Here are some quotes from Mandy about starting voluntary work:

> "At the moment I am happy with the volunteer work to build on that confidence and I want to go from doing one afternoon to two afternoons, to build me up so I can cope basically with work in future."

> "Volunteer work is a big, big, big stepping stone and it proves it works. It works because you are getting your confidence, it is building everything that you have lost from losing your sight, to cope and that is why it is so important."

> "I say when I do my volunteer work I am going to work and all my friends now actually say 'which day are you working this week?', I think that, that is so key, because it is a mindset and a confidence builder, building on

strength and situations coming from nothing and lack of self esteem. It is so empowering to how I was a few months ago."

"Four months ago I was an empty shell, […fast] forward four months, I have now got confidence, skills, certificates, personality, you name it, it has grown and I have got the bits of paper to prove it and a reference!"

7.1.7 Postscript

After the project ended we learnt that Mandy was offered seven hours paid work at her volunteer placement with the British Red Cross.

7.2 Linda

7.2.1 Background information

Linda is 29 year old graduate with a degree in English and American Literatures. She took a post-graduate course in English Studies and would have continued with a Masters if her mother had not become ill. At the time of the first assessment Linda had never been in paid employment, although she did some volunteer work in 2000. Linda is registered blind, having been diagnosed with Neuro Mylitis Optica at the age of eleven. This is a long term health condition that also affects her auto-immune system, which is unpredictable and can affect her at any time.

Linda lives at home with her parents and acts as carer in a difficult family situation. Her mother has been diagnosed with cancer and her father with multiple sclerosis. The family also care for Linda's sister's young child, as her sister died suddenly.

Linda worked with Action for Blind People in 2010 on a programme called Seeing the Potential. Having joined the ENABLER project she was keen to explore volunteering opportunities, despite her responsibilities as a carer. Linda had suffered from depression in the past and lacked confidence. At the time of the first assessment she was someone who did not leave the house very often and rarely travelled alone. Linda worked with the project team for five months, compared with eight months for most other clients.

7.2.2 First assessment tool interview

Based upon the first assessment toolkit, Linda was scored at segmentation Level 4 (Foundation work required before employment services):

Closer to work (1 of 8)	Further from work (7 of 8)
Access to information	Employment experience
	Education and training
	Literacy and numeracy
	Computer skills
	Independent travel
	Explaining vision
	Motivation

7.2.3 Interpreting the first assessment – EC judgement

Linda's EC felt that Level 4 was an accurate level. Linda was unsure of the type of work she wanted to do, although she had a number of transferable skills. Linda is qualified to post-graduate level and is "personable, friendly, polite, courteous and willing to learn new skills" according to her EC. She is also qualified in Indian head massage and Swedish body massage. Linda's EC felt that Linda would need to embark upon volunteer work first to gain experience, skills and confidence to progress. Linda had become de-skilled over the past couple of years in areas such as IT, but would be able to pick this up again quite quickly.

7.2.4 Key ENABLER project interventions

After the initial assessment Linda and her EC agreed the following targets:

- Meet with local volunteer society and secure volunteer work.
- Consider sports massage/physiotherapy courses as Linda has qualifications in this area, possibly local or residential college.
- Secure IT training.

Over the time of the ENABLER project, the following summarises the specific interventions undertaken (and related outcome):

- Linda quickly established a plan to train as a sports therapist, undertaking sports injury massage.
- Linda visited a specialist college for people with sight loss to investigate the courses they had to offer. Linda was very interested in a combined sports injury massage and IT course.
- Linda applied and was subsequently offered a place. The course was organised as a six-month residential placement.
- Linda was understandably concerned about leaving her family and her duties as a carer. For the remainder of the project Linda's EC supported Linda in making the decision whether to accept the offer.
- Linda accepted the offer and so Linda and her EC started looking at potential work placements for the course.
- IT training at the local society.

7.2.5 Second assessment tool interview

Based on the second assessment toolkit, Linda was scored at segmentation Level 3 (Longer term support needed):

Closer to work (2 of 8)	Further from work (6 of 8)
Access to information	Employment experience
Literacy and numeracy	Education and training
	Computer skills
	Independent travel
	Explaining vision
	Motivation

Linda moved closer to employment overall, reflected by an upward shift of one level according to the assessment toolkit. At the first assessment Linda scored at Level 4 but at the second assessment this had changed to Level 3. Linda had moved closer to work in one specific category; literacy and numeracy.

At face value it seemed odd that Linda was able to improve in the area of literacy and numeracy, given that Linda had a post-graduate degree. However, at the first assessment Linda talked about her lack of confidence and her inability to use IT at that time. Both areas improved as a result of participating in the project, which was reflected in the second assessment.

7.2.6 Interpreting the second assessment – EC judgement

Linda's EC agreed that Linda was now at Level 3. Linda's focus shifted during the course of the project. At the time of the first assessment she was interested in a volunteer placement, but this quickly changed to pursuing a place at college. Linda decided to build upon the practical skills she already had, in Indian head massage and Swedish body massage by pursuing a course in sports injury massage. Linda's EC was surprised by Linda's application to the college, and by her acceptance of a place on the course. Her EC believes that the process of applying to college helped Linda to realise something about her potential.

Linda found working with the project difficult because both Linda and her parents were ill at different times. Linda's caring responsibilities were a big concern to her and at the time the project closed it was by no means certain that

Linda would take up the college place. Her confidence remained low as a result of this. Linda's EC felt however that the project was good for Linda because it gave her something else to focus on and an opportunity to think about future possibilities. According to Linda herself: "It has given me the opportunity of considering a potential future."

7.2.7 Postscript

Since the project's closure Linda has been diagnosed with a very serious illness. Therefore she was unable to take up her place at college, although she hopes to do so at some point in the future.

7.3 Joe

7.3.1 Background information

Joe is 53 with an early history of employment. He trained as a chef in the Territorial Army and on leaving secured worked as a chef at a local hospital and then several colleges until he lost his sight. This happened approximately 19 years ago and Joe has not worked since. He is registered blind and also suffers from a rare condition that affects his joints, causing Joe severe pain. This condition affects his hearing; he has lost 30-40 per cent of hearing in both ears, although he does not wear an aide. Joe also has regular medical check-ups, monitoring his kidney function.

Joe has not applied for work or participated in any voluntary work since the late 1980s. However he re-trained as a push-bike mechanic in 1994, and gained a City and Guilds qualification. Joe has extreme mobility issues, a combination of his physical health and his size. He has few disability-specific skills, for example he is unable to use a computer, although he uses large print and a magnifier. He is unable to travel independently and lives in sheltered accommodation.

7.3.2 First assessment tool interview

Based on the first assessment toolkit, Joe was scored at segmentation Level 4 (Foundation work required before employment services):

Closer to work (0 of 8)	Further from work (8 of 8)
	Employment experience
	Education and training
	Literacy and numeracy
	Computer skills
	Access to information
	Independent travel
	Explaining vision
	Motivation

7.3.3 Interpreting the first assessment – EC judgement

Joe's EC felt that Level 4 was an accurate level. His EC summed up the situation as follows:

> "Joe has not worked for the last seventeen years and so we have to start right from scratch with him. Just getting out of the house for Joe is a big deal; he has both mobility and weight issues that complicate this process. We need to go back to basics and at first take pigeon steps in order for Joe to move forward."

At the time of the first assessment, Joe had no idea about the kind of work he could do: "I am really baffled by what I can do and that I cannot see very well and see this as a big stumbling block."

7.3.4 Key ENABLER project interventions

After the initial assessment Joe and his EC agreed the following targets:

- Careers guidance interview to establish possible future employment areas.
- Focus on literacy and numeracy skills and pre-employment skills.
- Identify residential pre-employment courses at specialist colleges for people with sight loss.
- Arrange visits and organise funding.

Over the time of the ENABLER project, the following summarises the specific interventions undertaken (and related outcomes):

- Joe applied for a place on a six-month residential pre-employment course at two specialist colleges.
- Joe's EC spent considerable time and energy securing visits to both colleges. This proved extremely difficult, due to Joe's on-going health problems, mobility issues and confidence.
- Joe attended an open day at one college, where they expressed serious concerns about whether Joe could cope with a six-month residential course (mainly due to his lack of mobility). The college agreed that Joe could complete an application and sit an assessment, although he did not take this any further.
- Joe attended an open day at the other specialist college, where Joe was actively discouraged from applying due to his mobility difficulties, lack of IT skills and literacy and numeracy concerns.

Computer skills:

- IT assessment at the local society, which identified Guide as a suitable IT programme for Joe.
- Secure IT training at the local society, supplemented by home study.
- Obtain a copy of Guide (purchased or borrowed) to allow Joe to study at home.

7.3.5 Second assessment tool interview

Based on the second assessment toolkit, Joe was scored at segmentation Level 4 (Foundation work required before employment services)

Closer to work (0 of 8)	Further from work (8 of 8)
	Employment experience
	Education and training
	Literacy and numeracy
	Computer skills
	Access to information
	Independent travel
	Explaining vision
	Motivation

Therefore, Joe did not move closer to employment overall (both first and second assessments scored Joe at Level 4). Joe did not move closer to work in any specific categories between the first and second assessments.

7.3.6 Interpreting the second assessment – EC judgement

Joe's EC agreed that Joe had remained at level 4. Joe's EC did not feel that Joe had moved forward during the project, although Joe himself said the project had been helpful. Joe acknowledged however that he required a great deal more support if he is to return to employment. Joe's EC felt that he needs basic skills training and an assessment from a specialist college. Joe also needed intensive support over a sustained period, including counselling, as Joe revealed that he suffered from depression whilst part of the project. By the project's close Joe's EC had identified his lack of mobility as a key factor. She encouraged Joe to contact his GP about his mobility, as this is likely to hamper Joe's attempts to become independent in the future if left unchecked.

7.4 Wanda

7.4.1 Background information

The ENABLER project team met Wanda during the first trial of the assessment toolkit in 2011. At the first assessment in 2011, Wanda was scored at segmentation Level 3. However, this was revised by her EC to Level 4. Wanda was 24 at that time and had been unemployed for eight years. She is registered blind, having developed glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy at the age of 20. Wanda presented as someone who did not want to be seen as someone "who was blind" and so was not using any mobility aids or seeking ways to compensate for her sight loss. Wanda said at the time of her first interview that she wanted advice with disclosing her sight loss to potential employers.

At the second interview (during the first trial of the toolkit), Wanda was scored at segmentation Level 3 once again. However, her EC felt that Wanda's situation had changed considerably in the six months they had been working together and that she was actually at Level 2. Wanda was doing very little at the time of the first assessment, but by the end of the first trial was:

- volunteering two days per week as an administrator
- applying to have a guide dog
- undertaking regular job search
- enrolled on a one year part-time college course to gain formal IT and office skills qualifications.

The project team felt that working with Wanda in the second major research phase would allow the team to measure her progress. Wanda seemed an ideal candidate for the new pre-employment programme being trialled during this phase of the project. However, by the time of her first assessment during the second research phase, Wanda was no longer volunteering and had decided against applying for a guide dog. Her IT course had also come to an end.

7.4.2 First assessment tool interview

Based upon the first assessment toolkit, Wanda was scored at segmentation level 2b (Nearly work ready (further)):

Closer to work (5 of 8)	Further from work (3 of 8)
Education and training	Employment experience
Literacy and numeracy	Independent travel
Computer skills	Explaining vision
Access to information	
Motivation	

7.4.3 Interpreting the first assessment – EC judgement

Wanda's EC felt that Wanda was really at Level 3. This assessment was based on Wanda's lack of knowledge of the current labour market and relevant work experience at that time. Wanda also lacked mobility skills and independent living skills, and needed support in explaining her sight loss and possible adjustments. Crucially in the ECs view, Wanda was reluctant to acknowledge her sight loss to the outside world.

7.4.4 Key ENABLER project interventions

After the initial assessment Wanda and her EC agreed the following targets:

- Participation in the newly designed pre-employment programme also being trialled during this phase of the project. It was hoped that Wanda would benefit from participating in a structured learning environment and from the routine of weekly attendance.
- Independent travel to and from the course venue, held at a local society 12 miles from Wanda's home.
- Create a list of local launderettes in the area and produce a speculative letter to be sent to retail outlets identified.
- Research visual aids to help her see labels on clothes and chemicals.
- Secure relevant volunteer placement in a launderette to support Wanda's aim to work in this field.
- Find out as much as possible about Access to Work in the area of visual aids.

Over the course of the ENABLER project, the following summarises the specific interventions undertaken (and related outcomes):

Job search skills:

- Wanda participated in the pre-employment course, although there were issues with her attendance and behaviour. Wanda's EC provided counselling support during the course to help Wanda to understand her role and responsibilities to others on the course. Wanda appeared to benefit from this intervention by her EC and her motivation improved considerably.
- Wanda took part in the filming of the pre-employment programme as part of the project. Wanda proved thoughtful and articulate, and enjoyed the experience hugely.

Independent travel:

- Wanda's EC devised a bus route to enable Wanda to travel independently to the course. Wanda's EC accompanied her on the first journey in order to support Wanda to become familiar with the route and the procedure for changing buses.
- Employment experience:
- Towards the end of the trial Wanda found paid work at a dry cleaner, working 16 hours per week over three days.
- Support in applying for Access to Work, ensuring Wanda had a taxi organised to take her to and from work.

7.4.5 Second assessment tool interview

Wanda did not complete a second assessment toolkit as she found part-time, paid employment towards the end of the project. Wanda's EC made the following observations on Wanda's time with the project. She felt it was hard to engage with Wanda as she only saw her during the pre- employment course. Therefore any one-to-one support she may have benefitted from as part of the project was never utilised.

Wanda's EC reflected on the difficult conversation she had with Wanda halfway through the course, and hoped that Wanda had found it helpful.

> "I believe the PEP programme helped her, not about how to fill an application form but how to fit in, behave appropriately alongside other people. Disclosing her disability and the disability statement were really important to Wanda. She went to the interview 'prepared', and she took the leaflet about access to work, which made all the difference."

Interestingly, Wanda did not want any further support with mobility once she had found work and did not want the EC to contact her employer to discuss any adaptations in the workplace.

7.5 Steve

7.5.1 Background information

Steve was recruited on the ENABLER project whilst working with Action as part of the Work Choice programme (the government welfare to work scheme designed to support people with disabilities). Steve had worked with Action's employment team previously, that is before working with Action under Work Choice, but at that time his EC felt he "lacked motivation and failed to engage in correspondence". However, he proved to be sufficiently motivated whilst on Work Choice for his EC to recommend him as a suitable participant in the ENABLER project.

Steve is his father's main carer, as he has many health issues. Steve has given up paid employment in order to be his sole carer since his father's divorce. Steve says that he has been "struggling to hold his family life together and doing lots of tasks that he is not really able to do due to his sight".

Steve is registered partially sighted but travels independently with confidence. He has a qualification in IT and graphic design and would like to work in web design, although he has never been employed in this field. He has provided some basic web design advice for one or two people free of charge.

7.5.2 First assessment tool interview

Based upon the first assessment toolkit, Steve was scored at segmentation Level 2a (Nearly work ready (closer)):

Closer to work (7 of 8)	Further from work (1 of 8)
Employment experience	Education and training
Literacy and numeracy	
Computer skills	
Access to information	
Independent travel	
Explaining vision	
Motivation	

7.5.3 Interpreting the first assessment – EC judgement

Steve's EC did not agree with the segmentation level generated by the assessment toolkit; instead she felt that at the time of the first assessment Steve was at Level 2b or even Level 3. The ECs assessment was based on Steve's desire to work in web design. His EC felt that initially Steve needed to acquire some relevant work experience in this challenging field. He also needed support in how to request adjustments and speaking positively about his skills to employers, irrespective of his sight loss. Steve's role as main carer for his father could also inhibit his work aspirations.

7.5.4 Key ENABLER project interventions

After the initial assessment Steve and his EC agreed the following targets:

- Participation in the newly designed pre-employment programme also being trialled during this phase of the project. It was hoped that Steve would benefit from participating in a structured learning environment and from the routine of weekly attendance.
- Identify 10 local web design companies.
- Create a speculative letter to be sent to identify employers.
- Job search and job analysis.
- Write a fortnightly diary documenting his experiences on the project.

Over the time of the ENABLER project, the following summarises the specific interventions undertaken (and related outcomes):

Job search skills:

- Steve participated in the pre-employment programme, although his attendance was intermittent. He was present for about 50 per cent of the sessions.

One-to-one support:

- Steve's EC provided contact details of organisations that could support him with his caring duties (that is social services support teams).

Employment experience:

- Steve focused on becoming a self-employed web designer as the project evolved. The EC secured funding to buy business cards and supported Steve to set up his own website and email address. He also produced leaflets promoting his services.

- Steve began receiving support from Seetec as part of the Work Programme.
- Steve applied for several jobs and by the end of the project had found paid work. He was employed full-time for a computer company as a logistics operative.

7.5.5 Second assessment tool interview

Based on the second assessment toolkit, Steve was scored at segmentation Level 1 (Work ready):

Closer to work (8 of 8)	Further from work (0 of 8)
Employment experience	
Education and training	
Literacy and numeracy	
Computer skills	
Access to information	
Independent travel	
Explaining vision	
Motivation	

Steve moved closer to work by jumping one segmentation level, according to the second assessment tool. At the first interview Steve was scored at Level 2a, but at the second interview he was scored at Level 1. Steve moved closer to work in one specific category; education and training. The second assessment was completed after Steve had secured employment, and was understandably very positive about his skills and abilities. Of course, the most obvious marker that Steve moved closer to work was the fact he found full-time paid employment in his chosen field.

7.5.6 Interpreting the second assessment – EC judgement

Steve's EC was delighted that Steve had found paid work. However, the EC was not convinced that Steve had removed all of the challenges he faced in finding work/being employed in the way the second assessment suggested.

For example, at the second assessment interview Steve said that he felt comfortable discussing his sight loss with his employer and explaining his needs in terms of adjustments. However, when asked by his EC Steve confessed that

he had not disclosed his sight loss to his current employer. Steve felt that he was able to do the job without adjustments, and therefore did not want to draw attention to his sight loss. His EC discussed with Steve what he would do if he was asked to undertake different duties; Steve explained that he would disclose his sight loss at that time.

7.6 Roy

7.6.1 Background information

Roy was referred to Action by his Disability Employment Adviser (DEA) in 2011 and signed on to the Work Choice programme. He had worked in a factory under the supported employment scheme for over 30 years but was made redundant in 2011. Roy's partner died from cancer in the months leading up to redundancy, which was both traumatic and unsettling for him. Roy's partner was fully sighted and therefore provided support with shopping, travel, dealing with correspondence, and all other aspects of domestic life. This was especially important for Roy, who has no sight and is registered blind. Roy was 56 years old at the time of the first assessment, and had only ever worked in a supported employment environment. His work skills were therefore confined to light packing. He is able to use Guide so he can order his groceries and email friends, which appear to be his main social activity. Roy exited from Work Choice before working with the ENABLER team.

7.6.2 First assessment tool interview

Based on the first assessment toolkit, Roy was scored at segmentation Level 3 (Longer term support needed):

Closer to work (2 of 8)	Further from work (6 of 8)
Employment experience	Education and training
Access to information	Literacy and numeracy
	Computer skills
	Independent travel
	Explaining vision
	Motivation

7.6.3 Interpreting the first assessment – EC judgement

Roy's EC felt that Level 3 was an accurate level. Roy's EC felt that the priority for Roy was stabilising his home environment. He was unable to deal with correspondence or to keep his home environment clean. Roy did not travel outside his house independently and required 100 per cent support in most daily tasks. His EC felt that Roy would need a basic skills assessment as a starting point in relation to employment.

7.6.4 Key ENABLER project interventions

After the initial assessment Roy and his EC agreed the following targets:

- Arrange 10 hours per week support worker provision, focusing on practical support in the home and social activities to reduce his isolation.
- Support Roy in his Disability Living Allowance (DEA) appeal.
- Record ENABLER experiences by email.
- Seek voluntary work opportunities, in particular re: Befriending service and/or local hospice.
- Pursue option to demonstrate Guide to others with sight loss via local society.
- Application for Blue Badge.
- Meet with rehabilitation worker and complete a needs assessment.

Over the time of the ENABLER project, the following summarises the specific interventions undertaken (and related outcomes):

Independent living:

- Securing 10 hours per week support worker provision, which made a tremendous difference to Roy's confidence and ability to cope on a daily basis.
- Successful Roy's DLA appeal.

Employment experience:

- Roy secured a volunteer placement with a befriending service called Listening Post. At the time of the project's closure Roy was awaiting induction training.
- A great deal of work went into securing a teaching role for Roy with the local society. Unfortunately this idea had not been taken forward by the close of the research phase.

Independent travel:

- Roy's application for a Blue Badge was successful.

7.6.5 Second assessment tool interview

Based upon the second assessment toolkit, Roy was scored at segmentation Level 4 (Foundation work required before employment services):

Closer to work (1 of 8)	Further from work (7 of 8)
Access to information	Employment experience
	Education and training
	Literacy and numeracy
	Computer skills
	Independent travel
	Explaining vision
	Motivation

Roy had therefore moved further away from employment overall. At the first assessment Roy was scored at Level 3 but at the second assessment this had changed to Level 4. Roy moved further from work in the category "employment experience" between the first and second assessment. Roy had recently lost his job at the time of the first assessment. As he had not found work by the time of the second assessment, this extra period unemployed meant he scored further from work in this category.

7.6.6 Interpreting the second assessment – EC judgement

Roy's EC felt that Roy had made considerable progress, and was now at Level 2b. This represented a jump of one segmentation level from the first assessment, and two levels compared to the second assessment. Roy's EC felt the descriptors in segmentation Level 2b offered a more accurate summation of Roy's situation by the end of this phase:

- greater support over a longer period to plug gaps in history and skills
- need to do voluntary-work/skills training
- receive greater support to make applications and prepare for work.

Roy's EC believed that fundamental to Roy's progress was obtaining a personal assistant, which enabled him to feel secure in his home life. The personal assistant was able to deal with official correspondence, finances, washing, cleaning and even help with organising social activities. This allowed Roy to focus on employment issues. Roy's progress also sprang from attending two

interviews for voluntary work, which led to a commitment to the principle of volunteering as the first on the road back to employment.

These areas of improvement were not specifically screened, but represent Roy's ECs interpretation of his progress. At the time the research phase closed, Roy still had very restricted independent mobility, limited access to web/print-based job vacancies, and limited job-skills due to 35 years in supported employment.

> "a great deal has been achieved through the time we've been able to give through the research, and the relationship that's developed between us which perhaps now would enable Roy to feel more confident generally. It seems to be more the feeling of working closely with Roy over this period, and the segmentation descriptors, rather than the specific screening tool questions that have influenced the change in levels."

7.6.7 Postscript

Two months after Roy's left the project, his EC supported Roy to attend two training days at the Sight Concern. He completed his volunteer induction, including training in providing emotional support and in supporting vulnerable adults. Roy also received My Guide training; he is supporting individuals receiving sighted-guide training by acting as the person who needs guiding, and then giving feedback on their performance.

Two clients have been referred to Roy in his role with Listening Post; both of whom he supports on a weekly basis. Roy says that he's "getting on well"; he told his volunteer co-ordinator at Sight Concern that he feels sufficiently confident in his new role to take on additional clients if necessary.

Roy was also introduced to the IT/access technology club, and to a man considering investing in Dolphin Guide for his home computer. This resulted in Roy experiencing a "short taster" in delivering one-to-one speech software sessions. Roy is now attending the Sight Concern IT club on a weekly basis, where he has been given a quiet room in which he can offer demonstrations and basic training for anyone interested in Dolphin Guide.

The last time Roy's EC spoke with him, Roy sounded confident in both roles and very happy with his new weekly routine.

7.7 Kelly

7.7.1 Background information

Kelly began working with the project during the first research phase in 2011. Like Roy, she had worked in a factory under the supported employment scheme for over 30 years but was made redundant in 2011. She is 53 years old and registered blind. Kelly cannot read print or braille and has no computer skills. She has very basic independent living skills, few disability-specific skills and no means of independently searching for work. She lives with her parents, who provide most of Kelly's support and daily structure. Kelly is keen to work, but only has experience of light packing work. Kelly would need to develop new skills and according to her EC would require "an empathetic and understanding employer".

At her first assessment during the first research phase Kelly was scored at segmentation Level 4 (Foundation work required before employment services). Kelly's EC agreed with this assessment at that time. A second assessment was not completed as Kelly was unwell.

7.7.2 First assessment tool interview

Based upon the first assessment toolkit, Kelly was scored at segmentation Level 3 (Longer term support needed):

Closer to work (2 of 8)	Further from work (6 of 8)
Employment experience	Education and training
Motivation	Literacy and numeracy
	Computer skills
	Access to information
	Independent travel
	Explaining vision

7.7.3 Interpreting the first assessment – EC judgement

Kelly's EC felt that Level 3 was an accurate level. Kelly was keen to return to work, but according to her EC has little idea of the current labour market. Kelly was hoping to work in a factory doing manual packing, but this work is increasingly rare. Kelly's EC, fully supported by the research team, felt that a residential placement at a specialist college for blind and partially sighted

people would be the most appropriate course of action. However, coming to terms with living away for six months was likely to prove challenging for Kelly and her parents.

7.7.4 Key ENABLER project interventions

After the initial assessment Kelly and her EC agreed the following targets:

Independent Living/Mobility/Basic Skills:

- Visit the specialist college and decide on whether to complete the assessment process.
- Enlist the support of Kelly's parents in pursuing a residential course, including practical support with completing application forms and visits to the college.
- Attend local society group to build confidence and social networks.
- Record ENABLER experiences.

Computer skills:

- Continue to attend IT training at the local society each week to build access technology skills.
- Visit local FE college open day with a view to further IT training.
- Attend Non-Visual Desktop Access drop-in session each week with support from parents.

Independent travel:

- Contact local society to source training using My Guide.

Employment experience:

- Arrange visit to Volunteer Action to assess suitability of local volunteer opportunities.

Over the time of the ENABLER project, the following summarises the specific interventions undertaken (and related outcomes):

- Working with Kelly's parents on the emotional and practical consequences of Kelly attending a specialist six-month residential placement.
- Attending an open day at Loughborough College in order to assess her suitability to enrol on the pre-employment course, which includes basic skills training in computer skills, mobility and independent living.
- Kelly and her parents were encouraged by the visit and the reaction of the college. They decided to continue with the application process.

- Kelly attended an assessment at the college, but was not accepted. Kelly was asked to improve her skills in specific areas – independent living skills, computer skills and mobility – which mirrored those identified by the employment assessment toolkit.
- Kelly started a self-taught touch-typing course at home.
- Kelly began visiting the local society on a regular basis, improving her confidence and social networks.
- My Guide training was not available in Kelly's area.
- Contact with the sensory support team at Bedfordshire Central Council. At the time the project ended Kelly was awaiting a full assessment from the team.

7.7.5 Second assessment tool interview

Based on the second assessment toolkit, Kelly was scored at segmentation Level 4 (Foundation work required before employment services)

Closer to work (1 of 8)	Further from work (7 of 8)
Motivation	Employment experience
	Education and training
	Literacy and numeracy
	Computer skills
	Access to information
	Independent travel
	Explaining vision

Kelly moved further away from the labour market according to the assessment toolkit. At the first assessment Kelly was scored at Level 3 but at the second assessment this had changed to Level 4. Kelly moved further from work in the category 'employment experience' between the first and second assessment. Kelly had recently lost her job at the time of the first assessment. As she did not find work by the time of the second assessment, this extra period unemployed meant she scored further from work in this category.

7.7.6 Interpreting the second assessment – EC judgement

Kelly's EC agreed that Kelly was now at Level 4. This is how Kelly's EC analysed the shift from Level 3 to Level 4:

> Crucially, Kelly scored highly in the area of motivation; her willingness to take reasonable steps and the importance of paid employment. Over the course of this phase it became evident that although there is no doubting Kelly's honesty, she struggles to understand the implications of these statements [that is willingness to take reasonable steps] and to make things happen without support from others. In other words, to fully consider how she can progress; how she can access anywhere independently and access any form of meaningful information (both due to sight loss and basic skills needs). These challenges fit with the descriptors contained within Level 4 – "faces multiple barriers, lack of literacy and numeracy, little or no information technology or access technology skills." This evidence was reinforced by the RNIB College assessment which identified matching barriers.
>
> No doubt, Kelly is better placed for the work of ENABLER; she attends IT and Access Technology classes weekly, has social contact via the local society, and will be considered for a Local Council Needs Assessment. Again, this matches the descriptors for a person at Level 4; "potential customer of wider services such as independent living and welfare advice, rather then employment, but may then be better placed to seek work in the future". Kelly would love to achieve paid employment within a similar environment and job-role to the supported employment factory where she previously worked, but has no means of comprehending the difference between that and the pressures and skills demanded in open employment. For now, Kelly is content to have increased her social interaction and to maintain her current domestic routine.

7.8 Dan

7.8.1 Background information

Dan is 49 years old and is registered blind. He has NVQ level one and two qualifications in Business Administration, Customer Services and Radio Broadcasting Law. Dan had two periods of employment, from 1997–2001 and again in 2010. He currently volunteers for a local radio station and also undertook a brief period of voluntary administration work with Action.

Dan has been supported by Action on several occasions in the past, most recently as part of Work Choice. He attended Finding your Feet – Steps to Employment in 2011, and has voluntarily attended Work Focus sessions since 2012. These sessions are open to blind and partially sighted people and cover a wide range of employment related issues, including: volunteering, welfare benefits, Access to Work, exploration of local employability courses and an introduction to job readiness and motivation.

7.8.2 First assessment tool interview

Based upon the first assessment toolkit, Dan was scored at segmentation Level 3 (Longer term support needed):

Closer to work (2 of 8)	Further from work (6 of 8)
Literacy and numeracy	Employment experience
Access to information	Education and training
	Computer skills
	Independent travel
	Explaining vision
	Motivation

7.8.3 Interpreting the first assessment – EC judgement

Dan's EC felt Level 3 was an accurate level. "It worked really well for Dan and I think it's very accurate. It also gives some very clear areas on which to work." At the time of the first assessment Dan said that he would like to work in radio, but would also accept administration or customer services work.

7.8.4 Key ENABLER project interventions

After the initial assessment Dan and his EC agreed the following targets:

- Develop a volunteer role for Dan within Action.
- Exploring job roles in Action.
- Refreshing Dan's literacy and numeracy skills.
- JAWS training with Dan's EC.
- Explore skills around spreadsheets and databases.
- Developing links with Insight Radio.
- Meet with Working Links to get a local picture of employment opportunities.

Over the time of the ENABLER project, the following summarises the specific interventions undertaken (and related outcomes).

Computer skills:

- One-to-one JAWS training with Dan's EC, including a series of speed tests to improve Dan's computer skills.
- Independent JAWS training at the new IT centre at Action Bristol from September 2012.
- Completion of a fortnightly diary summarising Dan's experiences and feelings as part of the ENABLER research project.

Employment experience:

- Attendance at regular Work Focus sessions, focusing on a range of employment related issues.
- A visit to Insight Radio, which resulted in Dan presenting a feature on the ENABLER project, including an interview with a project team member.
- Participation in filming for a DVD, highlighting the work of the ENABLER project.
- Teaching social work student Grade 1 braille.
- Volunteer role with Action completing customer service questionnaires, after role-play training and familiarisation with paperwork.

Literacy and numeracy:

- Literacy and numeracy training.

Independent travel:

- Dan learnt how to travel independently to his meetings in Bristol using public transport, through the support of his EC.
- This work was supplemented by independent mobility training.

7.8.5 Second assessment tool interview

Based on the second assessment toolkit, Dan was scored at segmentation Level 2b (Nearly work ready (further):

Closer to work (4 of 8)	Further from work (4 of 8)
Literacy and numeracy	Employment experience
Access to information	Education and training
Independent travel	Computer skills
Explaining vision	Motivation

Dan moved closer to work by jumping one level according to the assessment toolkit. At the first assessment Dan was scored at Level 3 but at the second assessment this had changed to Level 2b. Dan moved closer to work in two specific categories; independent travel and explaining vision.

7.8.6 Interpreting the second assessment – EC judgement

Dan's EC agreed that Dan was now at Level 2b. Dan and his EC established a follow-up action plan once the project had ended:

Computer training:

- Dan to continue with computer training at the IT centre at Action Bristol.

Employment experience:

- Dan to pursue his plan to volunteer with Insight Radio.
- Dan to apply for a volunteer role with Action completing Customer Service Questionnaire's. A new role profile was in development at the time this action plan was drawn up. Dan would practice completing CSQ's at home as preparation.

Independent travel:

- Investigate the possibility of further mobility training.

7.9 Jerry

7.9.1 Background information

Jerry was recruited to the project as a replacement for another client (see Thelma profile), although eventually the other person continued with the project. However, by this stage Jerry had already completed an initial assessment and so his EC agreed to continue supporting Jerry. This meant Jerry was only part of the project for four months, compared to eight months for most other clients.

Jerry lives with his wife and child. He completed a Diploma HNC in Law in 2000 and is a confident using assistive technology. He has an Apple Mac, a CCTV reader, and electronic magnifier. Jerry was previously employed in administration but has not worked for 14 years. Jerry gained experience of advice work through volunteering and training with Citizens Advice Bureau in 2001. Jerry has sight loss through diabetic retinopathy and is now registered as partially sighted. Jerry travels independently with a guide dog in his local area, and is confident using public transport.

He is worried however by his decreasing sight and subsequent vulnerability; and also how his sight loss is perceived by others. He is struggling to overcome barriers presented by the accumulative effects of sight loss, lack of relevant skills, a loss of confidence and poverty.

7.9.2 First assessment tool interview

Based on the first assessment toolkit, Jerry was scored at segmentation Level 3 (Longer term support needed):

Closer to work (2 of 8)	Further from work (6 of 8)
Literacy and numeracy	Employment experience
Access to information	Education and training
	Computer skills
	Independent travel
	Explaining vision
	Motivation

7.9.3 Interpreting the first assessment – EC judgement

Jerry's EC felt that Level 3 was an accurate level. At the time of the first assessment Jerry had not been in employment for 15 years; as a consequence of his deteriorating vision. He was keen to improve his knowledge of law, in the hope of eventually finding work as a legal executive or similar. Local job opportunities in Cornwall are very limited and competition is high, so Jerry was aware of the need to upgrade his skills, qualifications and confidence levels if he was to compete in this environment. He was researching higher education courses at a local college as the first step. Jerry also understood the importance of volunteering in his chosen field; and how this would improve his confidence, knowledge and add to his CV.

7.9.4 Key ENABLER project interventions

After the initial assessment Jerry and his EC agreed the following targets:

Employment experience:

- Source suitable volunteer placement.

Job search skills:

- Prepare CV.

Target job:

- Source training in law, relevant to Jerry's chosen field of work, including appropriate level of qualification.
- Ensure appropriate course(s) make adequate provision for his guide dog and address any issues.

Computer skills:

- Write ENABLER diary.
- Practice letter writing/speculative letters, including applying for volunteer placements.

Over the time of the ENABLER project, the following summarises the specific interventions undertaken (and related outcomes):

- Jerry enrolled on module one of the Certificate of Personnel Development (CPD) at a local college. The CPD course is made up of three modules of ten weeks each over one year. Jerry was to consider enrolling on the remaining modules once he had completed the first module. Completing the course in full would give Jerry 60 points/credits or the equivalent of quarter of a foundation degree.

7.9.5 Second assessment tool interview

Jerry did not complete a second assessment, and withdrew from the project through illness before he could take up his place at college. The place was held open, in the hope that Jerry recovers sufficiently to begin the first module. Despite being unable to start college, Jerry's EC felt that Jerry had benefitted from the project. She offered the following analysis:

> "As soon as Jerry had signed up for the project, he seemed to adopt a 'can-do' attitude. He contributed to the [local] social networking 'vip google' group and benefitted from some good advice from other blind and partially sighted people. He offered tentative invites to some of these people, along with family and guide dogs, to meet up at a café. This has now developed into a regular monthly meeting that Jerry organises. With his current illness, this is undoubtedly a tremendous source of support for Jerry.
>
> Jerry was thrilled to have been accepted on to the CPD course, who provided relevant support for himself and his guide dog with no fuss. Jerry was also impressed that the college had kept open his place. By being a part of the project Jerry has had 'a glimmer of hope.' He was able to discuss his aims and work out a way forward. The structure the project offered gave him the confidence to make decisions that led to an improvement in his overall well-being."

7.10 Thelma

7.10.1Background information

Thelma is a single parent who is registered blind. She has congenital sight loss with no sight in her right eye and 40 per cent in her left eye. Prior to 2006 she had volunteered as a teaching assistant and telephonist but has never had paid employment. Thelma gained in-house qualifications in Spoken English and telephone/switchboard operating at a specialist college. She has basic IT skills which are self-taught and Thelma can use email. Thelma travels independently to familiar places but does not travel well in darkness or unfamiliar places.

Thelma has been using Action's employment services since July 2011. She has been reluctant to undertake additional training or volunteering, and withdrew from a number of volunteer opportunities. She did however take a volunteer placement at Age Concern in early 2012 but left when she struggled to get on with the supervisor.

7.10.2 First assessment tool interview

Based upon the first assessment toolkit, Thelma was scored at segmentation level 3 (Longer term support required):

Closer to work (3 of 8)	Further from work (5 of 8)
Access to information	Employment experience
Explaining vision	Education and training
Motivation	Literacy and numeracy
	Computer skills
	Independent travel

7.10.3 Interpreting the first assessment – EC judgement

Thelma's EC felt that Level 3 was an accurate level. Thelma has good computer skills which were mainly self-taught but she has not had a formal IT assessment. Thelma has never had paid employment and her experience of volunteering has not been successful. Thelma lacks confidence and left her volunteer placement after an allegation of bullying. This affected her belief in volunteering as a stepping stone towards employment. Thelma said herself at the first assessment that she needs "longer term support."

Thelma has other health problems, which affect her mobility and ability to stand/sit for any length of time. She also lives in an area of high unemployment, with a particularly high level of unskilled job seekers. Thelma wanted to work as a telephonist but appreciates that her skills and qualifications were not relevant in the current job market. Thelma was pessimistic about her chances of finding paid employment.

7.10.4 Key ENABLER project interventions

After the initial assessment Thelma and her EC agreed the following targets:

- Find a suitable volunteer placement.
- Investigate additional training to support Thelma's chosen employment area.
- Attend First Aid in Workplace course.
- Attend literacy and numeracy assessment at local college.
- Identify computer training and back to work skills course, although Thelma resistant to further study.

Over the time of the ENABLER project, the following summarises the specific interventions undertaken (and related outcomes):

Employment experience:

- Thelma and her EC concentrated on finding a suitable volunteer work placement.
- Thelma secured a volunteer placement at a supported housing project, as a receptionist. She worked two days per week and was made to feel very welcome. The manager organised a larger computer monitor and for telephone numbers to be printed in large format. The housing project paid for Thelma to travel to and from the workplace by taxi.

Education and training:

- Thelma took a literacy and numeracy assessment at the local college, scoring at entry level 3. Thelma was initially keen to register for a course, but decided to concentrate on her voluntary work for the time being.

One-to-one support

- Thelma's EC carried out a great deal of work with Thelma on a one-to-one basis. Using selected pre-employment training modules, Thelma worked through the activities and talked in depth with her EC about the many issues they raised.

7.10.5 Second assessment tool interview

Based upon the second assessment toolkit, Thelma was scored at segmentation Level 2a (Nearly work ready (closer)):

Closer to work (6 of 8)	Further from work (2 of 8)
Education and training	Employment experience
Literacy and numeracy	Independent travel
Computer skills	
Access to information	
Explaining vision	
Motivation	

Thelma moved closer to work by jumping two levels according to the assessment toolkit. At the first assessment Thelma was scored at Level 3, but at the second assessment this had changed to Level 2a. Thelma moved closer to work in three specific categories; education and training, literacy and numeracy and computer skills.

7.10.6 Interpreting the second assessment – EC judgement

Thelma's EC agreed that Thelma was now at Level 2a. Thelma's EC felt that Thelma was difficult to engage initially, and she spent several frustrating months unable to move forward with any of the planned activities. The ENABLER project manager and Thelma's EC took the decision to withdraw Thelma from the project, due to her apparent lack of commitment. For whatever reason this event proved cathartic, and having decided to continue working with Thelma, there was a marked change in Thelma's commitment.

Thelma began searching for voluntary work, often on her own initiative and using her own resources, that is her computer and the internet. This resulted in a marked improvement in her computer skills and overall confidence. Thelma secured interviews at several organisations and found an ideal placement with the housing project.

The volunteer placement with the housing project provided Thelma with relevant work experience. The employer and work environment was fully supportive, and recognised Thelma's capabilities; encouraging her to expand her role and develop her skills. This greatly affected Thelma's morale and confidence.

At the close of the research phase Thelma remained fully committed to her volunteering role, treating it very much like paid employment.

Thelma acknowledged that she had a tendency to be confrontational in stressful situations. But her experiences over the last six months have contributed to an improvement in her reactions. Thelma says that completing first aid training, attending literacy assessments and attending interviews for volunteer roles has increased her confidence, which helps her in difficult situations.

7.10.7 Postscript

Thelma has been shortlisted for a customer service award by the supported housing project. She is due to attend a national event and has been told to have acceptance speech ready just in case she wins!

7.11 Susan

7.11.1 Background information

Susan is 22 years old and is registered blind. She attended a specialist school for people with sight loss and left in 2010. Susan has not had a paid or volunteer position before and doesn't attend any activities or commitments during the week. Susan has suffered from depression since her early teens and is on medication, which can make her feel lethargic. She has previously attended counselling.

Susan's EC met with Susan on a couple of occasions before completing the initial assessment interview. They put together a CV and identified some voluntary opportunities. Susan was also booked on a free counselling taster course. Susan did not follow up any of these opportunities, citing a lack of confidence in doing this "on her own". Susan is worried about how she will be perceived by sighted people and is not confident in using public transport. Susan usually asks her partner to book taxis on her behalf as she is nervous about making calls.

7.11.2 First assessment tool interview

Based upon the first assessment toolkit, Susan was scored at segmentation Level 3 (Longer term support required):

Closer to work (2 of 8)	Further from work (6 of 8)
Literacy and numeracy	Employment experience
Access to information	Education and training
	Computer skills
	Independent travel
	Explaining vision
	Motivation

7.11.3 Interpreting the first assessment – EC judgement

Susan's EC felt that Level 3 was an accurate level. The assessment identified several important areas to work on, such as gaining employment experience and improving Susan's ability to travel independently. Susan's lack of confidence and struggle with depression were also important issues to emerge from the initial assessment.

At the time of the first assessment Susan wanted to “work with people”, perhaps as a nursery assistant, a receptionist or as a counsellor. Susan realised that gaining some practical experience would improve her chances of success, as she had only one week’s work experience from college to draw upon. Susan was also aware that nursery assistant or counselling positions required specific training and qualifications.

7.11.14 Key ENABLER project interventions

After the initial assessment Susan and her EC agreed the following targets:

- Participation in the newly designed pre-employment programme, which was being trialled in Susan’s area. Susan felt this would help her to develop a routine and pattern to her day, and would build her confidence.
- Assist Susan with travelling to pre-employment course venue until she feels confident travelling independently.
- Attend Volunteer Services to discuss current volunteering opportunities and visit potential placements.
- Complete careers assessment tool; looking at different job profiles, what they involve, and the training requirements to help clarify Susan’s employment goals and future plans.
- Apply to attend an introduction to counselling course.
- Introduce Susan to local resource centre to look at other vision aids and gadgets (equipment that will be useful in work place).
- Investigate local social groups and introduce Susan where suitable.

Over the course of the ENABLER project, the following summarises the specific interventions undertaken (and related outcomes):

Job search skills:

- Susan participated in the pre-employment programme on a regular basis and said that she learnt a great deal.

Employment experience:

- Susan took a volunteer role in administration with Action, overseen by her EC.
- Susan and her EC attended an interview at a rape crisis centre in the hope of additional voluntary work.
- Attended interview with West of England School and College.
- Independent travel:

- Susan organised taxis so that she was able to travel to her volunteer placement independently and planned a public transport route to the office (that is without the assistance of her partner).
- Susan planned her own travel arrangements to the pre-employment course by bus.
- Susan planned and completed a public transport route to the crisis centre.
- The above work was supported by a local mobility officer.

Motivation:

- Susan had weekly meetings with her EC to help her with her plans and to maintain routine.

Computer skills:

- Completed a fortnightly diary about her experiences on the project.
- Used a computer, with support from her EC, to complete electronic applications for voluntary roles (including correspondence by email and completing word documents).
- Used a computer to complete careers assessment programme.

7.11.5 Second assessment tool interview

Based upon the second assessment toolkit, Susan scored at segmentation Level 3 (Longer term support required):

Closer to work (2 of 8)	Further from work (6 of 8)
Literacy and numeracy	Employment experience
Access to information	Education and training
	Computer skills
	Independent travel
	Explaining vision
	Motivation

Susan did not move closer to employment overall (both first and second assessments scored Susan at Level 3). Susan did not move closer to work in any specific categories between the first and second assessments. Susan fell pregnant three months before the project closed, which effectively curtailed her

involvement. Whilst Susan stopped volunteering at Action, she continued to attend her evening training sessions at the crisis centre.

7.11.6 Interpreting the second assessment – EC judgement

Susan's EC felt that Susan had made significant progress, and was now at Level 2b. In most categories in the assessment toolkit an improvement had been registered through the scoring system, even if this did not result in a shift to being closer to work in that category. Susan's score in the motivation section decreased, but her EC felt this was realistic based on her personal circumstances.

Susan's confidence increased considerably, improved by her volunteer work at Action and through the training she received at the crisis centre. Susan herself explained that she would feel more confident about attending courses in the future as a result of participating in the pre-employment course. Susan explained that mixing with fully sighted people in her volunteer placements was also important; boosting her confidence in how other people interact with her as a person with sight loss.

Susan also made a noticeable improvement in her organisation and time management skills. At the beginning of the project, Susan often forgot about meetings, resulting in these being cancelled or starting late. Susan and her EC purchased a large print calendar organiser from the local resource centre and Susan's EC taught her to use her phone's calendar function. By teaching Susan how to plan effectively, she became significantly more punctual and prepared for meetings. Susan's EC summed up Susan's progress as follows:

> "I am pleased that the 2nd screening [interview] does capture the progress she made during the time we worked together on ENABLER, which involved her attending the pre-employment programme sessions, volunteering at the office, applying for three volunteer positions, attending three volunteer interviews, undertaking a training course with [the crisis centre], and her contact with the mobility officer."

7.12 Aaron

7.12.1 Background information

Aaron is 49 years old and has been unemployed since 2008. He was referred to RNIB Scotland's Aberdeenshire employment service in December 2011 by adult day services; Aaron has a learning disability. Aaron was registered blind in 1990 although he has experienced sight loss since birth. Aaron's most recent employment was as a caretaker (2007-2008); previously he was employed as a labourer in the fishing industry. He describes this as a very negative experience where he experienced bullying in the workplace, which has had a significant impact on how he feels about work. At the time of recruitment, Aaron was volunteering at an internet café, supported by adult day services.

Aaron's mobility skills are good and he travels independently, asking for directions when required. Aaron lives in an area with good transport links to Aberdeen and the surrounding area, however industry is generally concentrated in more traditional sectors such as fishing, agriculture and the oil industry. The area has one of the highest unemployment rates within the Aberdeenshire Council area.

Aaron has good IT skills but poor literacy skills. He has taken a number of modules in administration and IT subjects between 1997 and 2006. He has also attended courses with RNIB Scotland at the Learning and Development Centre (LDC) in 1996, the Employment and Learning Centre in 2006 and he also participated in a Work Preparation Course.

7.12.2 First assessment tool interview

Based upon the first assessment toolkit, Aaron was scored at segmentation Level 3 (Longer term support needed):

Closer to work (3 of 8)	Further from work (5 of 8)
Access to information	Employment experience
Independent travel	Education and training
Explaining vision	Literacy and numeracy
	Computer skills
	Motivation

7.12.3 Interpreting the first assessment – EC judgement

Aaron's EC felt Level 3 was an accurate level. At the time of the first assessment, Aaron wanted to work in an administration role; however his lack of literacy skills would make this difficult. He has not been involved in active job searching and has limited knowledge of the current labour market. Aaron has a learning disability which may also act as a barrier to his understanding of job search and applying for jobs. Aaron is motivated and well organised with good IT skills, and is keen to move on from attending an adult day centre. However Aaron needs long term support if he is to enter open employment according to his EC.

7.12.4 Key ENABLER project interventions

After the initial assessment Aaron and his EC agreed the following targets:

- Referral to adult literacy support either with Linking Education and Disability (LEAD) Scotland or Aberdeenshire Council Adult Learning Service.
- In-depth exploration of four employment areas Aaron has identified, looking at skills required, and the jobs being advertised.
- Exploring work experience in Aaron's preferred work areas to build current experience and understanding of the roles.
- Confidence building intervention; around how to handle difficult situations, and the steps he can take.

Over the time of the ENABLER project, the following summarises the specific interventions undertaken (and related outcomes):

Employment experience:

- Volunteering position in a warehouse since September 2012.
- Applied for four paid positions and one voluntary position.
- Invited for three interviews plus the interview for the volunteer role.

Literacy and numeracy:

- Skill In-Sight assessment completed over two sessions.
- Attending literacy group with LEAD Scotland once a week.

Job search skills:

- Covering letter template created and saved to Aaron's laptop.
- Updated CV.

- Aaron has registered for email updates on ASDA recruitment website; this intervention is about developing Aaron's knowledge of employer expectations.
- Aaron attended a pre-employment course in Aberdeen. The course ran for six days over two weeks.
- Using voice recorder to record experiences.
- In 2013 Aaron hopes to become involved in the travel training initiative.

7.12.5 Second assessment tool interview

Based upon the second assessment toolkit, Aaron was scored at segmentation Level 3 (Longer term support needed):

Closer to work (3 of 8)	Further from work (5 of 8)
Access to information	Employment experience
Independent travel	Education and training
Explaining vision	Literacy and numeracy
	Computer skills
	Motivation

Aaron did not move closer to employment overall (both first and second assessments scored Aaron at Level 3). Aaron did not move closer to work in any specific categories between the first and second assessments.

7.12.6 Interpreting the second assessment – EC judgement

Aaron's EC agreed that Aaron had remained at Level 3. Nevertheless, in his time on the project Aaron had secured voluntary work and had left adult day services. He was very positive about this move away from a supported employment environment. Aaron successfully applied for a number of posts (passing psychometric tests used by some employers), but was unsuccessful at interview or he withdrew the application because of concerns about travelling.

Aaron continued to work on his writing and spelling skills and agreed that an administration role would require greater competence than he currently possessed. Aaron considered retail work and had an interview volunteering in a charity shop. The research phase closed before he was able to take up this opportunity. Aaron also has a volunteer opportunity to join an initiative to help other people with disabilities to travel independently, using his skills to help

others. Aaron was very positive about this opportunity, but his EC felt he would require ongoing support in this role.

Aaron remained keen to work, but not necessarily paid work as he was concerned about losing his welfare benefits. He was also concerned about his safety; having been mugged in the past he was reluctant to travel in the hours of darkness. Aaron also worried about his understanding and tolerance of other people.

7.13 George

7.13.1 Background information

George was last employed from 2008–2010 as an assistant manager in a charity shop, and he has been in paid employment all of his adult life. George was made redundant in 2010 and self-referred into RNIB Scotland's employment service in 2011. He is registered blind having developed significant sight loss in 2010. George is 55 years old and lives in a very rural location, with public transport restricted to one bus per day. George is isolated and unable to travel alone; he has had no mobility training and relies on his partner (who works full time). George has some basic computer skills but again relies on his partner to access the computer. He has good communication skills; however according to his EC George has struggled to come to terms with his recent sight loss and tends to dwell on his sight condition at length. There are few employment opportunities in his local area and George has found it difficult to believe that he will ever work again.

George's EC had worked with George on his confidence, by focusing on his transferable skills, creating a CV and applying for jobs. George was invited for three interviews but was unsuccessful in each. George completed Adults Directions (a career guidance software package) and undertook some Zoomtext training. George was also referred to the RNIB Welfare Rights team for a comprehensive benefits check.

7.13.2 First assessment tool interview

Based upon the first assessment toolkit, George was scored at segmentation Level 3 (Longer term support needed):

Closer to work (3 of 8)	Further from work (5 of 8)
Literacy and numeracy	Employment experience
Access to information	Education and training
Motivation	Computer skills
	Independent travel
	Explaining vision

7.13.3 Interpreting the first assessment – EC judgement

George's EC felt that he was actually at Level 2b (Nearly work ready (further). George's local employment opportunities are restricted by his rural local. However if he is successful in gaining employment Access to Work (AtW) may provide a solution to this problem by paying for transport to his work location. George also has recent and substantial employment experience.

At the time of the first assessment, George preferred career was in retail management, although he was open to other opportunities. George has substantial experience in this field, although he has few disability-specific skills (for example mobility skills, IT skills) and relies heavily on his family.

7.13.4 Key ENABLER project interventions

After the initial assessment George and his EC agreed the following targets:

- Participation in the pre-employment course also being trialled during this phase of the project. George feels that being part of a group of unemployed people with sight loss would be helpful. He is isolated and has not had an opportunity to meet with others in a similar situation.
- Pursue volunteer opportunities. George's recent job applications and interviews have taken priority, but George is keen to investigate this further to help build his skills and confidence.
- Mobility training, which would allow George to attend meetings with his EC in the Aberdeen Office.
- IT skills training.

Over the time of the ENABLER project, the following summarises the specific interventions undertaken (and related outcomes):

Job search skills:

- Twelve job applications and nine interviews whilst working with the project.
- Recorded experiences working with the project using a voice recorder.
- Attended a pre-employment course in Aberdeen.
- Received interview advice using the STAR model, which is a guidance tool that helps participants to sharpen their responses.
- Undertook extensive interview practice, which improved George's ability to remain focused at interview.

Employment experience:

- Secured volunteer placement at National Trust shop.
- Spent time shadowing an Activities Coordinator (on a voluntary basis), although George chose not to pursue this.
- George delivered a presentation at a national employment conference in Glasgow. George confessed he would not have been able to speak at such an event six months ago.
- Applied to volunteer with for a local hospital radio.
- Attended meetings at two local advocacy centres with a view to volunteering.

Independent travel:

- George received mobility training with an external mobility worker.
- As a result of this training, George travelled to his EC meetings by bus; the first time he had travelled independently since 2010.
- George travelled independently to IT training sessions in Glasgow; 130 miles from his home (see below). He booked assistance from transport staff as required.

Computer skills:

- Attended four IT training sessions.
- George secured funding to purchase Zoomtext and a portable CCTV.

7.13.5 Second assessment tool interview

Based on the second assessment toolkit, George was scored at segmentation Level 2a (Nearly work ready (closer)):

Closer to work (6 of 8)	Further from work (2 of 8)
Education and training	Employment experience
Literacy and numeracy	Independent travel
Computer skills	
Access to information	
Explaining vision	
Motivation	

George moved closer to employment overall, reflected by an upward shift of two levels in the segmentation model. At the first assessment Dan was scored at Level 3, but at the second assessment this had changed to Level 2a. George moved closer to work in three specific categories; education and training, computer skills and explaining vision.

7.13.6 Interpreting the second assessment – EC judgement

George's EC agreed that George was now at Level 2a. George's confidence increased hugely as the project progressed, and by the end he could see himself in employment. This played out in practical ways; he completed many job applications and for the majority he was selected for interview. George's EC felt that his focus on retail work, especially in the voluntary sector, may explain his lack of success. There is stiff competition in this field, and by the end of the project George had started to look at positions outside of retail. He also developed an understanding of AtW and it will help with travel costs to work. This is likely to be an important issue, given where George lives.

George has added to his disability-specific skills by learning how to travel independently, improving his IT skills and increasing his knowledge of AtW and aids and adaptations in the work place. Towards the end of the project he secured a place on both a first aid and a food hygiene course, and he hoped to begin an Introduction to Radio course in 2013. George also kept his employment experience up to date by volunteering as part of the project.

George was happy to advocate on his own behalf at the many interviews he attended; asking for information, clarifying roles and requesting feedback. Having attended several interviews with George, his EC felt that an on-going challenge at interview for George was to spend less time talking about his sight loss.

7.14 Shaun

7.14.1 Background information

Shaun was last employed in 2000, but he has not looked for work in recent years. Shaun achieved a HND level in education (legal services) in 2006 and is studying part-time for a Higher in Sociology. He has attended work preparation courses at RNIB Scotland and a Positive Steps [towards employment] course in 2011. He was referred to RNIB Scotland's employment services to assess his suitability for the government Work Choice programme before agreeing to work with the project team. Shaun is 49 years old, and was registered blind in 2008. He has mobility issue and lacks confidence.

7.14.2 First assessment tool interview

Based upon the first assessment toolkit, Shaun was scored at segmentation Level 2b (Nearly work ready (further):

Closer to work (4 of 8)	Further from work (4 of 8)
Literacy and numeracy	Employment experience
Access to information	Education and training
Independent travel	Computer skills
Motivation	Explaining vision

7.14.3 Interpreting the first assessment – EC judgement

Shaun's EC felt that Shaun was actually at segmentation Level 3. Although Shaun scored closer to work in areas such as independent travel and literacy and numeracy, he has been unemployed for quite some time. Shaun said that he was motivated to find work and had engaged with previous employment related programmes. However at the time of the first assessment he had not undertaken any job search activity in many years. He had limited knowledge of the legal sector and only a vague idea about the type of work he wanted to do: "administration in legal services, especially with family services."

Shaun has concerns about the public's perception of people with sight loss. At the first assessment he shared with his EC that he rarely uses his magnifier in public, because he is worried that the general public have a negative view of disability (he cited several examples from personal experience). For this reason Shaun had only just started using his long cane.

Shaun's EC felt that Shaun required long term support to identify relevant job vacancies, to improve confidence, and to develop work-based skills and disability-specific skills.

7.14.4 Key ENABLER project interventions

After the initial assessment Shaun and his EC agreed the following targets:

- Identify suitable volunteer opportunities, with Shaun taking the lead in making contact and applying for any positions of interest.
- Undertake computer skills training in Glasgow.
- Establish a travel plan for Shaun to travel between Aberdeen, Glasgow and the pre-employment course venue.
- Attend a pre-employment programme.
- Participate in one-to-one sessions on disability disclosure with his EC.
- Develop a CV based on identifying transferable skills and searching for suitable job applications.

Over the time of the ENABLER project, the following summarises the specific interventions undertaken (and related outcome):

Education and training:

- Shaun successfully applied to university to study for a BA in Criminological Studies.

Independent travel:

- Shaun travelled independently to Glasgow for IT training, sharing some of the journey with a fellow ENABLER client. He completed four sessions.

Job search skills:

- He partially completed a skills assessment using Prospects website to help identify careers relevant to his degree.
- Shaun developed his knowledge of the type of job he is interested in; specifically as an advice/equalities worker.
- Shaun used a voice recorder to record experiences on the project.
- Shaun attended attend a pre-employment course in Aberdeen.
- He completed a CV.

Employment experience:

- Shaun secured volunteer training with Citizen's Advice Bureau, due to begin after this research has ended.
- Shaun began volunteering with LEAD Scotland.

Vision:

- Shaun worked intensely with his EC on how to disclose his sight loss to a potential employer.

Mobility training:

- Shaun contacted his local society about mobility training but was advised he was not eligible for training. However, Shaun was using his long cane much more by the end of the research phase.

7.14.5 Second assessment tool interview

Based on the second assessment toolkit, Shaun was scored at segmentation Level 2b (Nearly work ready (further)):

Closer to work (5 of 8)	Further from work (3 of 8)
Literacy and numeracy	Employment experience
Computer skills	Education and training
Access to information	Motivation
Independent travel	
Explaining vision	

Shaun did not move closer to employment overall (both first and second assessments scored Shaun at Level 2b). Shaun did move closer to employment in two specific categories; computer skills and explaining vision. However, his motivation to find employment decreased between the two assessments, mainly the result of being accepted on a full-time degree course. Therefore he moved further from work in this category.

7.14.6 Interpreting the second assessment – EC judgement

Shaun's EC agreed with the result from the second assessment, and that Shaun had remained at Level 3. However, Shaun's EC felt that his confidence had increased hugely since working with the project. Shaun was more confident

travelling independently and had a greater understanding of AtW and aids and adaptations available to him in the workplace. And since starting at university his EC had noticed a huge difference in his attitude and body language. Equally important, Shaun had started up a friendship with another ENABLER client. They had travelled to computer training together and now communicate regularly by email.

The end of the research phase saw Shaun very focussed on gaining his degree. He felt success here would be the key to finding employment. Although Shaun has a range of qualifications and some experience volunteering, his EC remained concerned at his lack of paid employment experience. Shaun would need to develop his understanding of potential career paths and to develop his vocational experiences. He had only just started his course (which runs over four years) and therefore has time to build his work experience. Shaun's EC wondered whether Shaun will seek employment in the long term. He enjoys education, and it may be that education will fill the role of employment for him in the future.

About RNIB and Action for Blind People

RNIB works with Action for Blind People to draw on a wide range of skills and resources to support blind and partially sighted people. Our close relationship enables us to provide a unique combination of complementary strengths and expertise to support an ever increasing number of blind and partially sighted people.

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