



Introduction to Working with Customers with a Mental Health Condition

Topic 05 – Mental Health Conditions & Work

May 2014

Time

Approximately 45 minutes.

Objectives

At the end of this topic learners will be able to:

- state the benefits of working
- explain why individual circumstances can make it difficult to find work
- explain why some employers may initially be reluctant to employ someone with a mental health condition; and
- state how we can help customers with a mental health condition to find work.

Method of Delivery

This topic is facilitator led. It also uses discussion.

Learning Points

This event will cover the following learning points:

- Challenges to finding work
- Employer attitudes
- Helping customers with a mental health condition into work.

Support Material

- Handout 05.01 - Implications of a Mental Health Condition for Jobseeking and Employment
- Issue Handout 05.02 - Helping Customers with a Mental Health Condition into Work
- Handout 05.03 - Identifying a Job Goal.

Validation

This topic will be validated through facilitator input, discussion and question and answer.

Introduction

Mental health conditions are so common that we may be working with someone who is managing or is recovered from a mental health condition we just may not be aware of it.

Most people managing a mental health condition want to continue to work and can be as successful at work as any other individual.

However they can face issues around finding work. In this topic we will look at what these issues are and some of the ways we can help.



While working through this event, stress to the learners that most of the customers with a mental health condition who use Jobcentre Plus services have mild conditions for which they are receiving treatment.

The Benefits of Working



What are the benefits of working (for everybody, not just those with a mental health condition)?



- Financial
- Social
- Health
- Learn new skills
- Builds confidence.

This is true for all of us, whether or not we have a mental health condition. The overwhelming findings from research around the world are that work is a positive thing for people with physical or mental disability, physical illness, and those with a mental health condition.

People in work enjoy better physical and mental health than those who are out of work. Returning to work improves health – both physical and mental.

The social side of working, meaningful activity, earning a wage all contribute to a person's wellbeing.

There is then, a significant argument for people diagnosed with a mental health condition to be helped to manage it so they may return to work.

MIND, the mental health charity, says:



Show Visual Aid 05.01 – The Benefits of Working.

You may prefer to have this quote prepared on flip.

“Jobs...provide security, stability and structure. So being in paid employment is generally considered to be a good thing.

It is no longer just a way of earning a living: it provides identity, contact and friendship with other people, a way of putting structure in your life and an opportunity to meet goals and to contribute.”

Challenges to Finding Work

We have a wide range of customers. Many of them have personal circumstances which may make it more challenging to find and retain work.



What sort of personal circumstances might present a greater challenge to finding work?



- Caring responsibilities
- Homelessness
- Drug/alcohol dependency
- Criminal record
- Physical/mental health condition
- Prejudice against any of the above
- Low expectations of employment from within support teams such as clinical staff, drug support staff etc.

This list is not exhaustive.

So a mental health condition is just another aspect of personal circumstances that we have to consider when helping customers into work.



What do we need to consider when trying to help a customer with any of these circumstances into work?



- How will the personal circumstances affect their choice of job goal?
- How will that particular condition impact on their work capabilities and choice of job?
- Are any workplace adjustments and or changes to working pattern needed?
- What might be the impact of the condition on keeping a job?
- What additional support may be needed (from Jobcentre Plus or other organisations)?



What specific issues do you think a customer with a mental health condition may have around looking for work?



- Low self-confidence/self worth
- Lack of motivation
- Difficulties in being pro-active and promoting self to employers
- Reluctance to face the difficulties associated with finding work
- Fatigue and reduced mental and physical stamina
- Poor self presentation at Jobcentre Plus and job interviews due to anxiety
- Difficulties in concentrating and assimilating information, lack of eye contact, withdrawal, physical manifestations such as dry mouth, shortness of breath
- Difficulties in interaction with work colleagues
- May experience difficulty in being flexible and adapting to change
- Fear of losing their existing routine – a very real problem especially for those who may have been ‘institutionalised’

Introduction to Working with Customers with A Mental Health Condition

Topic 05 – Mental Health Conditions and Work

- Lack of resilience to setbacks and disappointments; and
- Attitudes or lack of knowledge of others (and this includes Jobcentre Plus staff and health professionals) about the work capabilities of the individual.



Issue Handout 05.01 - Implications of a Mental Health Condition for Jobseeking and Employment.

Allow learners a moment to read through.

When customers are feeling low in confidence they may have difficulty motivating themselves and presenting themselves to their best advantage.



As Jobcentre Plus employees, what can we do to help customers with a mental health condition?



- Listen to the customer – they are the expert on their condition and its impact on their working life
- Communicate appropriately
- Remain supportive and constructive through the contact
- Encourage the customer to focus on the positives – what they can do, what experience they have, what they enjoy doing etc
- Be alert to the customer's patterns of behaviour – how are they interacting, self presentation, signs of anxiety, attendance at appointments etc. This may indicate that they are experiencing some mental distress (or could be signs of other conditions such as a learning difficulty)
- Recognise and work within the limits of your own remit and expertise
- Maintain a focus on work related issues

- Refer on, or seek further guidance as appropriate, involving other colleagues and professionals where necessary. Collaborative working can be very important but you may need the guidance or support of a DEA or Work Psychologist to do this
- Utilise internal and external sources of information and support
- Be aware of the risks of forming preconceptions and making assumptions; be aware of your own attitudes and possible prejudices which may influence interaction with customers
- Set realistic job goals
- Be practical and realistic about the steps they should take to find work
- Find out more about mental health conditions
- If the customer mentions their mental health condition, do not be afraid to ask for more information.



Issue Handout 05.02 - Helping Customers with a Mental Health Condition into Work

Things to Consider

We have discussed asking questions to find out more about the customer's condition.



What specific information do you need when discussing job goals with a customer who has a mental health condition?



- The customer's skills and attributes
- Whether personal symptoms of the condition may affect achieving the job goal, for example:
 - Stamina and concentration levels
 - Confidence in interpersonal interaction
 - The customer's ability to cope with job demands
- If there are any work related side effects of medication
- Effective coping strategies the customer may be using
- The stability of the condition

- Whether the customer is currently receiving any professional support and treatment
- Any specific support needed in meeting Jobcentre Plus requirements, job seeking generally, participating in employment programmes and returning to and maintaining employment.



Issue Handout 05.03 - Identifying a Job Goal.

Allow learners a moment to read through.

Employers

As with most of the other issues we have raised, stigma and discrimination are often the biggest difficulties faced by people with a mental health condition.

Some employers are unwilling to consider employing people who are known to have a mental health condition.



Why are some employers reluctant to consider employing people with a mental health condition?



Employers may think:

- the person may be violent
- they won't have the skills to do the job
- they may be unreliable
- they will have a lot of time off
- they may behave 'oddly' and embarrass the company; and
- customers may be frightened or 'put off' by them.

This list is not exhaustive.

For all of the reasons already discussed, many people choose not to advertise that they are managing a mental health condition. Prejudice and stereotyping still exist, despite efforts to tackle equality issues in society'.



Facilitate a short discussion around whether employers are justified in having these fears.

Ensure the following points are raised:

- all the myths around violence and mental health (as discussed in an earlier topic)
- People with a mental health condition may be just as well qualified/experienced as anybody else
- Each individual condition affects each individual differently – we can not make assumptions or stereotype people.

It is important to note, however, that there are many employers who are positive about employing people with a disability.

Organisations such as the Employers' Forum on Disability provide practical support to enable companies to recruit and retain disabled employees and to serve disabled customers.

We need to keep ourselves updated about such organisations and employers in our area and ensure we are promoting the skills and abilities of each individual customer, whatever their circumstances.



What are the advantages to an employer of recruiting people with a mental health condition?



- They may be the best qualified person for that job
- They may have extensive experience in that work area
- Economic reasons - the more people who are in employment, the greater is the business's potential customer base.



What can we do to encourage employers to consider a particular customer who has a mental health condition as a potential employer?



Remind the learners that all of the following suggestions are subject to the disclosure issues that we have already discussed.



- Present the individual's skills and personal qualities and previous experience relevant to the job
- Make sure they are aware of the support available such as Access to Work and Work Choice programmes
- Signpost to other sources of information/advice if needed such as Shift, Employers Forum on Disability guides
- If appropriate, effective coping strategies used currently and/or in previous jobs.

Nothing to change in this topic except perhaps reorder as much of what is discussed has already been covered.

Summary

In this topic we have:

- discussed why work is beneficial
- explained why people with a mental health condition may find it difficult to find work
- discussed how we can help customers with a mental health condition to find work; and
- discussed how we can encourage employers to be more positive about employing people with a mental health condition.



Ask the learners if they have any questions before moving on to the next topic.

End of Topic