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Supported employment â€“ a success story under threat By Becky

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Given the increasingly awful unemployment figures, itâ€™s difficult to find anything to celebrate about the countryâ€™s job market. Young people are notoriously being hit the hardest, raising fears of a â€œlost generationâ€•, but disabled people are also suffering. 65% of people with learning disabilities would like to work, according to figures from the British Association of Supported Employment, but just 6.4% are currently in paid employment â€“ a figure that is dropping.

All the more reason to celebrate success when it happens, and in Trafford, Greater Manchester, there are some great examples of how a supported employment project run by United Response can get people with learning disabilities into work, helping them thrive as individuals and contribute to their employers. The service has just entered its seventh year, and has helped hundreds of individuals.

Last week the Manchester Evening News celebrated those achievements in a full page story. One of the people featured was Luanne Horton, 21, who approached us last year in the hopes of finding work. Luanne has Downâ€™s Syndrome and struggles with reading and writing, so she received help from job coach Maria Williams to put together a CV. Luanne felt she was best suited to practical work and so, inspired by Luanneâ€™s love of fashion, went job hunting together in shopping areas close to her home in Sale.

JLF hairdressers in Sale Moor agreed to take her on as an assistant and Luanne is now responsible for greeting customers and making drinks, sorting hair products, and cleaning the salon. Jess France, owner of the hairdressers, says Luanne is an asset to the business: â€œSheâ€™s very reliable an she has really come out of her shell since sheâ€™s been here.â€•

Ali Bishop, who has been the driving force behind Trafford Supported Employment since its inception, points out that not only does the service help individuals and businesses but actually saves the taxpayer money as it helps people â€œtake the first steps towards financial independence. They might be people like Luanne who, may not be able to come off benefits entirely, but when she is working she is not accessing things like day care servicesâ€¦Itâ€™s about being less reliant on the state

The Manchester Evening News agreed in a resoundingly positive leader column backing the scheme. â€œThe scheme offers people with learning difficulties extensive support, including help from a dedicated job coach. Could that be replicated for others finding it hard to get work? It would, of course, cost money. But can we afford not to try?â€¦ With the scheme in Trafford we have a successful model. Perhaps itâ€™s time to widen its reach.â€•

But hereâ€™s the kicker. Far from investing more in supported employment during a time of rising joblessness, many existing supported employment services are under financial threat or have already been the victim of cuts. Up and down the country, fewer people with learning disabilities are getting a fair opportunity to find work and the increased independence that comes with it. And yet we know that up front investment in the right support really does save money in the long run.

The Government, in its 2010 Vision For Adult Social Care, explicitly states that â€œPreventing peopleâ€™ needs from escalating will help to reduce the costs of intensive care packages. Employment is also an important part of helping people to stay independent for as long as possible.â€• Thatâ€™s why it needs to work closely with local authorities who, unlike Trafford, are not investing in supported employment. As the Manchester Evening News says, â€œcan we afford not to try?â€•

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United Response is a national charity that supports people with learning disabilities, mental health needs and physical disabilities to take control of their lives. For more information please visitA HREFhttp://www.unitedresponse.org.uk/what-we-do/how-we-work/supported-living/> Supported living. /A>

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