

Top Tips: Engagement with wider partners

Wider partners (or 'supporting organisations', as referred to in the Grant Guidance) can help generate interest in Connect to Work (CtW) among residents and employers. This can help boost the referrals numbers, improve employer engagement, and ensure CtW staff are aware of other support offered locally. Engagement could lead to further integration of services (see the [Top Tips: Strategic and operational joining up of services](#) for more information). Strengthening the connection with supporting organisations can also be beneficial for other programmes delivered in an area, by improving joint working.

This document focusses on ways to identify and engage partners and factors to consider when communicating with partners about the programme.

Wider partners may include: housing associations, Voluntary and Community sector, faith groups, groups focussing on specific barrier conditions and disadvantages, Work Coaches and mentors within prisons, rehabilitation centres, domestic abuse refuges, primary care, community care and other care settings, Jobcentre Plus, and the Integrated Care Board.

You can find more information about the context in which this document was developed [here](#).

Lessons learned

We have drawn lessons from the evaluations of the [Working Well: Individual and Placement Support in Primary Care](#) as an example of Supported Employment programmes which can source referrals from a range of routes.

We have also included examples that are not Supported Employment programmes but have key lessons that can be applied to CtW and are compatible with the Supported Employment model. This includes Learning and Work Institute's evidence review on ['Employment support for people with disabilities and health conditions'](#) and ['Supporting workers' health and access to better work'](#), the [Central London Forward Integration Hub](#), [Work Local: our employment and skills offer to a new Government to boost inclusive growth](#) and the [Solent Jobs Programme](#).

For engagement with partners to be successful, delivery areas need to:

- identify partners that could be relevant to engage with
- form strong partnerships with the supporting organisations
- engage with them on an ongoing basis.

Identifying wider partners

To identify wider partners, a range of initiatives can be introduced including:

- **Establishing a map of existing local support organisations already engaged with people who could benefit from the programme.** The map can help identify the organisations with which referral routes need to be established. These need to be designed to ensure people who could benefit the most from the programme are introduced to the referral pathway. It can also help to identify other organisations that may be able to promote and champion CtW, such as community groups, food banks or libraries. Understanding local support already provided also help avoiding duplicating support.
- **Involving people with lived experience to identify supporting organisations.** Partnerships can also be built by involving those most affected by work and health issues. By identifying potential participants, it is worth finding out who is supporting/has supported them to identify support organisations.

Form strong partnerships with local partners

Once partners have been identified, engaging them with the programme is the next step, including considering some of the following actions:

- **Providing supporting organisations with a good understanding of the programme.** This includes clearly defining the eligibility criteria and key features of CtW, such as its voluntary nature.
- **Establishing a clear narrative and list of priorities for the programme.** This can also help identify the organisations that needs to be approached as a priority. Findings from the evaluation of the [Greater Manchester's Working Well programme](#) shows that prioritising the engagement with the parts of the health system which see potential participants at scale. For example, engaging with special schools can help generate referrals for young people. Due to councils' statutory duty when it comes to skills and education, local areas may already have strong links with these schools. Formal partnerships may be considered to strengthen the links between the organisations. Service level agreements, or similar, could be established to confirm the responsibilities and accountabilities of each organisation.
- **Establishing pathways from other front-line services**, such as health, housing, Jobcentre Plus, skills and community learning. This could be done by developing diagrams or flow charts to help with clear communication and understanding of the programme. A single point of contact can be introduced by local government so that partner organisations can refer individuals to a service responsible for the triage of residents to a range of other employment support programmes. This can facilitate the referral process for partner organisations, while ensuring residents are referred to an appropriate programme of support (see [Get Rochdale Working](#) for example below).

- **Engaging with specialist organisations which can support access to training and work for individuals with specific needs.** This could include [adult and community learning providers](#) who may have good training and support for individuals with specific needs. These links can help to support participants further and help to create a joined-up offer.

Ongoing engagement with wider partners

Activities to keep partners engaged could include:

- **Regular communication and networking opportunities with wider partners.** Previous programmes show that continuing to invest in the relationship with partners helps ensure quality referrals. Consideration needs to be given around how regularly partners in the programme meet or briefings are given. This may need to include changes or support for engagement with particular target groups.
- **Ensuring materials and resources are clear and adequate.** The use of adequate briefings can help wider partners to understand who the target participants are and help with engagement and integration of the programme.
- **Integration of services and co-location can also be considered to strengthen the relationships** (see more details in the [Top Tips: Strategic and operational joining up of services](#)).

Key considerations

Identifying wider partners

Are you aware of the supporting organisations in your area? Is there already a map of supporting organisations in the area? Does it need updating? Do you have a Voluntary and Community supporting organisation in your area that might help with this?

Have you considered how healthcare staff, education providers, employers, and housing associations may be able to support the programme either through referrals on to programme or to give additional support while participants are on programme?

How are these supporting organisations reaching or connecting with economically inactive people? Could this work help establish appropriate routes to reach economically inactive people? How might you involve people with lived experience in the process of identifying supporting organisations?

How could CtW help these other organisations achieve their goals?

Form ongoing formal partnerships with organisations

Is there a clear narrative around CtW that supporting organisations understand and are fully engaged with?

Do you have established partnerships with these supporting organisations? If yes, do these need to be developed further as part of this programme? If no, who can help you to establish and develop them?

Do you need to set up service level agreements or similar with these organisations?

Do you have a flow chart or diagram of how participants could be referred in of the programme? Which organisations in your area could help support with training and access needs for individuals with specific needs?

What health and wellbeing services do you have locally that could help support participants further if required?

Ongoing engagement with wider partners

Can resource be given for collaborative working and networking?

How regularly will partners meet to discuss and review the programme?

Could regular briefings or success stories be shared with partners to highlight the ongoing achievements or changes to the programme? How will you ensure that briefings and communications are understood? How often will you send these out?

What information are you providing to referral organisations to promote the health, wellbeing and wider benefits of employment, so that they understand why they should refer people to the programme?

Get Rochdale Working and Tameside Council: Individual Placement Support in Primary Care

In Rochdale, the programme Working Well: Individual and Placement Support in Primary Care (WWIPSPC) is primarily taking referrals via Get Rochdale Working. This provides a single access point where partners and residents can refer to. A triage service has also been introduced to refer people to the relevant provision of support. Setting up a single access point and triage services has many benefits for generating referrals, including:

- Simplification of the process for referral partners
- Establishing a brand that can have greater longevity than the provision sitting behind it
- Reducing programme staff time needed for generating referrals
- Sharing and co-ordinating approach to marketing between different provision.

However, it is worth noting that this approach also adds another layer of processes and it may have some implications as Employment Specialists lack the direct link with participant's other support. One way to mitigate this potential disadvantage is to enable Employment Specialists to approach other referral partners directly, which is something Tameside Council introduced to deliver the the WorkWell Vanguard which acts as a single point of access, often referring directly to WWIPSPC as well as other locally based provisions such as in work progression.