

Supporting a new approach to helping people aged 50 and over back into work

Report on a workshop to generate ideas and insights from practitioners

Report prepared for the Centre for Ageing Better

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1. Background

The labour market underperformance of older workers in some of the UK's major urban areas – especially in North East and North West England – is an issue of national significance. With the State Pension age rising, cuts to working age welfare benefits, growing numbers of vacancies and an expanding 50+ population, there are many reasons why supporting the re-entry to employment and/or purposeful activity of the 'missing million'¹ matters.

The Centre for Ageing Better, in partnership with Greater Manchester Combined Authority, is seeking to increase labour market engagement and participation among people aged 50 to State Pension age. It is recognised that this may require a major change both in the way that support is provided and in the interventions themselves, particularly in neighbourhoods where employment rates for older people are lowest and barriers are most evident.

While not targeted specifically at older people, the majority of those currently reached by Greater Manchester's Working Well programme are over 45. This represents a significant base of innovative provision for the partners to build on. However most clients to date have been single, male and white. It was felt to be important for the workshop to focus on other groups within this age range and in particular those who do not have access to or contact with statutory provision. Understanding their barriers to returning to work would help to develop a relevant programme in response.

1.1. Workshop to promote new ideas and explore new ways of working

In order to start the programme a practitioner workshop was arranged on Tuesday, 26 April in Manchester to bring together professional partners, stakeholders and other relevant bodies from across Greater Manchester. This report summarises the findings of the workshop.

1.1.1. Aims and objectives

The key aims of the workshop were to:

- Establish working relationships between agencies
- Improve understanding of current delivery and understand what works well and does not work so well
- Consider the client groups whose requirements may not be fully met by existing provision
- Put forward new interventions and actions that would bring about positive change
- Identify partners / resources required for delivery
- Identify what is required for next stage of design.

¹ BITC 'The Missing Million', 2015. One million people aged 50-64 have been pushed out of the labour market for reasons beyond their control and are now struggling to find employment

1.1.2. Methodology

The interactive workshop was designed to engage a range of stakeholders in considering the interventions that would encourage different cohorts of people to move towards work. The session started with thoughts and reactions to current provision and then moved to thinking about the future.

Specifically, participants were invited to draw on existing knowledge to create personas of individuals who could benefit from different forms of support to move towards work.

The persona profiles were then considered by a separate group acting as “consultants”. Their brief was to think through the issues faced by the individual, and especially the issues that might act as a barrier to engagement. They were asked to propose interventions that would overcome any barriers and encourage and support the individual into work.

These interventions were then presented back to the commissioning group for consideration and response.

Each group represented a “mix” of agencies and roles – replicating the integrated working that had been highlighted in “what works well” in current provision.

2. Key insights from the workshop

2.1. Where are we now? Thoughts on current provision

Participants drew on their experience of current return to work support. This included the Working Well programme as well as other employment programmes. They considered what did and didn't work, in particularly focussing on people over the age of 50:

2.1.1. What participants said works well:

- Programmes focus on an often excluded age group
- The integrated approach and involvement of different agencies through co-working and integrated management
- The programmes recognise the talents and assets of those over the age of 50
- The programmes enable individuals to build on their talents and passion
- Key working approach.

2.1.2. What participants said doesn't work so well

- Lack of shared outcomes
- A tendency towards a one size fits all approach
- Lack of employer engagement and some discrimination
- Lack of engagement of the wider target group with the programme only attracting white men who are single and working class.

2.2. People's needs are varied and do not fit simple interventions

It is important to recognise that people aged 50 to State Pension age are not a homogenous group and are comprised of a wide range of individuals. However, three common themes affect all four of the "individual" personas independently developed in the workshop, that they were:

1. In unsustainable situations and had reached, or were about to reach, a crisis point.
2. Were isolated, albeit in different ways, including: language barriers; by choice of profession; following bereavement; and through part of the family (and hence support) being located on another continent.
3. In financial crisis.

Many of these individuals are not in touch with statutory services and may be far away from the employment market; they may not recognise a need to take action, nor know where to go for support; there may be multiple barriers that prevent or limit their ability to access support or move into employment or other unpaid contributions.

Therefore a range of interventions are required that takes account of the needs of the "whole" person and, in some cases the whole family or household. Only then will it be possible to move to specific employment-related interventions. Issues that may need to be

addressed can include the individual's financial position and housing as well as factors such as caring responsibilities.



The needs of the whole person in the centre, with the required attributes of a successful intervention in the outer ring. (Diagram adapted from Mental Health Wales www.mentalhealthwales.net)

2.3. Successful interventions share common attributes

While the interventions developed were tailored to meet the needs of the individual, a number were common to all the individuals and were highly regarded by the “commissioning groups”. These interventions included:

1. The creation of an environment in which the individual's situation is stabilised and they are then able to overcome barriers that prevent their moving to employment.
2. The provision of financial advice and support that addresses their wider situation.
3. Support to overcome isolation and improve mental wellbeing.
4. Support with understanding family interactions and the role of the whole family, household or community in enabling an individual to move towards work.

In proposing an intervention that includes financial advice and support, it was recognised that many elements of this support currently exist but there is an opportunity for an integrated offer.

Furthermore, the “commissioning groups” identified that all interventions need to have common attributes to be successful:

2.3.1. Raise awareness, gain interest and engagement

It is important to recognise that there are many people who could benefit from support into work who are not currently engaged or are not eligible for support from statutory services. Many may not realise that there could be a benefit for them to move into employment.

Consideration needs to be given to identifying:

- Relevant groups of individuals who may include, but not be limited to, couples with no children, people living alone, individuals within cultures where there is not an expectation for them to undertake paid work outside of the family structure
- The most appropriate ways of “reaching” individuals in these different groups taking account of the need for proactive outreach in places that are a “part of their daily lives” such as community centres, supermarkets, or GPs
- The “offer” that will attract an individuals to be involved in a programme and the different aspects that would sustain their continued engagement.

2.3.2. Right time and over time

Interventions need to be delivered at the “right time” and “over time” and to be phased in a way that recognises that some people may feel that the transition to work is not possible in their current circumstances. Short-term interventions may be required to address confidence issues and to remove barriers to engagement such as financial concerns and housing, while medium- to long-term interventions may be required to address skills development.

2.3.3. An approach that works with the whole person, family or household

There is a need to build trust and relationship between the individual and any agency – to allow sufficient dialogue and trust that in turn supports effective engagement. Within this approach it is important to understand the individual; their community and culture; their hope and aspirations for the future; what motivates them; where their passions lie. At the same time it is important to draw out the many issues and concerns that affect them, their family or other contacts from day-to-day. Unaddressed, these issues will act as barriers to moving forward. Further it is important to co-produce rather than impose solutions on the individual to build trust, ensure engagement and build sustainability.

2.3.4. Finance in the round

The need for financial advice and support is common to all individuals. With this goes a requirement for an integrated, detailed understanding of the issues faced by individuals and for a financial review “in the round” that covers all aspects of the individual and their wider financial situation.

2.3.5. A multi-agency approach

A multi-agency approach is required to address the different barriers that prevent or limit individuals from moving into employment. It allows for a whole-person approach to be taken by meeting individual needs and engaging with a wide range of expertise and resources held by organisations in their local area.

- Individual needs could include reviews of finance and financial health; understanding what support services are available; benefits advice; addressing issues relating to housing; physical and mental wellbeing and developing the necessary soft skills to move into employment.
- Agencies could include housing providers; GP services; Citizens Advice (CAB); bereavement services; social care; family support services; and Jobcentre Plus (JCP). It is important to identify agencies that can come together to meet the varied needs of the individuals.

2.3.6. Building working relations between agencies

From the workshop it was evident that agencies work well together when faced with a common challenge, shared objectives and are coordinated. Working collaboratively and co-producing solutions to problems shared by the agencies is an effective approach.

Detailed feedback from the groups

3. Thoughts on current provision

A number of programmes have been put in place to encourage individuals into work in the Greater Manchester area, including Greater Manchester's own Working Well programme, as well as national provision such as the Work Programme and Jobcentre Plus (JCP).

In terms of "What works well", there were high levels of appreciation of the integrated approach and involvement of different agencies through co-working and integrated management. It was also recognised that programmes such as Working Well allows recognition of the talents and assets of those over the age of 50 and enables individuals to build on their talents and passion.

However, concerns were expressed over the lack of shared outcomes and tendency to a one-size-fits-all approach. It was also noted that further employer engagement would be beneficial. Currently Working Well has higher participation among single, white men than is representative of the overall Greater Manchester out of work population so there may be more work that could be done to support other demographic groups.

4. The individual personas, their challenges and the ‘consultancy’ response to support them into employment

The individual personas outlined below were created during the workshop. They are not necessarily representative of the many different groups that could benefit from support. These would include couples without children, single / divorced females living on their own and members of other community groups.

All personas are fictionalised but based on actual demographic groups in the Greater Manchester area.

4.1. Mohammed

Mohammed is aged 58 and came to the UK from Pakistan as a child although a large part of the family stayed in Pakistan – where they still live. Mohammed now lives near Lowton with his wife and one of his two adult children – the other child lives away from the area. He worked most of his life as a low-skilled factory worker but was made redundant 8 years ago. Following the redundancy he felt his working days were over and gave up all thoughts of going back into employment. He now acts as a carer for his wife who has Multiple Sclerosis and associated long-term depression.

Mohammed’s financial position is very difficult. He and his wife receive Disability Living Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance and Carers Allowance. The money is just about enough to live on but the house they live in, and own, is in poor condition and requires maintenance. He doesn’t know how to do it and doesn’t have the money to get help.

Mohammed has become very isolated. Their house is in a village in which there is very poor public transport and they can’t afford a car. He hardly leaves the house and his health (both mental and physical) is beginning to suffer.

4.1.1. Possible interventions

It was felt that Mohammed would benefit from support to address his financial situation and problems with the state of the house as well as his sense of isolation. These should be addressed before looking at interventions that may ultimately support him into employment.

Specific interventions included support to deal with financial issues starting with a financial review with CAB that could include his wider assets, engaging in a “better off” calculation through JCP and ensuring that Mohammed understands his pension entitlement. He may also wish to explore ways of generating additional income through taking in a lodger or developing IT skills that would enable him to work from home. Equally important was the need to consider the state of the house – especially in light of his wife’s physical health.

It was proposed that an open conversation could be had with Mohammed to explore training options that would enable him to do his own repairs or the possibility of selling the house (with support) and moving to a house in a better state of repair.

Mohammed's isolation and his sense that there is nothing for him raised serious concerns, and it was proposed that it would be relevant to look at ways of connecting with people – his family, the wider community and his ex-work colleagues. Thoughts around Skype to connect with family in Pakistan, engaging with a health trainer and getting in touch with ex-colleagues were all explored. Importantly it was also felt to be important to consider ways he could engage with the family and to understand what support he could get to help with his wife. It was suggested that a family group conference should take place and that this could include an open and honest conversation about finance, the state of the house and his wife's needs as well as what Mohammed needs to continue to care for his wife.

4.2. Leo

Leo is mixed race and is aged 52. He lives in Wythenshawe and has intermittent work as a self-employed artist. He is passionate about art and really enjoys the flexibility of being self-employed. However he does not have enough work to sustain a regular income that covers his needs. Leo lives on his own although he acts as a temporary parent to his three children some of the time. He loves seeing them but inevitably they put a strain on his finances.

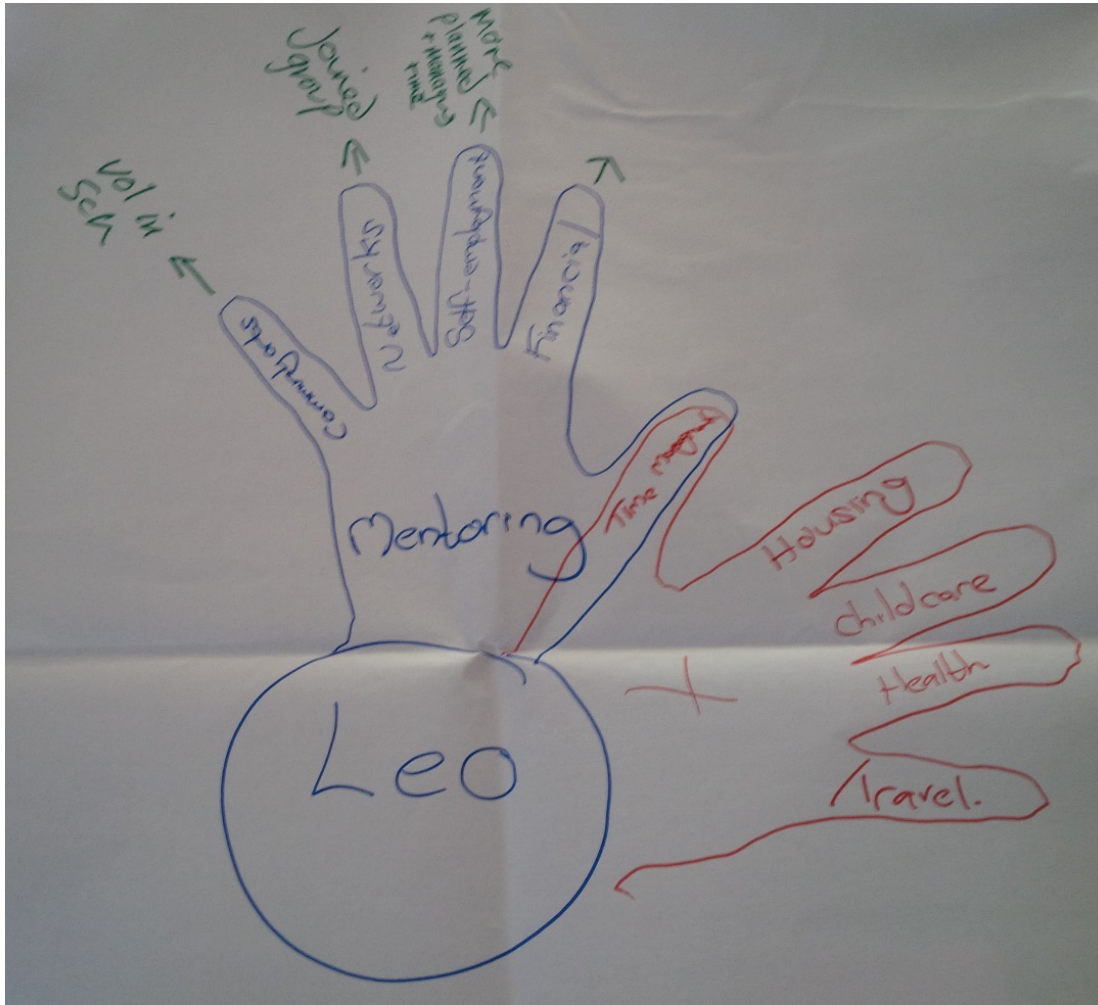
Money is difficult and his financial worries just add to the anxiety he already suffers. He is worried about the future and to him this just means more of the same. He doesn't know which way to turn; he wants to stay working in the arts but that means spending money on equipment, which he doesn't have.

4.2.1. Possible interventions:

With Leo, there needs to be a way of "finding a hook that will inspire change". It is important to have an approach that helps to address his financial situation as well as building his confidence to enable him to realise his talents and move into more sustainable work.

Specific interventions could include financial advice to address any debt problems he may have as well as networking opportunities with other artists or creative entrepreneurs in the local community to offer peer support. In addition, it is important to consider Leo's housing situation, including the potential to take a lodger or house share to help with the financial situation.

It is also important to build Leo's confidence by helping him to make the most of his talents and build on his assets. It would be appropriate to offer coaching and mentoring to help him to think more broadly about self-employment in the arts sector or employment in creative industries; possibly investigate voluntary sector outlets for his talents while he seeks some employment, including possible work in schools.



Meeting the whole needs of Leo in order to support him to achieve suitable employment (image from the 'consultancy' group)

4.3. Bev

Bev is aged 53 and lives on her own in Bolton. She has two grown up children and although she is close to her daughter and looks after one of her grandchildren while her daughter goes to work, she does not communicate at all with her son.

She was recently been bereaved when her partner died suddenly from a heart attack. She now feels totally lost and alone; she is Black British and her partner was white so she is unsure of which community she belongs to and feels isolated; she has never worked and feels she has no skills; her partner took care of everything to do with house and money.

Financially, Bev is in a difficult state. She lives in private rented accommodation in Bolton but with no benefits or income, she is now getting into rent arrears - she has never claimed housing benefits as her partner's salary always covered everything and wouldn't know how to go about it. And to add to all her problems, Bev has problem neighbours who keep her awake at night.

She just feels miserable.

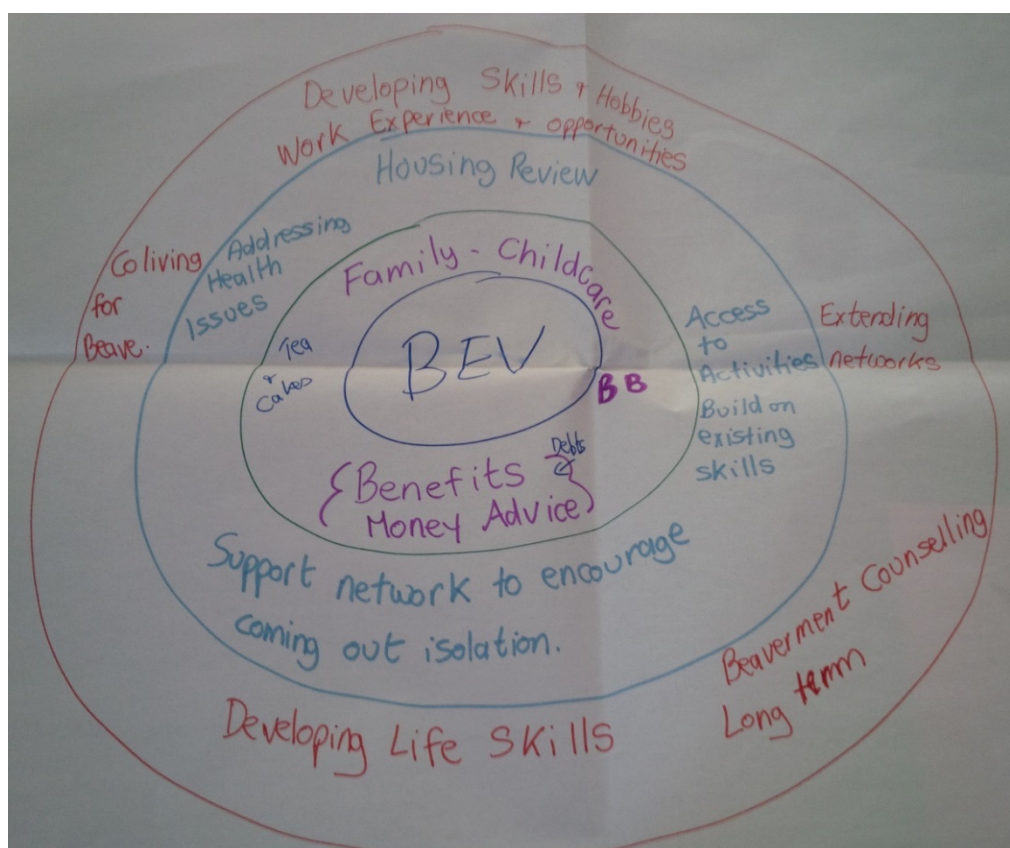
4.3.1. Possible interventions

Bev clearly needs wrap around care that can support her during this difficult time and deal with the difficult situations she is facing – especially her financial situation. Her case will be a ‘journey’ rather than a single intervention.

Specific interventions could include immediate financial and debt advice coupled with advice on her entitlements and death-in-service payments from her partner’s place of work, as well as information on the benefits to which she may be entitled to stop her situation getting any worse. At the same time it is important to support Bev in her current fragile emotional state – the ‘consultancy’ group came up with the idea of a voluntary “bereavement buddy” in the short term, and possibly bereavement counselling in the longer term.

Once she has regained her confidence and is less fragile, it would be possible to investigate childcare options for her grandchild that would give Bev time to build her own skills and work experience. It may also be possible for her to attend local friendship or activity groups for peer support and to develop further her self-confidence, building on her interests in baking and experience as a school governor. But this may all take time.

Finally it is important to try and re-establish Bev’s home as somewhere she wants to be and talk to the local authority about problems with the neighbours. The ‘consultancy’ suggested that Bev could potentially move out of the area and closer to the job market, possibly moving into a co-living situation.



For Bev to achieve long-term financial independence through employment, there are a number of ‘layers’ that need to be addressed first (image from the ‘consultancy’ group)

4.4. Katya

Katya is aged 55 and came to the UK from Poland three years ago. She is divorced and now lives with her daughter and granddaughter in private rented accommodation in Broughton. She works as a cleaner 16 hours week and the rest of her time she looks after her granddaughter so that her daughter can go to work. Katya is eligible for Universal Credit with in-work conditionality as she is working 16 hours a week.

Katya feels quite isolated as Broughton is a transient community where there are only limited internal support networks. She has reasonable English although finds it difficult to communicate sometimes and would like to be better. She is quite healthy although she is a smoker and often feels 'low' without any assessment of her mental health. Most importantly, Katya has a strong work ethic; she takes responsibility for work and the childcare very seriously. She would like to extend her working hours but this is not an option because of her childcare responsibilities. Also she can't see herself staying as a cleaner forever as the physical demands of the job are just too great.

4.4.1. Possible interventions

It is important to understand the complete situation in which Katya finds herself – initially understanding her financial situation, and then considering the journey that she could travel to better employment. In terms of her financial situation it would be helpful to conduct a “better off” calculation for the whole family (i.e. including Katya's daughter). This would enable them to have an objective view of childcare options and the financial opportunities that would offer. However, it is equally important to engage Katya in the whole process and for her to be reassured that any interventions are supportive for her and the whole family. Consequently it is important to choose the right entry point. This would include being given information by a “trusted” individual and ultimately meeting with a relevant support worker somewhere that Katya is comfortable. This includes active outreach through schools, nurseries and Polish groups or shops in the community, and engagement during schools hours or at other times which suit Katya.

Looking ahead to Katya's journey into better employment a number of interventions could help her along the way including support with language (ESOL), ensuring any qualifications she has are converted to UK equivalents and receiving appropriate employment advice when she feels able to look for other or additional work. The 'consultants' also suggested some immediate actions related to Katya's current employment and income – providing advice or a referral to JCP to enable her to claim Universal Credit, and ensuring that her employer is paying the National Living Wage.

5. Conclusions and next steps

5.1. Conclusions

1. There are significant numbers of individuals who are not in touch with statutory services or eligible for current employment support provision who could benefit from support. The key questions to consider are how to reach individuals in different situations and the relevant messages / offer that would attract and engage them in the range of interventions that are on offer. “What is in it for them?”
2. The individual cases that were created illustrate that not all people fit perfectly into traditional services. For sustainable support into long-term employment, each person needs an individual response structured about around their (or their family unit’s) particular needs – involving a multi-agency, collaborative response. Unaddressed these will act as barriers to moving forward.
3. Agencies that need to be involved include housing providers, GP services, CAB, bereavement services, social care and family support services – as well as JCP and other employment services.
4. While a move into employment is the ultimate objective, it may not be appropriate to focus on ‘getting a job’ in the short to medium term. Individuals need to have the opportunity to address and overcome significant barriers to employment before starting the journey to employment.
5. The need for financial advice and support is common to all individuals. With that goes the need for an integrated, detailed understanding of the issues and for a financial review “in the round” that brings together the many different service elements that already exist.
6. On reflection, many of the interventions, whilst well intentioned and reflecting the perceived needs of the individual, made significant assumptions about the target individual. Examples include individuals moving house to deal with a financial / repairs issue, or undertaking training in DIY, or accepting a move to co-living to overcome financial difficulties.
7. Professionals from a range of different agencies at the event worked well together, illustrating that this is a model for future work for this and other programmes.

5.2. Next steps

1. Undertake a mapping exercise to identify the demographics and location of those potentially eligible for the programme. Use this information to identify appropriate geographic areas of focus and relevant outreach activities that would engage different groups.

2. Develop and test the “offer” that will engage and motivate individuals to access different interventions and ultimately move towards employment or other meaningful activity.
3. While the workshop has given an insight from the perspective of professionals, it is important to understand the perspective of potential future users of the different services:
 - What interventions would they want?
 - What are their reactions to the proposed interventions?
 - How realistic are the thoughts on engagement?
4. Continue the dialogue with workshop participants and ensure continuing engagement in the process.



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