



Need2Know When I Grow Up

Raising the aspirations
and employment prospects
of young people
with learning disabilities

Practical Support for Schools
and Colleges



foundation for
people with
learning disabilities



LOTTERY FUNDED



When I grow up

Introduction

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We know that with the right support, people with learning disabilities make hardworking and enthusiastic employees, bringing new skills, talents and perspectives to their employers, and that 62% of people would rather work in a company that employs people with learning disabilities.¹ Yet the employment rates of people with learning disabilities are falling, with the latest figures suggesting that only 5.8% of them have a paid job.² Successive governments have shown an interest in improving these rates and the current consultation, *Improving Lives*,³ is both timely and welcome.

One of the key contributors to the stubbornly low employment rates in the UK among people with a learning disability is the lack of expectation that they will get a job. Limited aspirations and the belief that they have little to offer exacerbate this lack of expectation in their employment prospects.

This programme is primarily aimed at schools and educators keen to look at new ways of improving these rates, but it will also be of interest to anyone committed to, or responsible for, commissioning, arranging or developing employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities.

1. <https://www.mencap.org.uk/press-release/new-research-highlights-how-public-attitudes-contribute-just-58-people-learning>
2. Health and Social Care Information Centre -ASCOG data (2015-16– accessed 01/11/16 <http://www.content.digital.nhs.uk/catalogue/PUB21900>
3. *Improving Lives The Work, Health and Disability Green Paper* (2016) HM Government

Background

When I Grow Up (WIGU) was a four-year programme run by the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities and funded by the Big Lottery Fund, which aimed to increase work expectations, aspirations and opportunities for students with learning disabilities at three schools and colleges in West Berkshire, Kent and the London Borough of Redbridge.

We worked in partnership with schools and colleges, supporting them to develop a more intense focus on employment. They informed us that:

- they needed help adapting plans to include long-term goals such as employment;
- work experience opportunities were rare and where they existed were often segregated and did not lead to paid work;
- they needed help to engage with employers to provide real jobs for students leaving school;
- there was no provision for much-needed job coaches to support people with learning disabilities into work.

The WIGU programme highlighted good practice and challenged low expectations by:

- raising the aspirations and expectations of the schools about employment;
- supporting schools to ensure work was embedded in the curriculum;
- developing a series of workshops that prepared students and their families for the world of work;
- supporting schools to develop person-centred employment plans;
- supporting the development of individualised work placements;
- ensuring paid employment opportunities were developed for students;
- running a number of national seminars and all-site meetings to bring schools together to learn about the role of job coaches and share good practice;
- working with families to help them to think about employment as a positive life goal for their sons and daughters;
- raising other people's assumptions and expectations around employment for this group of young people.

An independent evaluation of the programme found that it had an impact in a number of areas. Students were more confident during work experience placements and about employment as a real option after leaving school and college, and they felt better able to fit in, as they had a greater understanding of the workplace culture.

The WIGU programme helped schools and colleges create more employment opportunities, with work experience becoming more regular and starting earlier. Embedding the WIGU workshops and materials in the school curriculum helped to prepare students for life in work experience.

The evaluation showed that the programme informed, enthused, inspired and reassured families about the future, leading to an increase in family support for the student having a job as the next step. Indeed, one of the most important outcomes from the project was that it helped students and their families identify a positive future; as one parent eloquently put it, 'life at the end of the tunnel'.





Using the evidence

There is much evidence to suggest that giving good-quality support and working with students at an early stage can lead to better employment outcomes.⁴ The Foundation has a track record of employment planning and family intervention,⁵ and we built on this throughout the programme.

Some excellent resources have recently become available, such as the publications from the Preparing for Adulthood⁶ and the Employment is Everyone's Business projects.⁷ Both focus on young people and good-quality job coaching.

Although each school's/college's experiences were different, they shared some key similarities. This summary outlines the main findings from the project and offers some suggestions about what schools/colleges can do to put them to good use. The final section provides a selection of resources and websites which you may find helpful.

4. Greig, R., Chapman, P., Eley, A., Watts, R. and Bourlet, G. (2014) The Cost Effectiveness of Employment Support for People with Disabilities Final Detailed Research Report, Bristol: National Development Team for Inclusion
5. www.learningdisabilities.org.uk
6. <http://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/>
7. <http://base-uk.org/projects/EEB2016>

The experiences

1. Embedding employment in the curriculum

The main aim of WIGU was to build an employment pathway for young people through school. The schools we worked with typically focused on young people from Year 9 onwards but some included younger people in early conversations about work.

A whole-school approach with senior leadership buy-in and support is vital, and where this was apparent, we saw a significant shift in how the school approached the conversation about employment.

The role of the employment champion within schools is time-consuming and requires specialist training. Allocating this position to a non-teaching person, as one of the schools in our programme did, was clearly beneficial, since the person was able to dedicate more time to the role than teaching staff, who had so many other demands placed on them.

In all schools, an impressive range of innovative interventions had been introduced to build an employment focus, including:

- workshops and training about employment;
- vocational profiling – information about the individual's aspirations, interests and abilities for work – as a planning tool;
- better engagement with, and understanding of, local employers;
- employment-focused events and activities across the curriculum.

However, all schools commented that it took time for the new ideas and methods to embed.

Workshops that looked at building the links between students' skills and qualities with those required by employers were clearly helpful. Of equal impact were sessions based on 'soft' skills, such as interview techniques, behaviour and personal presentation. These were helpful and very popular, with one student commenting 'now we know how to act when meeting an employer'.

Not all schools linked this work to formal awarding bodies such as ASDAN, City and Guilds Level 2, but others felt these offered important evidence of progression for the students.

One school ran a week-long event about work, involving every student and teacher in the school and bringing employment into every subject area. Students, ex-students and employers gave assembly presentations. This event strengthened links within the school and with families and the local community.

Case study: Castle School

Castle School in Newbury has a World of Work programme that helps students to get a job by providing meaningful work experience. Feedback from employers made the school realise that any qualifications that students gained needed to be either directly useful for their future career, or as 'currency' to get them on to the next level of qualification on their pathway to employment.

The school has replaced its generic 'employability' qualifications with a range of practical qualifications that are personalised for each student and include basic food hygiene, first aid, safeguarding and prevent training. This has allowed them more time to focus on encounters with local employers, one-to-one careers sessions and further education guidance. This approach, in line with the Gatsby benchmark recommendations,⁸ has resulted in a significant increase in the number of students gaining employment.

2. Identifying good-quality job coaching

The provision of good-quality job coaching, both during work experience while still at school and after moving on to explore employment and internship possibilities on leaving, was considered key in all the schools.

The role of a job coach is to offer people with a learning disability personalised support into employment by matching their skills, interests and aspirations to the needs of local employers.⁹ Once employment has been secured, the coach supports the new employee and helps them learn the new role and settle in.

Some job coaches benefited from Training in Systematic Instruction, an evidence-based approach for those working directly with people who require additional support to learn the practical skills needed for work and complete any complex tasks related to their job. Some obtained a Level 3 qualification in Supported Employment run by the British Association for Supported Employment (BASE), while others took courses that covered the main aspects of the employment support process. South West Employment Institute also provides training, and there are National Occupational Standards for job coaching.

In one school, a significant opportunity was created when a Supported Employment Service was introduced to the area, and an external job coach was co-located at the Post-16 unit. The job coach worked successfully alongside teaching and non-teaching staff and supported a student in a work trial at a major retailer, which resulted in the student getting a Saturday job.

8. <http://www.gatsby.org.uk/education/programmes/good-career-guidance>

9. Supported employment and job coaching: best practice guidelines (2011) HM Government

Using external job coaches enabled school staff to run other useful activities within the school day, for example hold lunchtime job clubs with a variety of part-time jobs displayed and offer support to students with job applications. An important element was partnership working between the job coaches and the schools, with clear definition of roles and responsibilities.

Case study: Sam

Sam's second work experience placement was at a hotel and spa. It offered him a variety of experiences, ranging from collecting and issuing towels for spa users through to working in the hotel restaurant.

After a year there, Sam felt confident enough to take on the role of a waiter. With support from the school employment champion who coached work placements, Sam was able to start work in the restaurant.

The staff team were very receptive to this and provided training and a uniform. Sam is now being paid to work part-time as a waiter (the 7am to midday shift three days a week) while he continues his education.

3. Engaging employers

The WIGU programme set out to develop education–business partnerships to improve employer engagement. All schools already had some good long-term relationships with employers; for example, one school had strong links with the local Chamber of Commerce. For them, involvement in the WIGU programme was an opportunity to expand the employer network.

One school started small, with short lunchtime meetings with two or three of the employers who had already offered work placements. It was through these meetings that the idea of a 'thank-you' event for all the other employers who had hosted work placements came about. Importantly, this event was initially championed by one particular employer who drove the recruitment of others. In this way, the school used its existing contacts to generate more opportunities.

This event has now grown into an annual celebration of work experience with local employers and other allies. Awards are offered to employers and individuals who go out of their way to create opportunities, assist individuals with higher support needs or promote the programme in a more general way. The local MP is actively involved too, enhancing the profile of the event and creating publicity with a subsequent newsletter and media coverage.

Case study: Jonny

Jonny had a very successful placement at a large food store. As the HR lead was a member of his school's small education business partnership, the school employment champion negotiated a paid job.

Although Jonny was actually offered a full-time job, he preferred to work part-time while he finished his college course.

4. Working with families

Considerable attention was given to the need to improve engagement with families of young people with learning disabilities. All schools reported that this was a challenge, due to the competing demands on families' time, their own jobs and other pressures.

Some progress was achieved through the family workshops and by engaging parents early in the planning process, but it was harder to reach families en masse. Workshops to engage with families were helpful, especially when run in parallel with the students' sessions. Simply raising awareness of the programme enabled some families to identify employers and employment opportunities from within their own networks.

Inviting families to the school to hear feedback from their son or daughter as they developed their thinking about employment, especially after work experience placements, was useful. One school now includes the employment element in all its annual reviews, thus embedding from an early age that the school has an expectation that students will find work.

Families consistently spoke about their uncertainty and concern for the future. Few reported positive employment experiences for their sons or daughters; those that did said job coaching support and links with employers proved helpful in improving levels of confidence. It was clear that hearing about local examples of students who had found a job led to raised aspirations.

Travel and travel training were a key issue with many families. Research suggests that a key determinate in raising families' confidence was their son's/daughter's safe travel to work.

Case study: Rebecca

Bringing families together to discuss their aspirations for their son or daughter after full-time education was an important part of the programme. Exploring existing networks helped families to think about the useful contacts they already had.

Rebecca's mum spoke about her friend who ran a pre-school nursery. This led to a long-term work experience placement for Rebecca at the nursery, including volunteering during school holidays.

The pre-school manager is also supporting Rebecca to obtain a paid job there after she finishes school.

Recommendations for schools and colleges

- **Remember this is about the individual** – each student needs their own personalised employment plan.
- **Identify skills and talents** – match these to what employers need.
- **Include everyone** – we need to find innovative and creative approaches to support people with complex needs.
- **Start the employment conversation early** – and include employment in all Education, Health and Social Care Plans.
- **Use trained and experienced job coaches** – this will improve supported employment practice and principles.
- **Think about qualification and accreditation** – supported employment can challenge the need for pre-vocational training.
- **Families are important** – get them involved early on, offer support and encourage them to use their own networks to create opportunities.
- **Employers are allies** – consider creating an employer network to help brainstorm opportunities and identify your champions.
- **Forge better links between schools and colleges** – to support progression from school.
- **Celebrate success** – involve the whole community, including employers, the local MP and press.
- **It takes time** – do not expect change to come overnight.

We believe that employment is possible for all young people irrespective of need, they all have talents, skills, gifts and dreams. All means All.

WIGU resources

The WIGU programme has developed the following resources, all of which are free to download from the website www.learningdisabilities.org.uk:

- Facilitator's handbook
- Workshop session plans
- Games and activities
- Work profile

Useful websites

British Association for Supported Employment:
www.base-uk.org

South West Employment Institute:
www.swei.org.uk

Employment is Everyone's Business resources:
www.ndti.org.uk/major-projects/current/employment-is-everyones-business1

Department of Education Supported Internship Guidance:
www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/389411/Supported_Internship_Guidance_Dec_14.pdf

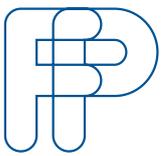
www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/media/378024/evaluation_of_project_search.pdf

For further information and support contact info@learningdisabilities.org.uk

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We are very grateful to the Big Lottery Fund for funding this work, and to the students, staff and families from Castle School, Newbury, Berkshire; Milestone Academy, Kent; Little Heath School and Redbridge College, London Borough of Redbridge who have worked with us during the past four years on this project.



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Company Registration No. 2350846

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