



**European Union**  
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Investing in jobs and skills



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Special Publication

**ESF Projects Successfully  
Engaging with the Over-50s**

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# Introduction

The number of 50+ participants benefiting from ESF projects has been increasing. In the previous ESF 2000-2006 programme, there was a greater focus on the 50+ who were the specific target for a number of projects.

In the current ESF 2007-2013 programme in England, there are fewer projects specifically for the over-50s; instead, most providers have adopted a cross cutting approach, offering provision for a wide range of participants. This trend is set to continue.

- So how can ESF providers offer 50+ participants the support they need?
- What is different about working with them?
- What are their common barriers?
- And how might their expectations of the service provided differ from those of other age groups?

This publication seeks to answer the questions posed by providers who want to offer a good service to their 50+ participants.

TAEN – The Age and Employment Network, have compiled this publication from good practice tips and techniques contributed by ESF projects so that their knowledge and expertise can be shared with successor programmes.

The featured contributions are Priority 1 projects from the 2007-2013 Round, each operating in varied circumstances across the country. Among the six projects are initiatives based in London, in sparsely populated rural areas and in former industrial areas.

Also included are projects that have supported people into self-employment, an important route back to work for the over-50s. Another specialist provider focuses exclusively on supporting the over-50s. All projects were operating in a difficult economic environment because of the recession and yet all delivered or exceeded their targets. The selected projects are inspirational in many ways and the approaches taken may also provide ideas for working with other age or target groups.

We hope that this publication will continue to be a source of good practice tips for those working with the over-50s in ESF projects both now and in the future.



**Chris Ball**

Chief Executive

TAEN – The Age and Employment Network

# MENTA: Strong Community Focus in Rural Suffolk



Located in Haverhill, MENTA supports groups based in Suffolk. MENTA is strong in the community and has a reputation to maintain as the 'go-to' place for correct information, advice and support and has been offering services in the community for the last 27 years. MENTA will also go anywhere to publicise what they do. That's possibly the most important aspect, says Rosanne Kilbourn, and MENTA's top tip if you're looking to outreach to clients. People may not be able to travel to a particular place, or may find it off-putting, so bring it nearer to them.

## Creating 'olderpreneurs'

MENTA's project - Enterprising Communities (ESF 7373) – the project reference is hard-wired into Rosanne's brain – was an 18-month project which supported people to start their own business, find employment or meaningful volunteering, or step into education. Enterprise coaches were attached to the project to support budding 'olderpreneurs'.

One of two Suffolk-based Enterprising Communities projects (the other was run by Exemplas), MENTA understand the issues faced by isolated communities in rural places. All ages suffer from problems of accessibility; Haverhill is not served by trains, for instance, and the buses operate on school timetable schedules. This makes it difficult for someone to get to employment if they have to work a three shift system.



Enterprise coaches were attached to the project to support budding 'olderpreneurs'.

"It does all come together at the end," Rosanne affirms. "It has taken time for older people to get used to the idea of changing their life."

The ESF pilot project did specific work with all age groups in Haverhill: 220 people got help; 57 businesses were started – 11 of them in the over-50 age group, with a mix of male and female enthusiasts. Rosanne reels off the statistics: proof of a successful project that ended in May 2011.



It has taken time for older people to get used to the idea of changing their life.

### ▪ **Be Prepared to Outreach Anywhere**

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If that brings you into contact with the customer you're trying to attract: volunteer centres, local church bazaar, parish newsletter (a well-read information source for the older age group), community centres, libraries, supermarkets, doctors' surgeries. People may be unable to travel to a particular place, so bring the outreach to them.

'Touch and buy' rules apply here too, and it has to be something people can take ownership of and it helps if they can go with friends. It all boils down to people contact. Get the outreach right: talk to people, find out what they want and tell them what you can offer.

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### ▪ **Nothing Replaces Word of Mouth**

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When organising drop-in events, create a safe, friendly and welcoming space to attract the older age group. If a friend recommends the service, it has added power.

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### ▪ **Accessible Information: Bite-size and Visible**

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Remember, 10.5 million older people are not on the internet, so there is a need for information and advice to be accessible to this age group. **So, make things available in all formats:** leaflet drop, coverage in print (in newspapers, newsletters).

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### ▪ **Slow Burn**

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Accept that work with marginalised communities will be a 'slow-burn'. Don't expect fast results or to be able to turn around participants overnight. There is no immediate fix, and therein lies the difficulty with short-term funding

### ▪ **Build Trust and Offer Consistent Support**

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Outreach is important but it is not a one-hit wonder. Other activities such as enterprise and coaching can be a crucial part of the support on offer. Knowing all the project participants personally was key for MENTA in building trust and good relationships.

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### ▪ **Look for Partners to Spread the Message**

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Partnership working is key in such communities to address longer-term barriers to employment, and MENTA have established links with a whole host of local agencies in order to further their message. Keep partners involved in the project and share knowledge. Let them know how the project is progressing and how their clients are benefiting.

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### ▪ **Share Success**

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The MENTA project was one of the winners of the **ESF Creating Futures Awards**, when their Outreach Worker and former programme participant, Chrissy Proctor, won a **Personal Transformation Award**.

## Case Study: James Romana-Powling



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I contacted MENTA straight away and I was immediately put on the right track.

“In 2010, I lost my mother to cancer very suddenly and without any warning. I held a senior post in the Health Service at the time and the last three years had proven to be very difficult. These events led me to examine my own life. “I dwelt on the issue for many weeks and did nothing about it, other than talk to my wife about the various possibilities. To add to the pressure of the situation, we had already decided to sell our house of 11 years and downsize. However, in the back of my head a little seed of an idea began to germinate. My wife and I talked about the idea that I was nurturing, and she encouraged me as I worked things out in my head.

“After a two-week break I had decided to start my own business. I had wanted to do this for years, but either the time had never been right or our financial commitments too great. When we returned to the UK, I began sorting things out. I resigned from my post at the Health Service and began to work up my plans.

“Through my wife’s work she already had a business relationship with MENTA and so was well aware of what they were able to offer by way of support and information. I contacted MENTA straight away and I was immediately put on the right track.

“I spent a couple of sessions working through my ideas with Jo Garden, who was also able to provide a great deal of help. Jo helped me with establishing the structure of my business and, as I began to peel back the layers, I started to realise just how much was involved in starting up your own business.

“MENTA provided no end of help and advice. They also provided courses (free) that covered any number of subjects, from book-keeping to making use of the media.

I signed up for half a dozen courses and really benefited from the advice and support of those delivering the sessions. “I had to take my courage in both hands and not worry about whether or not I had done anything like this before, I just had to get on with it. Everything that I had learned up to this moment strengthened my conviction to get out there and sell myself.

“That was almost a year ago. I set myself up as an interior and exterior decorator offering a quality and dependable service at a reasonable price, also covering small building projects, garden design and maintenance and anything else that falls into a similar category.

“Today I have a pipeline of work for the next six months. My self-esteem and self-confidence have grown enormously. I am making a profit and generating some healthy business. I have to remember that I would not be here were it not for the support of my wife and the guys at MENTA. The only thing that I ask myself is: ‘Why didn’t I do this years ago?’”

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My self-esteem and self-confidence have grown enormously. I am making a profit and generating some healthy business.

# Momentum Arts: Helping People into Work through Arts, Sports and Volunteering



Momentum Arts is a not for profit organisation helping people into work through arts, sports and volunteering. Team East for Skills is a successful programme for anyone who wants help to get into employment or enterprise. Using the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games as inspiration, artistic and sports facilitators aim first to find the passion in an individual, then seek to inspire unemployed individuals to improve their skills, engage in volunteering and move into employment.

Jointly funded by Legacy Trust UK, an independent charity set up to create a lasting cultural legacy from the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and the European Social Fund, the £2 million programme which ran until February 2012 offered a total of 1,500 places on a unique programme of personal skills, communication and confidence building.

Group challenges and tasks honed individuals to progress from an initial Warm-up (10 hours) to Bronze and Silver level programmes offering more challenging work skills and personal development and possibly an accredited qualification.

## Working with partners

Highlighting the importance of partnership working (one of their top tips) Momentum Arts, working in Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire on the Team East for Skills programme, point to their own successful regional partnership and regularly meet with Norfolk and Suffolk, and Hertfordshire and Essex regional partners. The TEFS



The message that should come through loud and clear is that *there is a future after 50.*

programme has a steering group; and a local advisory group (which includes the County Arts Officer) to ensure there is an effective and engaged local dimension to their work. Their particular organisation also has links with the London 2012 Organising Committee (LOCOG), through its links with regional Olympic and cultural events.

Part of partnership working involves maintaining a good working relationship with the organisations and the Jobcentre. Keep them in the loop of what you are doing and the good results you have achieved. This may mean finding people in the organisation who can be the channel for this information. And remember, it is not unusual to find ‘champions’ in the Jobcentre – at least one.

Momentum Arts is careful to always treat clients as human beings. This may sound like a no-brainer, especially since an arts-based environment is as far removed from a formal setting as you can get. Momentum Arts does touch on CVs, but the artists and facilitators are more concerned with helping people find out how they could make money from their interests or something they love doing.

In working with the over-50s whose background may have been in what is now an 'obsolete' career, there is a strong chance that participants will be looking for a complete career change which will not necessarily be full-time work. So engaging them to find out what excites and interests them is paramount, and having a person on staff with whom they can share their experiences, and who can support their vision, is welcome. The message that should come through loud and clear is that there is a future after 50.

### **Evaluating your project**

And finally, when looking at the interventions used, consider what worked and what didn't and ensure project participants complete appraisal forms and questionnaires. Listen to what clients are feeding back (the bouquet treatment is always welcome but don't ignore the brickbats). Then use it as advertising and a profile raising opportunity: Momentum Arts' Facebook page contains compliments from participants, and gives an idea of what the programme has done for the individual. IT exposure is another good idea to reach different client groups, especially the younger group.



Team East for Skills made me feel like a human being again, and the programme gave me more than money – it gave me back my self-respect.

## **Case Study: Paul Merrell**

Paul, 51, was out of work following a factory accident which had forced him to give up his 35 year career as an electrician. Paul had a background in sport, competing for 23 years up to international level as a sprinter and had always volunteered as a coach whilst working. He is now a self-employed sports coach, specialising in speed fitness, strength and conditioning training, and he currently works with rugby players, hockey teams, track and field athletes, and his clients include a range of national finalists and medal winners.

The Warm-up level with Momentum Arts was just what Paul needed: it rebuilt his self-esteem and self-respect, and motivated him to make the jump into setting up his own business.

The course 'flipped a switch' for Paul, making him look at what he could offer other people. "Team East for Skills made me feel like a human being again, and the programme gave me more than money – it gave me back my self-respect."

### ▪ Invest in a Database

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Team East for Skills' Project Manager, Steve Nation, recommends investing in a database as a first step to attracting clients. Relatively new to the support sector, but speaking from his business background, a database doesn't have to cost much, Steve maintains, but having the knowledge base and contact details of organisations region-wide is crucial to providing a landscape of the provision that is currently out there. And how better to know who you can contact with a query, or the organisations with whom you could partner on a project?

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### ▪ Build and Develop Links

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By using contacts on the database to build and develop links in regions and communities (hard to reach, the long-term unemployed, those with mental health difficulties), an up-to-date database is also a key marketing tool to promote training offers and events.

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### ▪ Identify Particular Groups

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Identifying particular groups in the community with your potential target audience, then go forth and forge links. There's no replacement for face-to-face and telephone contact with people in the locality to find out what they need and want.

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### ▪ Be Inclusive

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Based on their experience, Momentum Arts stresses that we can all be inclusive, as long as organisations know the difficulties an individual may face (long-term unemployment, mental health difficulties, people on the autistic spectrum) so that services can be adapted to meet client needs.

### ▪ Networking and Partnership Working

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Steve has always been struck by how little networking goes on in the community and voluntary sectors, for good reasons perhaps (lack of time and resources). He muses that one good thing that may come from the drive towards the Big Society is that organisations, instead of working in 'silos', will be obliged to work together more closely to get the best from reduced pots of funding.

Understandably, people who go into the sector invariably have a passion for the work and client group/s, and are therefore less interested in the commercial side. However, this could be an opportunity for smaller charities to up their game - working in partnership with other organisations.

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### ▪ Presence and Professional Image

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Smaller charities may have difficulties in presenting a professional image, and establishing a presence in today's digital world. This could have an impact on sponsorship, funding and promotion, and is another area where working in partnership could help small (less well off) organisations.

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### ▪ Don't Segregate Clients

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Momentum Arts programmes work to include clients, whatever their background. The aim is to build on the strengths of the individual, and find their passion. Momentum Arts is helped by the informal artistic and sports setting, which works well with intergenerational groups. Everyone is good at something, and learning can come from different generations.

Programmes are facilitated by artists (e.g. actors, graphic designers and musicians) and content leans towards the creative, team and trust building activities.

### ▪ Give Clients the Choice

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'Different strokes for different folks': No one is forced to 'share', and part of treating people as human beings is respecting the decisions they make. Engage with individuals to find out what they want from the programme, and if the creative approach is not working for them (they may be more scientific and analytical in approach), talk to them about what their next step might be, and make the appropriate referral.

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### ▪ Offer Continued Support

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Momentum Arts does not disappear and at the end of the four-day workshop, maintaining contact through email, phone and leaving the door open if clients wish to return. Support may continue too through the referring agency (who will have been kept up to speed about their client's progress).

# New Challenge: Experience Counts 50+ Programme

**NEW CHALLENGE**  
Employment and Training Specialists

Miriam, a New Challenge client, discovered that experience really does count. Aged 66, having had a taste of retirement (travelling home to the Caribbean to visit family and friends), Miriam started thinking about how she was going to spend her later life. Then Miriam saw an advert for the Experience Counts 50+ programme, for residents of Brent and Harrow, and her life took a whole new direction.

Miriam now has a licence to operate and deliver services to Harrow Council as a long-term carer for vulnerable adults. Read her story on 50+ Works: [http://www.50plusworks.com/downloads/New\\_Challenge\\_casestudy.pdf](http://www.50plusworks.com/downloads/New_Challenge_casestudy.pdf)

## Delivering one-to-one support

Experience Counts 50+ is a London Councils / European Social Fund co-financed programme. Run by New Challenge (NC) for Brent and Harrow residents aged 50+, who are unemployed or economically inactive, an established team of four NVQ Level 3 and 4 qualified Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) / Recruitment Advisers offer tailored one-to-one support.

The project is “all about the individual,” says Ramesh Moher, manager at New Challenge. Advisers actively encourage a lot of engagement with participants, who are given time to discuss their needs and barriers.

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The project is “all about the individual”.



## Participants of Experience Counts 50+

A minimum of six hours' one-to-one IAG support is built into the project, which means that participants are not placed under time constraints. New Challenge advisers spend time exploring participants' backgrounds, prior experience and personal circumstances, which will usually become apparent during the course of conversation. New Challenge understands that multiple barriers take time to address, and the relaxed environment creates confidence in the individual that they will not be lost in a 'big bureaucratic system'.



New Challenge has discovered with this client group that many participants have elder care responsibilities - and health issues of their own.

### **Building strong relationships and networks**

“The same core team in New Challenge have worked together for the last seven years; they have built up strong relationships with clients and communities in the area, developed excellent employer links, and an extensive provider network,” says Ramesh.

The project is particularly proactive in the job search arena and participants are encouraged to ‘get in the driving seat’ of their own job search. New Challenge has built connections with a wide range of local employers that participants can ‘tap into’, covering a range of sectors: large retailers, security companies and in the health and social care field, nursing homes and domiciliary care providers. Despite the benefits of electronic job search, it may not always produce the right results for older jobseekers, which is why New Challenge advisers work intensively with clients to focus on their individual job application process.

Together they work to develop a SMART Action Plan to get a realistic sense of the individual’s goals - and any limiting factors. This means talking through the exact job requirements for an individual to get a fuller picture of what will be expected of them.

### **Providing a reality check**

One lady, a driver with a Passenger Carrying Vehicle (PCV) licence and experience of working in community transport, wanted to transfer her skills to delivery driving for a big food retailer. The New Challenge adviser went through the Job Description/Person Specification to

highlight that driving was not all that would be required. Drivers would sometimes be expected to deliver heavy shopping to a customer’s door. The adviser posed the question: “What if the customer lives in a top-floor flat and the lift isn’t working?”

Advisers take individuals through a reality check and then help them to investigate other roles more suited to their circumstances. With the PCV-licensed driver, New Challenge introduced the idea of picker/packer opportunities, preparing the goods for delivery.

Talking through which roles would be suitable for the participant and fit in with their lifestyle, advisers can better help clients prepare for the application process.

New Challenge has discovered with this client group that many participants have elder care responsibilities - and health issues of their own, as a sizable number report long-standing health conditions.

In their local community, with a large ethnic population, Ramesh explains that the ‘squeeze’ can be even tighter. The traditional expectation that women will take care of both younger and older generations and manage the household; the long-term unemployed who may have not worked for several years; and those who have additional responsibilities - all are circumstances that conspire to make a return to work difficult.

“So, show them what they are capable of doing,” Ramesh says.



The view of older people as IT illiterate and technology-averse is a nonsense.

He also thinks that the view of older people as IT illiterate and technology-averse is a nonsense. New Challenge's partner, the College of North West London (CNWL), runs a three-week IT course (21 hours) at Entry Level 3 (non-accredited), which gives people a rudimentary knowledge of computers and the basic MS Office packages.

### Meeting targets

Another ambitious target set for the project is for 64 participants to progress to further learning. New Challenge worked with CNWL to develop a more in-depth Level 1 IT course and this additional training equips participants with many of the skills needed to work in an administrative role. To date, the success rate stands at an impressive 100 per cent.

New Challenge can look back on a successful track record of delivering ESF-funded programmes since 2003, working with all client groups. Over the two-year programme 'Experience Counts 50+', New Challenge has supported 100 older participants (of their target 139), 86 per cent of whom come from an ethnic minority and 30 per cent of whom have a long-standing health condition.

At the end of June 2011, 21 individuals - out of a target 31 - had found paid work (68 per cent of the employment target) and of those employment outcomes, 11 out of 14 participants had achieved sustained employment for six months (79 per cent).



**New Challenge participants have the opportunity to hone their IT skills**

In terms of further learning, 30 people achieved positive outcomes and progressed in further learning (of a target 64) - 47 per cent.

With Work Programme prime contractors gearing up to offer similar tailored support to the unemployed, New Challenge looks forward to working with providers to continue delivering personalised support to older jobseekers, helping the 50+ to remain active and prolonging their working life.

### ▪ **Make the Project about the Individual**

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New Challenge's Manager, Ramesh Moher, explains that the project is all about the individual. Advisers actively encourage a lot of engagement with participants, who are given time to discuss their needs and barriers.

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### ▪ **Partnership Working**

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Twenty per cent of project participants must be Jobseeker's Allowance claimants, so New Challenge has cultivated a good working relationship with local Jobcentres, and New Challenge advisers 'hot desk' in local Jobcentre Plus offices to outreach to the over-50s. This relationship is reciprocal with Jobcentre Plus keeping New Challenge informed of local vacancies they source.

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### ▪ **Keep it Local**

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New Challenge uses local advertising and links established within their network of local organisations to outreach to those who may be some of the 'hidden workless' and possibly claiming other benefits.

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### ▪ **SMART Action Plan**

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New Challenge advisers work intensively with clients to focus on their individual job application process and to develop a SMART (Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Realistic and Timebound) Action Plan, in order to get a realistic sense of an individual's goals – and any limiting factors.

### ▪ **Consider the Age Group**

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New Challenge discovered with an over-50s group that many participants had elder care responsibilities and health issues of their own. In their local community of Brent and Harrow, with a large ethnic population, Ramesh explains that the 'squeeze' can be even tighter. The traditional expectation that women will take care of both younger and older generations and manage the household; the long-term unemployed who may have not worked for several years; and those who have additional responsibilities - all are circumstances that conspire to make a return to work difficult.

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### ▪ **Don't Buy into Stereotypes**

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Ramesh thinks that the stereotypical view of older people as IT illiterate and technology-averse is a nonsense. New Challenge's partner, the College of North West London (CNWL) runs a three-week IT course (21 hours) at Entry Level 3 (non-accredited), which gives people a rudimentary knowledge of computers and the basic MS Office packages. And a more in-depth Level 1 course has had an impressive 100 per cent success rate to date.

# Over-50s: Babcock Achieves Excellent Results



Reach Out was a highly successful and innovative ESF project run by Babcock in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight in 2008-2011. It addressed the issue of worklessness among disadvantaged groups through community engagement. The project exceeded its targets relating to 50+ people who represented 25 per cent of participants. More importantly, a very high proportion of this age group (around 90 per cent) found employment.

Mohammed Khan, Project Manager, and Malcolm Short, Lead Key Worker, who led the project, had worked together for some 10 years and piloted and developed elements of the Reach Out model over a number of years. Here they share their recipe for success with us.

## Creating the customer journey

At the heart of the project was the support offered in a non-threatening environment; the use of one-to-one rather than group sessions; and mentoring along with continuity of support. Each participant had a 'key worker' who accompanied them throughout their journey, which could last up to 40 weeks. A key worker would tailor the support he or she offered to meet each person's needs, respecting individual differences and going at an appropriate pace.

In addition to the services it offered itself, Reach Out bought in debt services and counselling and collaborated with eight subcontractors, many of whom had their own partners. In this way, they were able to greatly extend the opportunities available to participants. Reach Out regarded the support they offered principally as a



Because participants were allowed to control the pace of their own journey, the drop out rate was lower than average for such projects.

journey as people did not necessarily end up by finding employment. For those very far from the labour market, the acquisition of soft skills was considered an important outcome.

## Innovative thinking

Reach Out staff were aware of the importance of incentivising participants. For example, if participants were poor timekeepers, staff were able to offer them a £10 shopping voucher if they managed to arrive on time on three occasions. This could prove to be a key turning point, demonstrating to participants that their efforts paid off.

A discretionary budget controlled by the Project Manager to fund participants' employment-related needs was an innovative element of the project. Each key worker was entitled to submit a request for funds which could be used to cover a wide range of needs. They were not only for training or courses, for example. They could be used to cover costs such as travel to meetings with key workers, suitable clothing and footwear to wear at interviews, IT equipment or refresher driving lessons. There was no set upper limit per individual. Nevertheless, each request to draw on funds would be carefully considered. Funding to attend courses or acquire qualifications was only provided if the courses or qualifications led to real employment opportunities locally.

Jobcentre Plus referred 20 per cent of Reach Out's participants. The majority were self-referrals or came



**Mohammed Kahn, Project Manager of Reach Out, presenting to a group of participants of the Reach Out project. Malcolm Short, the Lead Key Worker (wearing a white shirt) is seated to the right of Mohammed.**

through word of mouth. The remainder came via community centres or through engagement in public places such as shopping centres. The key workers were skilled in selling the Reach Out concept. And because participants were allowed to control the pace of their own journey, the drop out rate was lower than average for such projects.

Reach Out organised several participant forums of up to 12 people to obtain feedback on the services they offered. Each forum usually had a mix of people at different stages of the programme. Typically, they had to have been on the programme for at least 10 weeks to have sufficient experience of the services to be able to comment. The anonymity of forum participants and their comments was guaranteed. An additional element of quality control lay in regular visits by Jobcentre Plus to monitor customer experience.

### **Recruiting a successful team**

The expertise of Reach Out's staff was a key element of their successful delivery model. In recruiting key workers, Mohammed looked for people who were not too set in their ways. He wanted to avoid employing people who would not be able to adjust from operating on shorter timescales in static locations. Instead, he selected people with the right transferable skills who could acquire the appropriate qualifications or formalise their skills at a later stage. In the end, Reach Out had to offer a slightly higher salary than originally anticipated to attract candidates of the right calibre. Reach Out's staff also included two job brokers.

Reach Out established various ways of managing and developing their staff. Key workers operated in groups under a lead key worker. Every month they would hold a formal supervision session. These sessions provided key workers with an important opportunity to discuss any problems or issues they had. And, because they were working closely with participants for up to 40 weeks, all sorts of issues did arise. The lead key worker (who was not a line manager) was also able to provide peer mentoring. There were additional monthly meetings with the project manager. According to Mohammed, the key to good relationships not only with staff but also with subcontractors is honesty and openness.

### **Working with 50+ people**

Malcolm says that one of the biggest barriers for people aged 50+ is a lack of awareness of their transferable skills. They often need someone else to help them identify their skills. Mohammed recalls a moment when he worked with the staff of a brewery that had gone out of business. Most of the men who had worked in the brewery had been there for 30 years, and although they had no idea what to do, they knew they had to move forward. The line: "I can't do anything else" was frequently heard. Malcolm adds that advisers supporting the over-50s need to allow time to build rapport and trust. Only then will their customers open up and say what they feel and what they want to do.

Reach Out attributes its remarkable success rate with the 50+ in part to the fact that a relatively high proportion

of their participants had only recently lost their jobs as a result of the recession. Many had come through a family member or through a former colleague. In 2008, Reach Out also worked with Woolworths when it went out of business as part of the Government and ESF funded

‘Response to Redundancy’ measure. Reach Out, however, used a more low key and informal approach than traditionally used. They also found it made it easier for people to adapt to their new situation and move forward if they worked in a group of former colleagues.

### ▪ **Staff Expertise**

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When recruiting, think about what skills and attributes are needed to successfully deliver your project. Babcock was aware of the importance of recruiting the right key workers for their project. This meant offering a slightly higher salary than originally anticipated but ensured they attracted candidates of the right calibre.

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### ▪ **Manage and Develop Staff**

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Once you have recruited the right staff, it is important to actively manage and develop them. Establishing a structure of support and supervision for staff provides an opportunity for problems to be discussed and resolved. Mohammed Khan, Babcock’s Project Manager, believes honesty and openness are key to developing good relationships.

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### ▪ **Think Innovatively**

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When working with a marginalised or hard to reach group of people, it is important that staff are able to think innovatively. Babcock describes incentivising participants as an example of an innovative approach. Participants who were poor timekeepers were offered a £10 shopping voucher if they managed to arrive on time on three occasions.

### ▪ **Participants’ Forums**

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To ensure you are meeting the needs of your clients, listen to what they say. Organising participant forums is an effective way to get their feedback on the services you offer. Including a mix of people at different stages of the programme and guaranteeing their anonymity will lead to varied and constructive feedback.

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### ▪ **Barriers of the 50+**

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There are many barriers that are commonly experienced by older jobseekers and being aware of these will help you to best support your clients. One of the biggest barriers for people aged over 50 can be a lack of awareness of their transferable skills. Babcock staff frequently heard the line “I can’t do anything else” from workers who had been in the same job for many years. A crucial part of your role involves identifying what your clients have to offer and how they can sell their skills.

## **Case Study: Story of David, by Job Broker Tony Dixon**

David was referred to me in May 2010. He was 53 and had spent most of his working life as a bricklayer. He had a City & Guilds qualification in bricklaying and had served an Indentured Apprenticeship. For most of his working life he had been on PAYE as a bricklayer, which was unusual, as most bricklayers today are self-employed. David was very much a worker of the old school and very set in his ways.

He was desperate to find PAYE bricklaying work in Portsmouth, which was proving to be very hard. He had few IT skills, so job searching on the internet was extremely difficult for him. We set him up with an email account, which initially he struggled to use, but with our help he gradually became more proficient in job search, sending emails and applying for jobs online.

David was adamant that he wanted PAYE work but I pointed out to him that it would be very unlikely that he would find PAYE bricklaying work in the current economic climate as self employment was now the norm. This enabled employers to 'lay off' people more easily once a job was completed with long term financial commitment or outlay. David eventually came round to this idea as we continued to meet and started to explore other options for him.

Having a connection at Estee Lauder, the cosmetics company, in Petersfield, I suggested that we send his CV to them, which we did, and he was asked to attend an interview. I took David to the interview and picked him up when it finished. Unfortunately he was not successful, which he was not too worried about

as he later told me he couldn't stand the constant smell of perfume in the place.

I continued to meet weekly with David and assisted him in his job search. After one of our sessions we came across a temporary job with Royal Mail at their main post office in Portsmouth which was to cover the Christmas period. David was not too keen at first, but with my encouragement decided to give it a go and to try it. Initially this was just for a six-week period, but because David settled in so well, he was retained with four others after the Christmas period.

This casual work continued for a further period as they kept asking David back. We kept encouraging him as part of our in-work support to stick at it as there appeared a good chance that he would soon be offered a contract of employment, which he eventually received.

David is now very happy working for Royal Mail. The job suits his type of work ethic and he has realised the benefit of working for a large employer. He did comment that working outdoors in the winter as a bricklayer had become more difficult as he got older. He has made a lot of friends in his new job and appears very happy with his situation.

# The Business Factory: TEDCO

## The Business Factory

The Business Factory project, based in Wallsend, is North Tyneside Council's one-stop shop for budding entrepreneurs. It is delivered by enterprise agency, TEDCO.

### Creating entrepreneurs

Its mission is to support local people, including the over-50s, to be more enterprising and to take a fresh look at their life and work. This could mean developing a business idea, taking up a new career, or finding out how to exploit a hobby or skill. By offering free, professional advice, The Business Factory helps people realise their potential and consider what they have to offer and, with luck, turn their ambition or interest into an income stream. The project provides step-by-step guidance for local people who are at the 'thinking' stage of developing a business, but who may not have identified a clear idea to take forward.

The Business Factory delivers group and one-to-one sessions, and workshops to assist people match their personal interests and skills with local business needs. Building confidence is paramount, and business coaches mentor individuals to motivate them to take the next step on the road to becoming an entrepreneur.

A typical Business Ideas Generation workshop is designed to help clients develop viable business ideas themselves. These can include turning a hobby into a part or full time business, retraining to do something new, or using an existing trade or skill as a route into self-employment.



Building confidence is paramount, and business coaches mentor individuals to motivate them to take the next step on the road to becoming an entrepreneur.

The Business Factory enterprise coaches and business advisers help people who may already have an idea for a business but are not quite enterprise ready. The team works with individuals to help them overcome any barriers to self-employment they may have, for example a disability or lack of funds.

### Delivering innovation

The Business Factory Ideas Bank is an interesting innovation. The Ideas Bank is a database of business ideas and opportunities specific to North Tyneside (750 at the last count). The database has been compiled with the assistance of the North Tyneside business community and is enhanced through constant feedback from the 'Ideas Vault'. This is an exercise used in community outreach, where the general public is invited to contribute their good ideas or 'light bulb moments'.

Clients are able to log on to an online service to browse and search for ideas at their leisure. The service provides information of a range of different businesses throughout the area, from manufacturing and retail to beauty therapy and online ventures, such as setting up an Ebay store.

TEDCO's outreach in the community involves making contact with people in informal settings such as in shopping malls or in community centres. Exploring skills and hobbies, as well as work experience, can be a way into discussions about self-employment.

## **Case Study:** **Wishing Well Cards;** **A New Business Venture**



**Kathleen Cave in front of her shop**

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We help clients to become active agents in their own life, not just passive subjects of interventions.

A North Tyneside resident used her wealth of experience to turn her dream of becoming her own boss into a reality. She opened her own greetings card and gift shop, Wishing Well Cards.

Kathleen Cave, 53, from North Shields had been made redundant twice so when her most recent job was under threat, she decided to bite the bullet and work for herself.

Although she had ten years' experience of working in greeting card shops, she faced a couple of barriers. She did not have access to business start-up funding and she lacked confidence in her ability to go it alone. In search of advice, she and her partner, Rob Gray, approached The Business Factory where she met TEDCO business adviser George Wafer.

Kathleen commented: “George was very enthusiastic about my business idea and he encouraged me to take it forward whilst giving me advice on start-up costs and the different funding that was available to help me.

With his help, we secured a business start-up grant from North Tyneside Council and pooled it with our own resources. We made our dream come true when we opened the shop.”

# BEST Limited: Tips for Working with Older Jobseekers



BEST Limited was initially the New Deal sole contractor for West Yorkshire. BEST ran classroom-based training (part-funded by the European Social Fund) for those eligible for the New Deal programme: some 300 customers aged 18-60+ at any one time, spread over three floors of their training centre. “The classroom situation does not work with the older age group,” maintains BEST’s Area Performance Manager, Ruth Wilkinson.

Realising that older customers may be overlooked in classrooms of mainly younger people, Ruth decided that something needed to be done about the ‘older customer sitting in the corner’, and wanted to create a 50+ group that would deal specifically with their needs, with more one-to-one support.

## Choosing the right group leader

Ruth remembers: “It is also important to make sure you have the right person leading the group. It doesn’t have to necessarily be someone who is 50+ themselves but has the right personality. For this job I chose Carlson Chan who was in his early 30s – very focused and had a lot of respect for the older generation, was firm but fair and smiled a lot! “We began by running focus group meetings with all customers 50 and over, asking them how they felt about the centre and the training delivery, and we let them tell us what they needed. Most were very eager to be in a like-minded group, claiming that they were tired of listening to the negative comments that some younger people voiced. A small number, however, preferred to stay where they

were and we later found out that this was because they didn’t trust that what we were about to do for them would be any different to what they perceived was ‘the norm.’” The older customers who did not wish to join a ‘peer group’ became the control group in BEST’s unscientific experiment and were required to fill out a weekly activity sheet and detail interviews attended, etc, so this could be compared against the new group’s activity. With the customers who embraced the option of working in a peer group, intensive work began on defining and addressing the barriers they felt they faced.

## Breaking down barriers

“If a customer believes they face a barrier, and some really believe they do, it is harder for an individual to see beyond it,” said Ruth. “It became very clear, very quickly, that most of these people had barriers that went far deeper than the run-of-the-mill issues we deal with daily. We needed to dig down under the surface and try and address some of the psychological problems that were preventing them from moving forward.”



The classroom situation does not work with the older age group.



If a customer believes they face a barrier, and some really believe they do, it is harder for an individual to see beyond it.

“While BEST didn’t forget that this course was all about getting a job, we also knew that people couldn’t do job search all day long. But if we hadn’t addressed the underlying issues as to why customers ‘can’t/won’t’ work, we would have been wasting our time.”

Ruth was curious to find out what else was going on in the customer experience, and how to change things for the better. Life coaching was one way to address this, and eventually the use of a psychologist proved to be the best way to help the group become job search effective.

“The life coach offered us 12 half-day sessions over six weeks and had to rework the course content. “This was a first for her; she had never dealt with such an intense group of older and disengaged adults before, some of whom had not worked for 20 years, or at all.”



**BEST adviser Carlson Chan supporting one of his 50+ clients**



This is all I needed, just someone to notice me and help me – thank you, my life is already changing.

“Despite the short timeframe, the coach did an excellent job and brought the whole group together in an upbeat and motivated way.” But the reason they did not engage in work activity was revealed to be depression. “Unless someone knows how to recognise depression, it can go unnoticed or undiagnosed in jobseekers, especially when they are long-term unemployed. And in mixed groups these people often disappear into the background. It was important to pick up those thought to have been labouring under this additional burden and seek a further intervention for them.” Engaging a mental health professional in this field was the next step for BEST.

### A ‘trial’ approach

“The psychologist had individual meetings with each customer first and confirmed that each had some form of psychological need which had kept them locked in their situation. He designed and delivered a trial six-week model of three-hour group therapy sessions with 12 individuals in total. This allowed people the time and space to share their experiences. The study went on to prove that nearly 80 per cent of the participants had suffered some kind of physical, mental or sexual abuse – or were past ‘abusers’.”

The trial assessment had some successful results: Out of the 12 that started, eight completed the course, of which five went on to find work and the other three to further treatment. After only two sessions the most gratifying comment from one group member was a huge thank you: “This is all I needed, just someone to notice me and help me – thank you, my life is already changing.”

Follow-up work with BEST staff involved some condensed training with the psychologist and some awareness-raising of ‘trigger points’: things in the individual’s story and behaviour that would help staff to work with their perceived barriers.

“Some work was done around ‘learning styles’ as well. Carlson responded to customer comments that the environment reminded them of school. By making a few small changes, and with the interventions we put in place for them, we noticed there was a marked reduction in sickness absence and no-shows as well as an increase in the number of customers getting jobs – compared with the results for the control group.”

Adjustments made to the timetable to accommodate a customer’s lifestyle needs achieved a change in mind set, some great customer feedback and the highest job outcome percentage for 50+ customers in the partnership!

## ▪ Choose the Right Person to Run the Group

This doesn't have to be someone who is 50+ themselves, just someone with the listening capability and empathy. BEST's Ruth Wilkinson explained she didn't want their provision to be just about facts and figures, but more about people.

## ▪ Create the Right Environment

Arrange furniture and equipment so it is not reminiscent of school. Sitting round one big table, instead of small tables dotted around, instantly provided the opportunity to foster team work and encouraged individuals to join in, ask questions, etc.

## ▪ Recruitment

Concentrate on reducing barriers whether customers have had a steady work record in the past or haven't worked for many years, or even at all. Older customers tend to be out of touch with today's recruitment methods and may need more help to understand and prepare (job applications, interview skills, IT training).

Older jobseekers may need help understanding that it is no longer a case of 'what you see is what you get', that prospective candidates will need to include evidence-based examples in application forms and answer competency-based questions at interview to demonstrate their suitability for a role. (This was particularly challenging for older men who had the most difficulty in expressing themselves.)

## ▪ Initial Appointments

These are for fact finding. As Ruth explains: "People don't come on these courses to bear their souls, because they don't believe anyone cares. Explore the background rather than just taking on board what they say. Why are they saying that? Look out for the

eyes not backing up what the body language and mouth are saying and encourage them to speak freely and be honest – they need to trust you."

## ▪ Debriefing and Constant Evaluation

Debriefs were held every day during the programme planning stages, and at regular intervals. BEST constantly evaluated their performance with customers. "Ask customers and listen, listen, listen – let's find out what they really think, not what they think we want to know. Remember we're learning as well."

## ▪ Buddying

In groups, including those which were not part of the life coaching or psychological assessment cohorts, BEST provided 'buzz' sessions: quick catch-ups to integrate new people into the group. In place of a 'group' induction, one way of integrating them quickly was by 'buddying' them up with a more experienced participant.

## ▪ IAG Support Network

A database of useful contacts and third sector organisations was set up for onward referrals. "Pastoral care is ongoing and this often continued after the customer's course had finished."

## ▪ Case Conferences

Increasingly, as BEST see more customers on a one-to-one basis and their case history can be difficult to unravel, they plan to introduce case conferences. Case conferences aim to bring experienced staff together to ensure the customer gets the best possible help to resolve their issues and move on into work.

# Top Tips Checklist

## Accessibility

- Be Prepared to Outreach Anywhere
- Choose the Right Person to Run the Group
- Create the Right Environment
- Accessible Information; Bite-Size and Visible

## Design and Delivery

- Make the Project about the Individual
- Staff Expertise
- Build and Develop Links
- Networking and Partnership Working
- Invest in a Database
- Slow Burn
- Think Innovatively

## Recruitment

- Keep it Local
- Nothing can Replace Word of Mouth
- Recruitment – Concentrate on Reducing Barriers
- Initial Appointments

## Supporting Clients

- Buddying
- IAG Support Network
- Build Trust and Offer Consistent Support
- Don't Buy into Stereotypes
- Consider the Age Group and their Barriers
- Be Inclusive / Don't Segregate Clients
- Give Clients a Choice

## Ongoing Assessment

- Case Conferences
- SMART Action Plan
- Participants' Forum
- Manage and Develop Staff
- Debriefing and Constant Evaluation

## Marketing and Communications

- Presence and Professional Image
- Look for Partners to Spread the Message
- Share Success



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**This Special Publication has been compiled by  
TAEN – The Age and Employment Network in  
association with the European Social Fund**

TAEN works to promote an effective labour market that serves the needs of people in mid and later life, employers and the economy.

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TAEN is the operating name of Third Age Challenge Trust, registered charity no. 1002770 and company limited by guarantee, registered in England no. 2602523