

Case study 3: Job clubs

Age UK Milton Keynes Employment Services run a regular job club in a meeting room over one of our furniture shops in the centre of Stony Stratford. The venue is attractive and easily accessible with free parking and nearby buses. The club is open to all of our employment service customers who are on Response to Redundancy, Routeways or Nextstep contracts. Many customers are referred from Jobcentre Plus, but we also have many customers who self refer based on our reputation locally. All our employment services are focussed on the over 50's, but there is some flexibility. The club normally runs every two weeks.

The numbers who attend each job club range between 10 and 25. The club lasts for two hours. People come from a variety of backgrounds ranging from managing directors to manual workers. We originally considered separating out an executive group, but the club worked so well that we decided against it. Some participants have learning difficulties, many are lacking in confidence, some are newly redundant, others have been unemployed for more than two years. But they all have a common need, which is to find work. They gain a tremendous amount from interacting with each other, and often the more confident individuals help people with less confidence. It is great to watch them do this.

The session is run by an experienced manager, and we usually try to have two or three advisers there to help. An aspect of job search skill coaching is always included. We have found that one of the most popular is panel interview practice. The interview panel is made up of job club participants, and they are given carefully and appropriately selected questions to ask the 'interviewee', who is also a participant. Supportive feedback is given by the manager running the session. The improvement in performance over a few sessions is clear to all, as is the increase in confidence. Everyone who participates volunteers to do so, no-one is forced to do anything. We also practise people networking skills, answering difficult interview questions, completing application forms, and writing covering letters, etc.

We often have outside speakers, who give their services for free. Sometimes this can focus on a sector, eg the Care Sector, with the speaker telling people about the different types of role available, training, and other requirements. We also invite representatives from other third sector organisations to tell people about possible voluntary work and training opportunities within this. We always allow time for participants to network with each other over a cup of tea or coffee.

We collect feedback sheets from everyone and ask for ideas of things to cover. Feedback has been 100 per cent positive. For some it is clearly the highlight of their week. One of the nicest things is watching people grow in confidence and self esteem, but the very best is when we have a message that someone cannot come because they have found a new role! This is a regular event and gives everyone else hope.

