



CONTENTS

- 03 Who we are
- 04 Introduction
- 05 What we learned
 - 05 Barriers to employment
 - 06 Time
 - 07 Criminal records checks & ID
 - 08 Employing people with criminal records
 - 09 Constantly reviewing our recruitment processes to ensure they were accessible
 - 10 How employment works alongside benefits
 - 11 Co producing a programme of induction, training, development & support
 - 12 Asset based progression into other roles
 - 13 Diversification
 - 14 Flexibility
- 15 With Thanks
- 15 Links to other practical guides
- 16 Contact us





Who we are

Inclusion North exists to make inclusion real for all people with a learning disability. We do this by working with people with a learning disability, family carers and organisations that support them. We work to change society so that everybody with a learning disability can live as full, active, and equal citizens. This means changing the way people think, and the way things are done.

Introduction

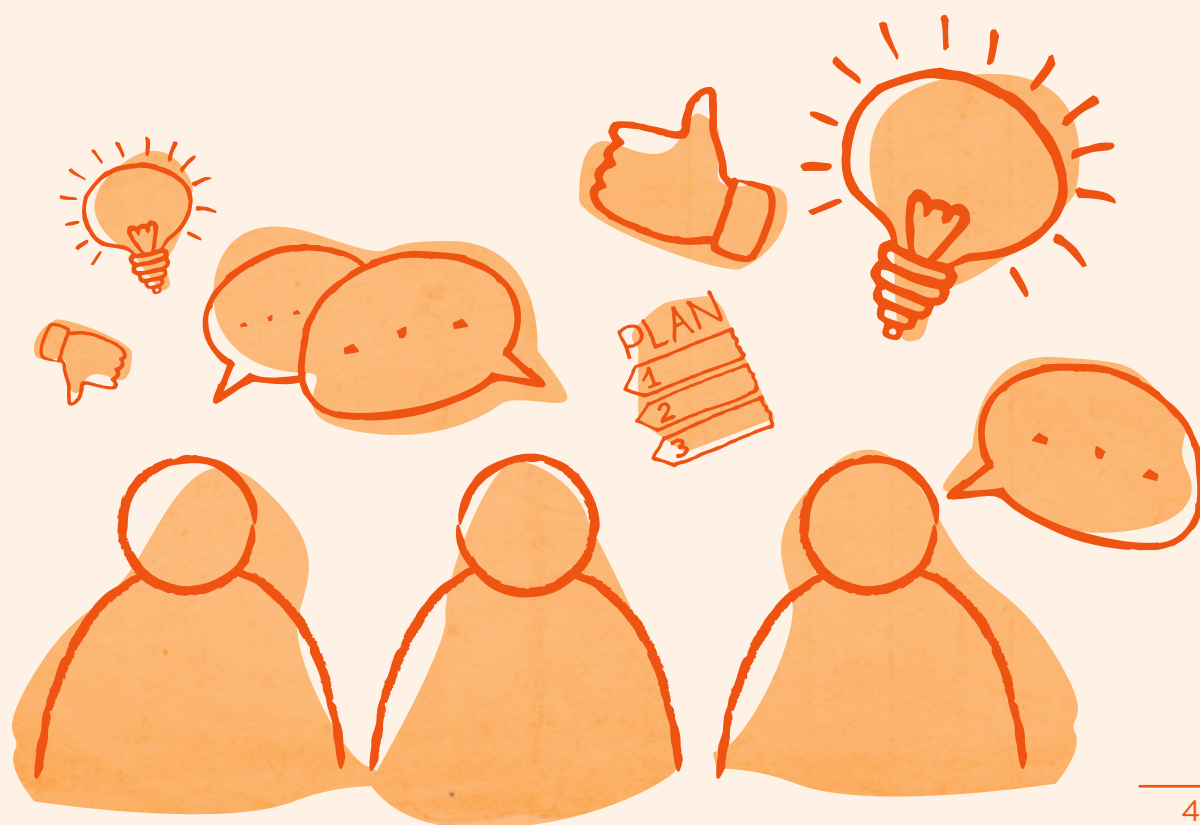
Inclusion North believes that everyone can make an important contribution to their community through sharing their different skills and gifts.

We operate a Hub through which people with a learning disability, autism or both and family members are employed as Expert Advisers who are valued for their lived experience. We recruit, train and support people to enable them to use their lived experience as part of the health and social care workforce.

The main work requested from our Hub, is for Experts to attend Care and Treatment Reviews as part of the Transforming Care programme. Clinical Commissioning Groups request Experts with relevant lived experience to contribute to the reviews of people who are currently receiving treatment in Assessment and Treatment Units.

We realised that our Hub would be stronger if we increased the diversity of the Experts we employed. We also thought that some people with a learning disability, autism or both and family members would probably face more barriers to gaining employment than others, and we were interested to explore whether we could address some of these barriers and create a more diverse workforce.

In particular, we wanted to employ more younger people, people from a black and minority ethnic background, and people with recent experience of living in an Assessment and Treatment Unit. We set out to recruit a further twenty Experts, and to learn as much as possible about the barriers people face when trying to get into employment and how to remove these.



What we learned

There are a lot of practical guides to employing people with a learning disability, autism or both, and we have included links to these at the end.

We didn't want to just create another guide. Instead, we wanted to share the detail of what we learned, in a quick, accessible way, so we created our top ten of things we wished we had known before we started.



1

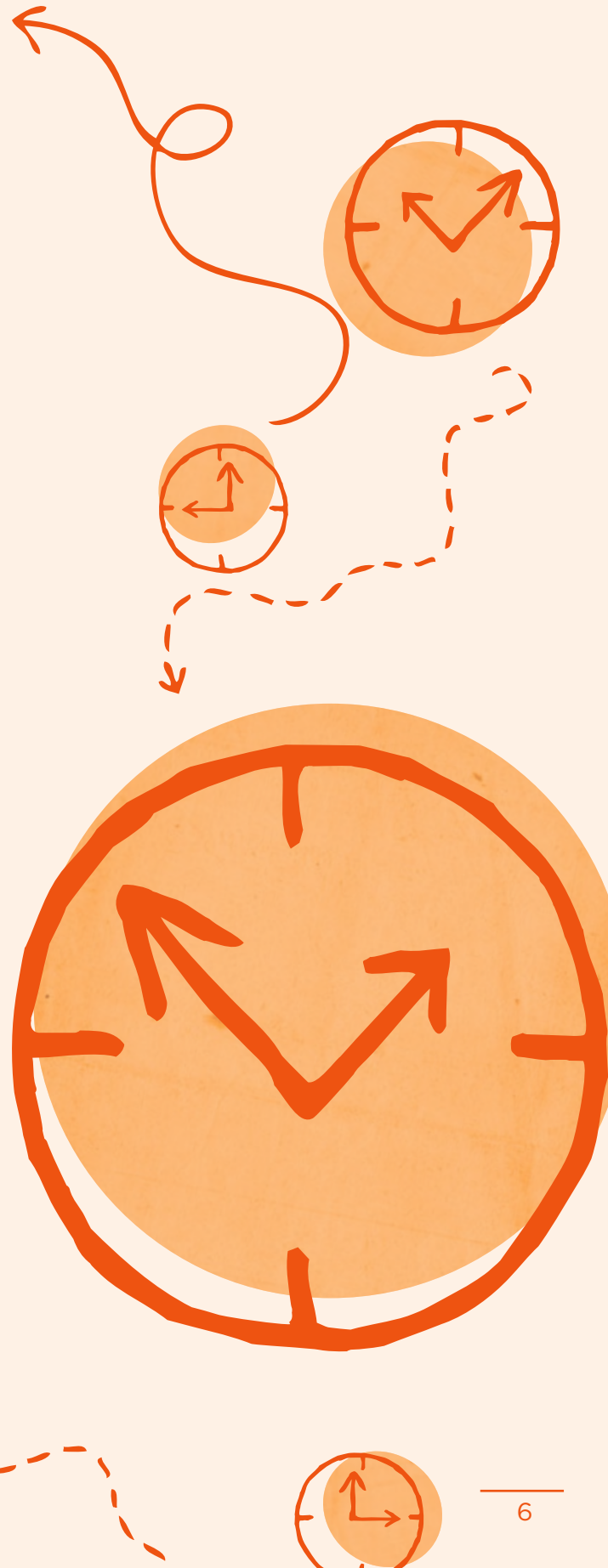
Barriers to employment

What we learned from the project was that everyone who applied to be an expert in the Hub faced barriers to employment that we had to work hard to remove. Within the Hub, we have used accessible recruitment practices for a while, and we assumed that for many of the new recruits these would be sufficient. However, what we found was that almost all of our new recruits encountered barriers in spite of our best efforts to be inclusive. These are all explored more below.

2

Time

Everything will take you much, much longer than you think it will. The barriers people face in gaining employment tend to be practical and often arise from them having a very different set of life experiences than many other people who are trying to get a job. This results in systems not working for people, and bespoke solutions needing to be found. Often this is enough to put people or employers off. To put it into the 'too difficult' pile. We found an individual solution for everyone who applied - and this took hours and hours and hours of research and problem solving. What we learned through persevering was - it is worth the investment. People whose lived experience is vastly different have a lot to contribute to the health and social care workforce, and a valuable perspective on what having a good life and good support services looks like.



"I found it really useful to shadow another Expert by Experience as I could see how the process worked and contribute my thoughts but not have the pressure of feeling like I was the only person in the room who was speaking from my perspective. I feel more prepared now!"

New recruit

3

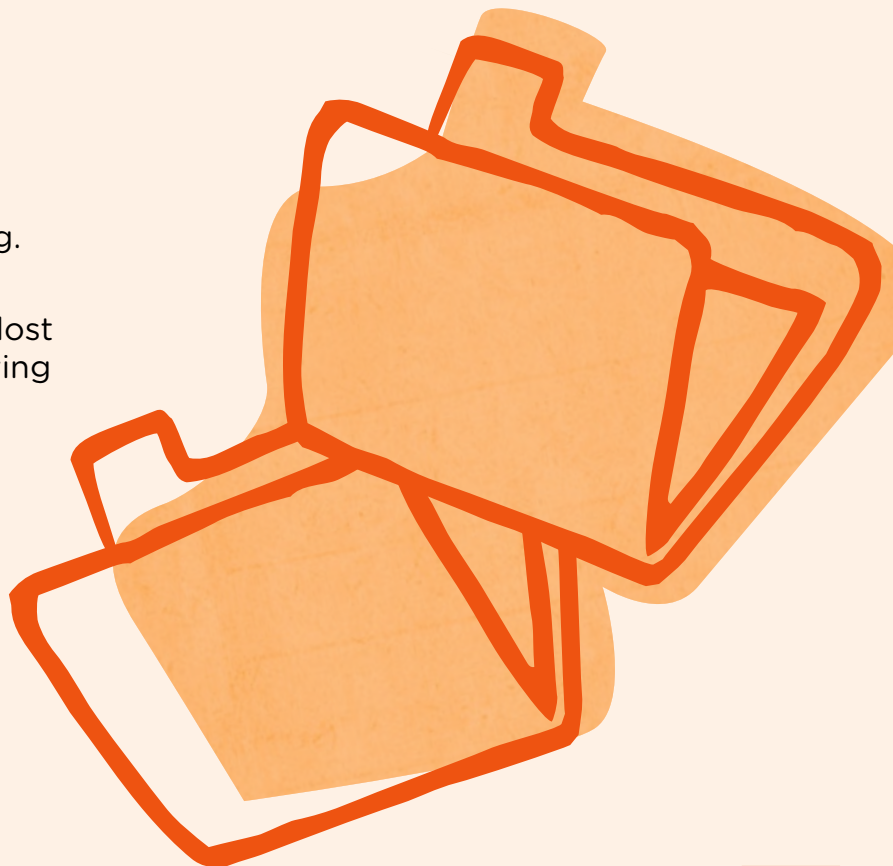
Criminal records checks & ID

One of the systems that we found often did not work smoothly for people was applying for a criminal records check through the Disclosure and Barring Services (DBS). DBS checks run most smoothly where people have set, accepted forms of ID and evidence of living at their own address. People with a learning disability, autism or both may struggle with this for many reasons including

- them not being responsible for paying bills in their home and therefore not having a current utility bill that is accepted as identification of their name and address
- having their financial affairs taken care of by someone else, leading again to them not having a bank statement to use as formal identification proving their name and address
- having been in Assessment and Treatment Units for many years and this creating an untypical list of previous addresses
- not having ever required the most common forms of identification e.g. passport, driving license
- their birth certificate having been lost during their time living in and moving between services

For some of our applicants we had to start from scratch in helping them to acquire basic ID in order to apply for a DBS check. To facilitate this process we:

- produced Easy Read information relating to the DBS checking process so that people understood what was required
- worked closely with the people that were supporting the applicant. Informing them of what was required very early on in the process meant that they could support the person to acquire ID. For example, by providing support to visit their local registry office to access a copy of their birth certificate



4

Employing people with criminal records

As part of this work, we reviewed our approach to doing criminal record checks to ensure it was lawful. We understood that, by actively recruiting people with experience of living in an Assessment and Treatment Unit, some applicants would have offences that were not spent under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 that would show up on the DBS check. We reviewed our policies and procedures to ensure they were fair, safe and did not create unnecessary barriers for people.

The steps we took were:

- Reviewed our policy on employing people with unspent convictions
- Attended training by NACRO to bring our knowledge and skills up to date
- Created a process for talking to the applicant about unspent convictions, carrying out a risk assessment, making recommendations about their employment and supporting the person through the process
- Clarifying the level in the organisation that decisions were delegated to, and ensuring confidential information handling to protect people's privacy

Before asking a person to apply for a criminal record check, the employer is legally responsible for ensuring that they are entitled to do a check for the specific job role. The need for checks for any role can be checked here:

[dbS-eligibility-guidance](#)



5

Constantly reviewing our recruitment processes to ensure they were accessible

Each applicant faced different issues in gaining employment with us, in spite of the accessible recruitment process we already had in place. We reviewed our whole recruitment, selection, induction, training and support programme and made further changes as a result of what we learned from each applicant. Some of the changes we made include:

- An autism-accessible application form that differed from our Easy Read form designed with people with a learning disability in mind
- Running an information session about the role of Expert prior to inviting people to apply, to give people a full idea of the role and the skills required, to reduce unsuitable applications and increase retention
- The opportunity to shadow an experienced Expert in a Care and Treatment Review as part of the induction process
- Increasing the proportion of the induction and training that was delivered by an existing Expert. This received good feedback from the applicants who felt that they were getting a very authentic account of the role and the skills needed to perform it

"Friendly informal environment"

Applicant

"Plenty of information in a format that was easy to follow and understand"

Applicant

6

How employment works alongside benefits

A permanent job with guaranteed hours can give people a clear idea of whether they can afford to come off benefits. However, this is not always what people are looking for, and sometimes part time or casual work is the best way for them to take their first or next step into employment. However, this poses greater difficulty for people in knowing what they can earn alongside benefits. The role of Expert in the Hub offered applicants a casual contract without guaranteed hours. This was not suitable for people who wanted a guaranteed income, but worked well for those who wanted to develop their work skills and build their CV as an entry level into the job market, or to work alongside caring responsibilities.

Many employers are not experts in understanding how earnings can work alongside benefits, and people report that access to specialist advice around this is limited. It's important for people to know that their Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payments are not considered when they start employment and begin to earn a wage.



People can do some permitted work (called Permitted Earnings) if they are in receipt of:

- Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Incapacity Benefit
- Severe disablement premium
- National Insurance Credits
- Income support (because of incapacity to work)

Job Centre Plus provides information about permitted earnings.

It's always useful to know how people's benefits will be affected when they start a new job. People can request a "better-off calculation" from an advice agency such as the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Access to Work can also be an option to support people into work. This is a government programme which supports disabled people to take up work or remain in work. It is a discretionary grant scheme. The person applying for Access to Work may have a mental health condition, a long-term health condition, and a learning disability and/or autism that impacts on their ability to work.



7

Co producing a programme of induction, training, development & support

We involved our existing Hub Experts to co-produce a comprehensive programme comprising induction, training, ongoing development and pastoral support for all Hub experts.

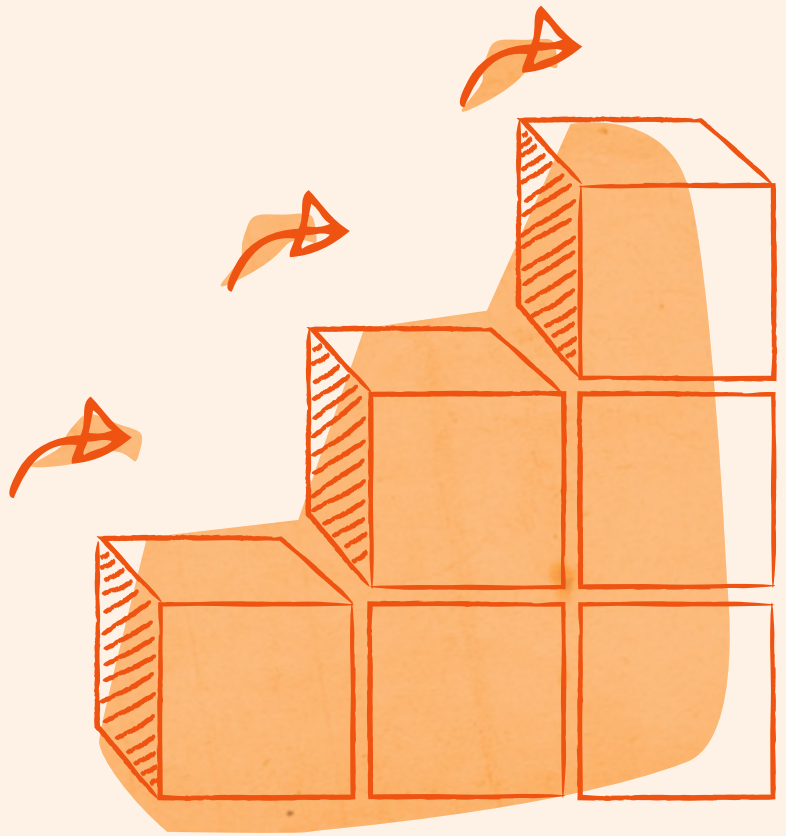
In doing this, we saw the confidence of our existing Experts increase as they recognised their own knowledge and skills and the contribution this could make to the Hub and the organisation. They also benefited from hearing the positive feedback from the new applicants, who responded well to hearing from the experience of the existing Experts and shadowing them in their role.

By co producing this, we really understood what Experts needed to perform their role well. Through evaluating the new approaches to training and support, Experts told us that they hadn't been unhappy with the original approach, but that the new enhanced approach, that they had co produced was much more comprehensive and made them feel far more supported.

"Being G's supporter with the training has taught me lots: He has gained in confidence, speaking up, and taking a lead. I began with the classic mistake of assuming what was needed and developed a package for him to use. He soon showed me what was required and together we put forward what he wanted to deliver. Having known him for a long time, it is great to see him in front of the class: his experience always takes me by surprise."

An Expert Adviser's Supporter





8

Asset based progression into other roles

Our approach to growing the Hub led us to understand that the Experts had far more skills and experiences to share than just those they were using within the Care and Treatment Reviews. We worked in an asset-based way to bring these skills into the Hub, which created additional roles for the Experts to take on. For some, this was about getting involved in the recruitment of staff within the organisation. For others it was about using their skills to deliver training.

This was both confidence building for the Experts, it grew the skills in the organisation, and it led to further paid work opportunities for the Experts.

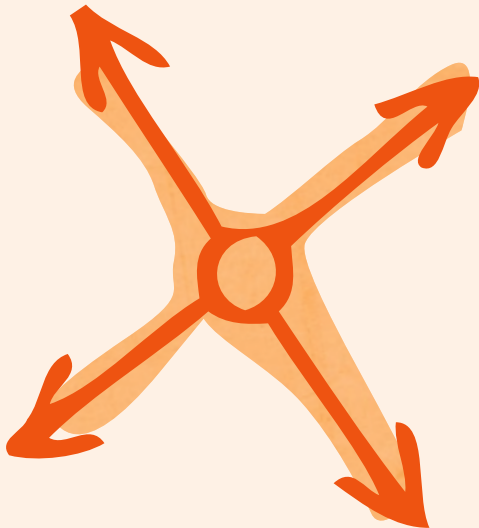
"I have never delivered training before, I have been doing it for a year and I feel really confident now"

Expert Adviser

9

Diversification

Points 7 and 8 above naturally led the Hub to look outside the organisation and beyond Care and Treatment Reviews and to develop an 'Offer' for customers using the Hub. This diversification led us into doing work in new sectors, bringing the benefit of lived experience into new areas of work. For example, one new avenue of work has been supporting the cultural sector to meet the Arts Council's requirement of the creative case for diversity. Experts who had previously only used their lived experience in the reviews of people in Assessment and Treatment Units, are now sharing their expertise with organisations at Board level around ways that organisations can be more inclusive.



“From Autumn 2017, supported by Inclusion North, we have invited Experts from the Hub to take part in meetings and conversations from the outset of our new project, and their experiences and insight has proven invaluable to ensuring our offer is relevant, appropriate and considerate.

It is the support and input of the Experts that has enabled us to fully realise that our proposed programme hadn't completely considered or understood the scale of the work we needed to undertake to ensure our offer was open to all.

Going forwards we intend to continue working with Experts not only on the Talent Hub programme but also across our wider organisation introducing their experiences and expertise to areas of governance, leadership, access and inclusion”

Martin Wilson, Director of Tin Arts

10

Flexibility

On reflection, the biggest advantage we had in making this project a success was our ability to respond flexibly to all the challenges we encountered. One advantage was the job role – we were recruiting people into an existing pool of Experts, which meant that we could continue to meet clients’ needs and provide Experts to Care and Treatment Reviews, while we worked through the issues with the new applicants. There would have been a much greater time pressure had we been recruiting to a single vacant role which needed to be filled in a timely way to begin delivering a service.

As a relatively small organisation we also did not have the constraints of a large HR department and many layers of bureaucracy to deal with when we came up against issues that we needed to change to make the process work. We could be responsive and change our processes based on our learning relatively quickly.

Finally, and critically, we carried out this project entirely with a ‘can do’ attitude. So no matter what barriers we encountered, or how long it took, we believed in what we were doing and that there must be a solution if we look hard or creatively enough. A positive attitude goes a long, long way.





On that note, we acknowledge in particular the work of Rebecca, Sandy and Gill in making this project a success, as well as everyone else at Inclusion North that contributed.



Links to other practical guides around employment

Nesta

[👉 We believe everyone can contribute - an asset-based approach](#)

National Autistic Society

[👉 Guide to employing people with Autism](#)

Mencap

[👉 Employing people with a learning disability - FAQs](#)

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