

revolving doors



Pathways into training, volunteering and employment for people with personal experience of multiple disadvantage in Manchester

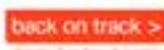
Research findings, April 2022

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 Inspiring Change Manchester



A National Lottery Community Fund project led by Shelter in partnership with



Contents

1. Introduction	6
About Inspiring Change Manchester	6
About the research	6
What we did	6
2. Opportunities in Manchester for people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage	8
3. Finding out about and accessing opportunities	11
Barriers to entering training, volunteering and work	11
Overcoming barriers	15
4. Experiences of training	17
5. Experiences of volunteering	19
6. Experiences of the workplace	21
7. The impact of being in work, volunteering and/or training ...	25
8. The impact on organisations	27
9. Conclusion and recommendations	29

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About Revolving Doors

Revolving Doors is a national charity that champion's long-term solutions for justice reform that tackle the root causes of reoffending and support people's journeys towards better lives. We advocate for a humane approach that responds to people's unmet needs and works with them to reach their full potential and to thrive.

We focus on the 'revolving door' group of people, those who have repeat contact with the criminal justice system whose behaviours are largely driven by unmet health and social needs. These include combinations of substance misuse, homelessness, mental ill health and domestic abuse often referred to as 'multiple disadvantage'.

We advocate for a system that recognises and addresses the drivers of contact with the criminal justice system, namely trauma, poverty and discrimination. Our approach involves empowering the voices of people with lived experience and conducting high quality research and evaluation to influence policy, make services more effective and innovative and offer alternatives.



Executive Summary

This report outlines the findings from a peer research project exploring training, volunteering and employment pathways for people with personal experience of multiple disadvantage in Manchester. The research was commissioned by Inspiring Change Manchester, a partnership programme delivering the National Lottery Community Fund's Fulfilling Lives initiative in Manchester.

What we did

The research was conducted between March 2021 and March 2022. It involved an evidence review of existing literature and good practice, two mapping workshops to identify available provision and gaps, and 22 in-depth interviews to learn more about individuals and organisations views and experiences. Peer researchers co-designed the research materials, co-facilitated interviews where possible and supported the development of this report.

What we found

There was agreement that a range of training, volunteering and work opportunities are available for people with experience of multiple disadvantage in Manchester. Raising awareness of opportunities in a variety of ways and accessible recruitment processes were considered important in enabling people with personal experience of multiple disadvantage to enter these.

However, employment opportunities can be limited to certain sectors or job types and often have short-term contracts, which limits job and financial security. In addition, people with experience of multiple disadvantage face many practical, personal and organisational barriers to accessing and sustaining these opportunities, as well as systematic issues linked to the benefits system and low wages, which are especially challenging to address.

Ongoing professional and personal support was identified as important for outcomes to be achieved and sustained. A workplace culture where people felt that they could raise concerns and not be judged for doing so was found to be particularly beneficial.

Positive experiences stemmed from people having the opportunity to access training through their employer or being able to get involved in wider organisational activities, which made them feel valued. Reasonable adjustments being put in place quickly also increased the likelihood of employment being a positive experience. In contrast, negative experiences were linked to involvement feeling tokenistic, having to regularly disclose personal information and feeling drained – because of the emotional toll of the role or because of the number of activities participants were asked to support.

The benefits of training, volunteering and work identified by interviewees included increased confidence, motivation and self-worth, gaining new skills, improved relationships, improved financial and housing situations, and feeling more resilient. Organisations benefited from the expertise and understanding that staff or volunteers with lived experience had, which also improved the quality of the service they delivered.

What we recommend

- **Create good quality opportunities across different sectors** so that there are a range of different types of roles that people with lived experience in Manchester can enter. This can be done strategically through commissioning process and quality standards, and more generally through increasing understanding of fair recruitment processes and involving people with lived experience in recruitment activity.
- **Ensure training provision is accessible and beneficial to people's progress**, through matching provision to labour market demand, encouraging more joint working between the third sector and training providers and increasing understanding of the learning and wider needs of people facing multiple disadvantage.
- **Share learning** to raise awareness of good practice and available training, volunteering and employment opportunities, and help one another to overcome challenges.
- **Address evidence gaps** so that there is greater understanding of how to overcome organisational and systematic barriers to people with lived experience entering and progressing in the workplace.



1 Introduction

This report presents findings from research conducted between March 2021 and March 2022, into training and employment pathways for people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage in Manchester. This research was commissioned by Inspiring Change Manchester as part of their wider work on improving employability outcomes for people facing multiple disadvantage living in Manchester.

About Inspiring Change Manchester

Inspiring Change Manchester (ICM) is a partnership organisation, made up of Back on Track, Big Life Group, Community Led Initiatives and Shelter, who are the lead partner. It is an eight year 'test and learn' programme funded by the National Lottery Community Fund's Fulfilling Lives initiative, running from 2014-2022.¹ One of the programme aims is to improve outcomes, including employability, for Manchester residents experiencing multiple disadvantage, and ensure these are sustainable.

Therefore, as part of the programme, ICM has committed itself to developing training and employment pathways for people facing multiple disadvantage and supporting people to engage in these. This includes through directly employing people with lived experience across the different ICM teams, a volunteer peer mentoring programme delivered by Community Led Initiatives and establishing GROW Traineeships across the Programme.

GROW Traineeships are 12-month paid employment placements for individuals to use their lived experience to help influence and shape services. This began as part of the ICM programme, but due to the success, it has now been rolled out across Shelter nationally, has been adopted by Albert Kennedy

Trust in Manchester and will be part of the new Changing Futures programme in Greater Manchester.

In addition, ICM partner, Back-On-Track, have supported people on the ICM programme to identify areas for development, upskill and build confidence through structured activities and group work, and prepare for work through accessing volunteering and work experience opportunities. Part of their approach includes creative activities (such as poetry and music) to engage individuals and build relationships before commencing to more traditional education, training and employment activity.

About the research

This research has explored the role that developing training and employment pathways plays in improving outcomes for people facing multiple disadvantage. The aim of the research has been to help consider the impact of these pathways and consider options for developing training and employment opportunities in the future. It has been guided by the following research question:

“What does an inclusive training and employment offer look like for people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage?”

¹ The programme came to an end in March 2022

Hence, we have sought to build on the research to make recommendations about how people who have previously or are currently experiencing multiple disadvantage can be successfully supported into good quality, sustainable work and training opportunities in the city.

What we did

The project has combined primary and secondary research. This began with an **evidence review** of the existing literature and best practice in providing training and employment pathways for people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage.

We then conducted a **mapping exercise** to better understand what provision is available and where there are gaps. This involved two online workshops attended by a total of 32 people representing training providers (e.g., Back on Track), delivery organisations supporting this cohort (e.g., CGL), Manchester City Council and Greater Manchester Combined Authority. Importantly, six individuals who attended had personal experience of multiple disadvantage and could feedback on their experiences – four of whom were then interviewed in the next stage to find out more.

At the workshops we sought to find out more about current training and employment pathways for individuals with personal experience of multiple disadvantage in Manchester, good practice within this, and what changes would improve the quality, accessibility and availability of future provision. The artwork used throughout this report was created in the workshops to reflect the conversations that happened.

Lastly, we completed a total of **22 in-depth interviews** with:

- 12 people (7 men and 5 women) with experience of multiple disadvantage who had entered training, volunteering and/or work to learn more about what went well and what challenges they faced.

- 6 staff members who had worked with volunteers and employees with lived experience to find out about their organisation's views and experiences of this.
- 2 strategic leads from local government working in employment and skills roles.
- 2 individuals with responsibility for advocating for and coordinating volunteering opportunities in Manchester.

Importantly, this project has taken a **peer research approach**. Peer researchers co-developed the topic guides, co-facilitated interviews where possible, and contributed to the analysis of findings by identifying key themes and points of interest. We also worked with the peer research team to ensure this report was accessible and disseminate findings. For example, two peer researchers presented interim findings from this research at a ICM learning event in March 2022.

We believe taking a peer research approach has been key to ensuring this research was relevant and high-quality. Peer researchers can draw on their own experience of the system to shape a project design, so it is more meaningful to the people it seeks to serve and ensure that research questions get more rich and relevant responses.

Limitations

It is worth noting that were unable to speak to any organisations that had not worked with volunteers or staff with lived experience, to understand reasons for this, such as perceived challenges and support needs. We also did not speak to individuals who had not been able to access some form of training, volunteering or employment who may have faced additional barriers not covered in this report. Lastly, because of the ongoing situation with Covid-19, the majority of the research was conducted remotely by phone or video call, and we recognise that this may have excluded some people from taking part.

2 Opportunities in Manchester for people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage

Out of the population of Manchester who are economically inactive, 19% or 18,000 people want to be working.² Therefore, it is important that there are accessible opportunities and support to enable people to enter (or re-enter) the labour market and/or learn new skills through further education, training and volunteering opportunities. This section outlines our main findings from the mapping exercise and interviews about opportunities in the city, drawing on local and programme statistics where relevant.

Training

Workshop attendees and interviewees agreed that there were many training opportunities available to people with experience of multiple disadvantage in Manchester. This is important in the context of skills shortages in the city, as demonstrated by the 2019 Employer Skills Survey. Survey findings showed that 19 per cent of vacancies in Manchester were unfilled because of a shortage of suitably skilled applicants.³

26 individuals entered training opportunities through the ICM programme, which was delivered by a range of providers including Back on Track, OUCH training and First Responder.

However, there were some concerns about duplication. For example, it was highlighted that there are four places where individuals could get a CSCS card in Manchester, which was felt to create confusion.

There were also concerns about gatekeeping, or individuals not always being referred to the most suitable provision as a result of the funding requirements organisations adhere to. Some organisations do not seem to push individuals to move on to access opportunities linked to their aspirations and/or skills gaps. Instead, they pass them internally between courses and hold on to them so that they can meet targets needed to receive funding.

“ Sometimes we see a lot of lateral movement – doing training to get bums on seats, you have to question the benefit of doing it. ”

There was also a desire for greater accessibility through more women-only provision as well as training being delivered in locations that were wheelchair friendly and easy and low cost to get to on public transport.

Volunteering and employment opportunities

26 people entered volunteering opportunities through the ICM programme, primarily with the Booth Centre or to support the delivery of ICM itself, and **25 people entered employment through the programme**. 19% of those who entered volunteering or work entered more than one role in the programme period.

As with training opportunities, there was felt to be a range of local volunteering opportunities for people with lived experience.

“ In terms of numbers, and places you can volunteer, endless in Manchester, fantastic, brilliant... ”

Although Covid-19 resulted in some organisations shutting down services, the pandemic was also felt to have created different types of volunteering opportunities in Manchester. This included mutual aid, such as the support groups established during the pandemic.

“ Because of the pandemic there was different opportunities coming and different projects flying up around the city. ”

“ With the NHS Volunteering responders programme – people could register and onboard and be volunteering the same day, so can we really see a return to application forms, referees...over the past 18 months, the hoops you are expected to jump through have been pulled down substantially. ”

In addition, it was felt that the benefits of lived experience are more widely recognised by organisations than they had been in the past. This led to some roles now requiring applicants to have personal experience of either multiple disadvantage or mental health issues, substance use, involvement in the criminal justice system or homelessness to be successful. For example, the ICM GROW traineeship programme and CGL Recovery Champions.

“ You have to have personal experience to get that job. People are seeing that as a valid experience. ”

It was felt that employment opportunities for people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage were more common in the third sector, housing associations and the health and social care sector. Hence, many interviewees raised concerns about ‘pigeon-holing’ people with lived experience into support roles despite this not always being their area of interest.

“ What happens if you want to get a real opportunity of work, but you are not that interested in support work? ”

However, data from the ICM programmes shows that individuals with experience of multiple disadvantage were supported to enter employment in a variety of sectors. Only 15% of roles were classified as being in the not-for profit sector.

Regardless, there was a desire for more organisations to offer opportunities to people with lived experience to increase the variation in good-quality roles that are available. To do this, it was felt there needed to be greater understanding of the benefits of lived experience involvement across the city.

“ I think the biggest thing is changing the mindset of those organisations who probably don't even know what lived experience means and what an asset people with lived experience could be... ”

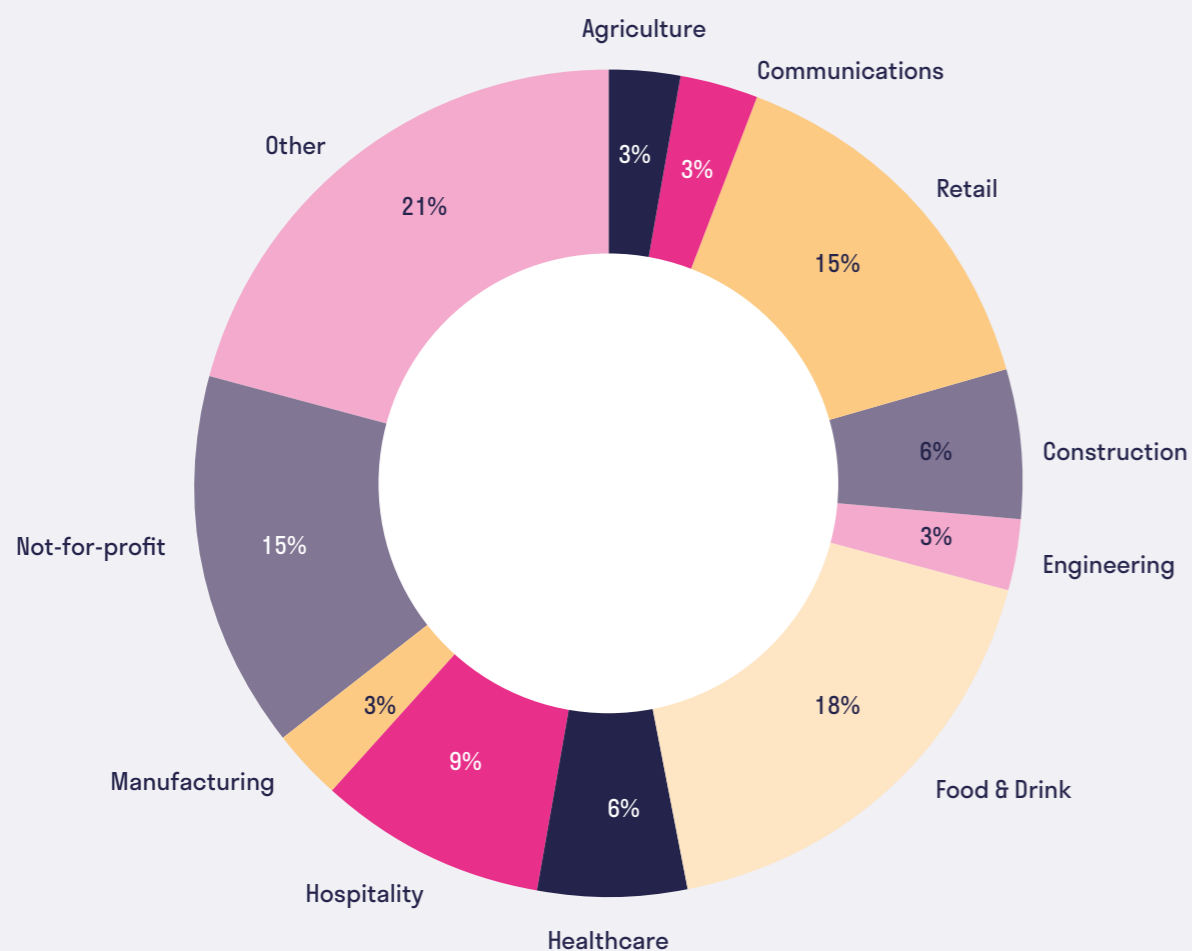
² Office for National Statistics, *Labour Market Profile – Manchester: Economic inactivity (October 2020-September 2021)*

³ Department for Education (2020), *Employer Skills Survey 2019: UK findings*

There were also less examples of leadership roles and progression opportunities once people with lived experience had entered the workplace. As part of a 'Lived Experience Employment' [podcast](#) series ICM recently produced with Elephants Trail, an episode called the 'glass ceiling' looked at this issue in more detail.

The new Changing Futures programme is a good example of where people have been able to find a new role which allows them to progress and build on their experience from the ICM programme.

Figure 1: Breakdown of ICM employment outcomes by sector



3 Finding out about and accessing opportunities

For people with experience of multiple disadvantage to enter and succeed in the available opportunities they need to be aware of the different options available to them and feel confident and motivated to submit applications. It is also important that opportunities are beneficial and do not have negative emotional and practical impacts. However, as this section outlines, there are numerous barriers that prevent people experiencing multiple disadvantage from accessing and succeeding opportunities. Findings from the interviews reflected the wider literature on this subject.

Barriers to entering training, volunteering and work

Practical barriers

Participants with lived experience of multiple disadvantage explained that it is not easy to find out about opportunities. Reasons for this included the reliance on advertising online, which is not accessible for individuals without access to technology or the internet, or who would not be comfortable to use this to identify learning options.

“ Not everybody has access to a laptop or computer. Not everybody is comfortable using the computer either like, not everybody has those skills. ”

Moreover, not having a permanent address, bank account and photo ID were all factors that prevented individuals experiencing multiple disadvantage from applying for roles. Limited finances also made it hard to obtain and maintain a voluntary or paid role. For example, the cost of travelling, childcare and buying a uniform, equipment or work clothes proved problematic. Linked to this, respondents with personal experience of multiple disadvantage highlighted the importance of stable housing – as without this, individuals will not be able to prioritise training and work.

Someone who's experienced multiple disadvantage and is trying to get into employment, training or education



Someone who hasn't



“ My barriers at the time, I was living in hostels. I was in and out of house shares, I was constantly losing possessions. I was losing my ID, my ID would be stolen, I'd buy it back. I had no base. ”

Some people explained that their decision to look for training, volunteering or work was motivated by wanting to be a positive role model for their children. However, childcare was another obstacle for parents, as this proved particularly costly and sometimes it was difficult to source local options.

“ I feel like what is the point of working if all my money is gonna go to childcare... I came so close to resign because of it. ”

Personal barriers

For individuals who took part in the research, a lack of confidence was a common reason why they did not initially try to enter opportunities. This was particularly common when they had been out of work for a long time or had never volunteered or worked before.

“ I kind of lost belief that I got the skills or ability to go back to work again and I lost confidence and I thought oh I can't apply for jobs... ”

“ So, I was lacking self-esteem, I was lacking confidence and there was a stage where I thought, am I un-hireable now? ”

This was exacerbated when respondents had no response after applying for opportunities, which also put them off from trying again.

“ Quite a few of the people who came my way had been knocked back or ignored by other voluntary organisations, so they had that fear again... [someone] had been waiting a year to hear from one and they'd just never come back to him. ”

Furthermore, as mentioned above, limited IT skills proved problematic when applications were only online, and limited literacy skills made completing these applications and finding other opportunities more challenging.

Evidence shows that poor physical and mental health is prevalent amongst people experiencing multiple disadvantage and a key reason why employment rates are low in this group.⁴ A few respondents explained that they had concerns about the impact of volunteering/working on their mental health and wellbeing, or that they were worried about organisation's finding out about their mental health issues and the problems they had experienced.

“ I was really, really unsure because my mental health was the reason why it all went perfectly wrong for me and I was really, really scared that going into a job might cause my head to go south again. ”

“ I was very worried because of my mental health. So going into something new and realising that the type of work I'm looking for, I might have to talk to people about my problems and what I've done to access the support, the opportunities... I thought, I'm going to be exposed, I'm going to have to expose myself so I was quite worried about that. ”

We also spoke to individuals who made the choice to change careers because of the negative impact their previous job was having on their wellbeing and lives.

“ I was working twenty storeys up on the construction site, next minute Covid has come... everything's in the air. We got told to down tools and the way they treated us, we were just pieces of replaceable meat, and I had a bit of a bad taste in my mouth. So, I had to re-evaluate where I was going. I had a mental health breakdown in the first lockdown... I ended up in hospital for fourteen days and I had a lot of time to reflect... I just thought I need to go back to what I love and that's working with people. ”

4 Bramley et al. (2020), Mapping the “hard edges” of disadvantage in England: Adults involved in homelessness, substance misuse, and offending, *The Geographical Journal*, 186 (4)



Organisational barriers

We also came across obstacles created by employers and training providers. For example, if learner needed to be in receipt of welfare benefits to be eligible for a course this could prevent some people from joining. In some cases, mainstream training providers were felt to lack understanding of how wider needs may impact learners. This meant that there was less flexibility and tailored support available, which proved key in learners being able to complete courses (see Chapter 4).

Accessibility of voluntary and paid roles was another issue. Many people we interviewed explained that they were unaware of different opportunities before they developed support networks and met people who would suggest roles and courses to them.

“ I didn't know who to go to, which organisation to ask for help. I didn't know anything you know. I was in a very isolated place where you wanna do something for your life, you wanna move on... I wish I had the support. ”

Linked to this, it was felt that volunteers were not always representative of the local community, which could put people off from enquiring about opportunities.

“ The majority of volunteers are white privileged - would I got to a community group if I know not a single person there understands me? ”

Recruitment practices were sometimes felt make it more difficult for people to succeed in entering and sustaining opportunities. This included not giving much notice before interviews, or only having short application windows.

“ So, on the Wednesday they told me I had the interview on the Thursday ... ”

In addition, we identified numerous examples of overly complicated application processes through this research, including a three person-panel interview for a volunteering role.

“They were insisting that when a volunteer had passed the application stage, they then had to be interviewed by a panel of three... it's very intimidating...”

It seemed common for the application process to include long job descriptions and numerous forms. This can be confusing and off-putting, for example the use of acronyms in job descriptions can make them hard to understand. In some cases, roles required individuals to attend particular training which only ran at certain times of the year, which delayed the process and caused frustration.

Hence, many application processes were considered disproportionate to the roles in question. For example, an interviewee who was working with NHS England to create lived experience roles highlighted that the application that needs to be completed is the same for entry level and senior roles, which was considered a ‘massive blockage’.

“The NHS application on their standard NHS jobs workforce [website] is exactly the same if you're applying to be a healthcare support worker, a porter or a cleaner or a domestic and things like that, as it is if you apply to be a consultant or a surgeon...”

Negative employer attitudes were also felt to be a barrier. For example, where the first question on application forms was about whether the applicant had a criminal record, this put people off and made them feel judged.

“Applications can often start by asking about unspent convictions – it can be off-putting...”

This reflects wider research conducted by Unlock, who conducted a survey of women with criminal records, and found that 86% of respondents struggled with employment, and that this was cited more than twice as often as any other issue.⁵

It was also highlighted that small organisations do not always have the capacity to organise and manage volunteering opportunities because it can be resource intensive to train and prepare volunteers, and that the workforce need upskilling to feel confident to work with groups with different needs.

“[Some organisations] can barely manage themselves, they don't have capacity to coordinate volunteers. They need support to complete tasks effectively – someone to talk to who can match skills to tasks.”

Systematic barriers

In addition, respondents explained the difficulty finding work that paid enough for them to be able to cover all their living costs without struggling financially. This is likely to continue to be a significant issue as the cost-of-living increases. Wages are expected to rise more slowly than utility, food and petrol costs, and taxes are increasing for many.⁶

“I can't find a job that pays enough for me to live on my own... to be able to live comfortably...”

Not being able to access certain financial support because of entering work was worrying for some respondents, especially those who had previously experienced homelessness, as this was a situation that they did not want to return to.

“The thought of having my housing benefit stopped or not being able to afford my rent and having the safety net of housing benefit taken away, when I've been homeless before, it's quite daunting that, that was a massive barrier for me to get past.”

5 Stacey, C. (2021), *Angels or witches: the impact of criminal records on women*, Unlock

6 Harari et al. (2022), *Rising cost of living in the UK*, House of Commons Library

56% of the employment opportunities accessed by ICM participants were temporary or contract roles. Research shows that being in temporary or agency work is a common reason for people falling out of employment.⁷ Unpredictable income can result in budgeting becoming difficult, particularly as the welfare system can prove slow, limited and inflexible when someone is working part of the time.⁸ For example, people on temporary roles who move in and out of work, face delays in accessing Universal Credit payments for up to five weeks between contracts, which can push people into debt and poverty.⁹

Permitted work, whereby people can work for up to 16 hours whilst claiming certain benefits, proved important in enabling people to access employment opportunities and still have the safety net of welfare benefits. However, some interviewees expressed fear of the rules changing or being made to apply for jobs they did not want to do to avoid getting sanctioned.

“If benefits [JCP] forced me to leave by permitted work and forced me into a job that I didn't like, I suffer with my mental health anyway – I'd end up burying my head in the sand.”

Therefore, a recent policy announcement by the Department for Work and Pensions that Universal Credit claimants face sanctions after four weeks, rather than three months, if they do not look for work outside their preferred field or if they turn down a role is concerning.¹⁰ There is evidence that inappropriate or poor-quality work can have as negative an effect on people's mental health as not being in work.¹¹

7 Butterworth et al., (2011), The psychosocial quality of work determines whether employment has benefits for mental health: results from a longitudinal national household panel survey, *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 68(11)

8 *Ibid.*

9 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2019); Trades Union Congress (2020)

10 Department for Work and Pensions (2022), *Jobseekers have four weeks to find work before widening their search*, UK Government, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/jobseekers-have-four-weeks-to-find-work-before-widening-their-search> [Accessed 16/03/2022]

11 Bretherton J. and Pleace N. (2019), *Is Work an Answer to Homelessness? Evaluating an Employment Programme for Homeless Adults*, University of York

Overcoming barriers

Importantly, we also came across many examples where people had been supported to overcome some of the obstacles they faced.

Firstly, encouragement to apply for roles from other staff or peers, proved particularly important when their confidence was low, or they lacked motivation.

“When your self-esteem is at rock bottom you kind of need people to say, “no, you can do this””

Similarly, where the role someone was applying for was at an organisation that they were familiar with, this often helped give them confidence to apply. A reason for this was that staff were aware of their lived experience and did not see this as a problem, instead it was often viewed as an asset.

“There is so much stigma around mental health that, I don't think I would have been able to go into a place that didn't already know me and I wasn't sort of reassured that my mental health wouldn't be an issue.”

In addition, support with CV and application processes, such as mock interviews and providing references helped people to progress through the recruitment process, and practicing interviews helped people to feel prepared.

“I got support with that too during the application...and then an hour before I was due, we did more mock interviews and then I went for my interview, and I got it.”

Sometimes, it was as simple as having someone explain the different job requirements. This is a reason why people appreciated having the chance to use computers at an organisation with other staff and volunteers around because help was on hand if they got stuck completing applications.

“There's so many buzz words and technical terms and job descriptions and so many acronyms and stuff and like you read stuff and I had no idea what this means... you just need someone to ask.”

Likewise, Shelter staff held pre-application support sessions where people could find out about GROW traineeships and get help with the recruitment process, and interviewees found these useful to learn more and feel confident to apply for the roles available. Another organisation offered a pre-training course to help people apply for Healthcare Support Worker roles, which was accredited, and meant that even if people did not go onto enter this job, they got something tangible out of this experience. Learning from the GROW traineeship programme had helped to inform this.

Another important aspect of support that interviewees discussed was advice on how to safely share their lived experience. As mentioned above, there were concerns about being judged, as well as fears about feeling triggered when discussing traumatic past experiences.

“They taught me how to speak to people, how to share my story without traumatising myself.”

“I was scared about my record, and they gave me that confidence now how to share it, how to think what you share, what you don't have to share and what you need to share.”

It is important to highlight that the research did identify good employer practices that made the application process a positive experience for those concerned. This included simplifying recruitment processes, asking about support needs upfront and consideration of the location for interviews and/or inductions, in recognition that busy offices could prove intimidating. Blind applications (removing identifying factors before screening) were also felt to help recruitment processes to be more inclusive.

“One of the interview questions I found really interesting was, ‘if you got this job what would you need from us’ and I thought, that's amazing!”

An interviewee that was working with NHS trusts to try and encourage them to hire people with lived experience also explained that finding staff that were willing to take risks and try things was key because it gave them examples of practice that could inform other areas.

“Once one did it, then it's a lot easier to get the others to do it, you've got an example look at... and now that we've done that there it's starting to feed into some of the other trusts that we're working with.”

In addition, relationships with community organisations were considered vital because it helped employers to raise awareness of opportunities with partners who had trusted relationships with residents. Similarly, volunteering coordinators and volunteering networks were considered important resources in connecting potential volunteers with organisations, supporting organisations to deliver volunteering opportunities and supporting people to identify their transferable skills. A few interviewees explained that people may want to get involved in activities in their community but could be put off by the idea of being a formal volunteer.

“Try to shift using the word volunteer – if you ask people to help, they'll happily come along – people are afraid to commit because their time is so valuable.”

4 Experiences of training

This section provides an overview of the research findings on experiences of training opportunities in the city, drawing on feedback from the mapping workshops and interviews, and comparing this with wider literature where relevant.

As well as gaining new skills, accredited qualifications has helped people with their confidence, as they were proud to have achieved something.

“It's an achievement, knowing that I've done something. I've previously been told 'you are thick' and that's stayed with me.”

Respondents in one of the mapping workshops emphasised that sometimes the format of the training and approach of the staff can be more important than the topic of the training. This reflects research into barriers to learning for disadvantaged groups that demonstrated the need for high-quality flexible provision to enable individuals to participate, such as online learning and part-time and evening courses. This was considered particularly important for people with caring commitments and individuals managing health conditions.¹²

Across both workshops, there were examples of individuals who preferred ‘learning by doing’ and ‘non-traditional’ options rather than classroom-based learning. Practical work-based opportunities had helped people to identify where they could develop their skills further.

“Hands on stuff... With my general experience I've learnt as I've went along... that has worked for me... Doing things helps you see what you are lacking.”

Furthermore, in the mapping workshops respondents agreed that it was not all about work-related skills and formal training as many people experiencing multiple disadvantage want to gain practical life skills, such as budgeting, cooking and personal hygiene. Several attendees explained that picking up these practical life skills was priority, and once people had this foundation they could then start to think about training and work options.

Supportive environments were important in enabling people with experience of multiple disadvantage to complete training courses and have positive experiences. Where learners had entered formal training opportunities with a large training provider, they sometimes struggled with the lack of flexibility and limited understanding of how wider needs can impact learning. They did not have the opportunity to learn at their pace and therefore sometimes struggled to keep up.

For example, a workshop attendee explained that they left college because they did not feel supported and struggled to attend at the times expected. This was because they were in an abusive relationship so could not always leave the house when they wanted, and they did not feel able to talk to staff about this – highlighting the importance of positive and trusting relationships between staff and learners.

Attendees also discussed the benefits of provision being delivered in local environments where there were already trusting relationships. However, finding appropriate physical spaces was sometimes an issue.

¹² Pennicchia J., Jones E. and Aldridge F. (2018), *Barriers to learning for disadvantaged groups: report of qualitative findings*, Department for Education

“ There is a lot of willingness but no resource to deliver. ”

Courses moving online because of Covid-19 has helped reduce the demand on physical spaces, but it has also resulted in digital exclusion for some individuals with personal experience of multiple disadvantage. In some cases, organisations were able to overcome such barriers by providing devices and internet access.

Lastly, in the workshops, some attendees expressed their desire for more women-only training provision and for organisations to take a gendered-approach when delivering courses so that they could be accessible for all. An interviewee also highlighted how women can get lost in the system and how women only spaces can support with engagement.

“ I was a Grow Trainee first when I came here... and we recognised there wasn't a lot of women on the service. They were getting lost in the system... we [now] do all women spaces and stuff like that, I think that's very good. ”

Similarly, a recent ICM report outlined the importance of women only spaces because they create a sense of safety, are places with 'no judgement', are places where women feel understood and because they provide an opportunity to share knowledge.¹³



13 Women's Voices Movement (2022), *The Importance of Women Only Spaces*, Inspiring Change Manchester

5 Experiences of volunteering

This section provides an overview of the different positive and negative experiences that research participants had whilst volunteering, and the reasons for this. It also includes good practice identified and any learning about addressing challenges.

Many people we spoke to found out about volunteering opportunities through organisations that were supporting them.

“ I got engaged [in services] and I got to see what was out there. ”

Volunteering then created an important pathway into paid work for many respondents. A key reason for this, was that the experience gave them the confidence to apply for paid positions because they now had recent experience.

“ I think the best decision I made is to do the volunteering work because if I didn't volunteer, I wouldn't be working with Shelter or doing anything with ICM. [Volunteering] gives you that push to be more confident to apply for jobs then go for interviews ”

Similarly, volunteering provided people with an understanding of how the system worked and access to wider support during the application process. Hence, volunteering enabled some respondents to turn an interest into an employment outcome.

“ The key thing for me was like confidence, like not having actually done this before. Thinking what can I actually apply for, what should I apply for? And needing guidance and advice from people who'd done it before so that's why volunteering was really helpful... I guess not knowing exactly how, being like oh I'm interested in this area but not knowing exactly how it works. ”

“ When I first applied I didn't fully understand what the Programme was and it meant that by volunteering and working alongside people and in that space... the next time I applied I just understood it completely in what they were looking for and what it was going to give me... ”

Added to this, an interviewee explained that volunteering at an organisation before working there helped them to get a sense of the culture and how they treated people, which made them feel more comfortable about applying for a role.



“ Being able to volunteer for an organisation before you work for them is amazing, especially if you've been out of work... It's hard to get an idea of a culture of somewhere without actually going into it and you can tell a lot about an organisation by how they treat their volunteers. ”

Respondents also explained that volunteering gave them a chance to find out more about their interests and skills. It was felt to be less pressure than going straight into work, and a different power dynamic than employment. Volunteering options were often quite flexible too, which was appealing.

“ I think through volunteering, it gives you a chance to explore what you like, what you really like, what you want to do, what your good at, what you're not so good at. It gives you opportunities to develop at a pace that's suitable to you. ”

“ Services need us to volunteer so we can create our growth and they can work around us. It's not just about us working around them. Shared ownership of power. ”

The benefits of volunteering identified through this project are reflected in the national evaluation of the Fulfilling Lives Programme. Those who left the programme with a positive destination were more likely to have done some volunteering (31 per cent) compared to those who left for more negative reasons (18 per cent): and volunteering was credited with being a way to identify strengths and rebuild confidence, which was not too burdensome.¹⁴

However, experiences of volunteering were not always positive. For example, an issue identified was assumptions being made about volunteers' ability and them being treated as inferior to paid staff.

“ As soon as I walked into the door there is the assumption that people come through that door as a volunteer, they will have no skills nothing, they don't know anything... I feel like this assumption is out there, people are being judged... ”

Whereas when volunteers felt included, rather than separate from the paid team this helped them to learn more about the organisation and its work. Having friendly and approachable staff meant that they felt that they could ask questions and shadow activities.

“ It was really nice being in the same space as the paid staff when there's sometimes separation like, this is a volunteer's room, this is the staff room, so I would see what the staff were doing, hear them talking when I was like stood around. I would shadow them so; it was just like that integration into how they really worked... ”

Furthermore, there was a risk of burnout, because once different organisations had learnt that someone has lived experience of multiple disadvantage, they were sometimes keen to get them involved in lots of activities, which people were reluctant to say no to. However, this sometimes resulted in individuals juggling lots of different responsibilities which was exhausting.

“ I had loads of organisations jumping at me... and you kind of wanna do it all. So, you end up with a bit of burnout and feeling bad because you've let someone down... [there is] a bit of competitiveness between them... People just need to have the time, choice and support to sort out what they want to do. ”

¹⁴ Welford J., Milner C. and Moreton R. (2021), *Involving people with lived experience in the workforce: Workforce development and multiple disadvantage*, CFE Research and The University of Sheffield

6 Experiences of the workplace

This section provides an overview of the different positive and negative experiences that research participants had whilst in paid employment, and the reasons for this.

The lockdowns associated with the Covid-19 pandemic delayed opportunities for some people, but they acknowledged that this was out of their prospective employers' control. Where this had happened it appeared particularly helpful when organisations kept in touch with people who had applied for the roles and let them know about other ways that they could spend their time whilst waiting for the job to start, such as training and volunteering opportunities. For example, an interviewee felt that volunteering whilst waiting to start a GROW traineeship had helped to prevent them relapsing and been important for their mental health.

Furthermore, where respondents had begun roles during the lockdowns, they explained that they had to immediately adapt to a new way of work, which meant they developed new skills. This included using online platforms like Zoom and tailoring communication methods when supporting someone remotely.

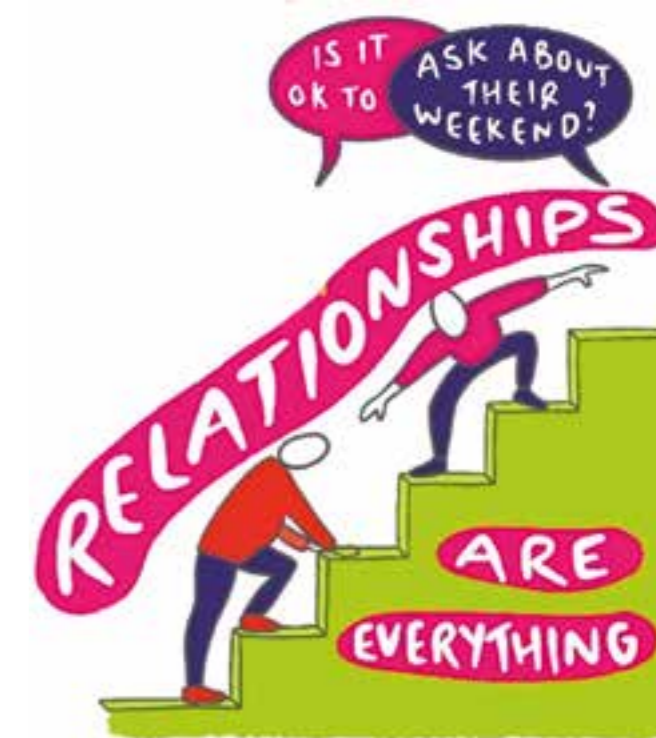
“ What I've learnt is a completely new way of working and if I wouldn't have learnt in the pandemic I wouldn't have these skills now so I think I've learnt how to incorporate my personality onto platforms like [Zoom] or speaking on the phone... My communication comes across better in person but I've kind of learnt how to do both now. ”

Another shortfall linked to the pandemic, was that for some, GROW traineeships became limited to one organisation, whereas before the restrictions people had done placements in several different places. Hence, some people commented that it would have been nice to see how other organisations worked to support their development and widen their experiences.

It is possible to identify themes underlying many positive experiences of employment. The first, is that where people had the chance to use personal and professional experience to help others, they enjoyed it and found the role rewarding.

“ Sometimes I'll use my lived experience in them kind of situations and it you know. I enjoy learning more about it, I enjoy supporting them, I enjoy quite a lot of things about it. ”

“ I know I'm doing good stuff and it just gives me fulfilment I guess and so even in those bad times you know I am putting something good out into the world... ”



Secondly, supportive line managers and colleagues were key, and this proved particularly important during Covid-19 lockdowns. Many of the people we spoke to who had lived experience and were volunteering or working at this time explained how the lockdowns had a negative impact on their mental health and sometimes led to problems with drinking/drugs.

“ I got unbelievable support...I told my line manager that I'd relapsed and they was there for you, it was brilliant the support. It was very non-judgemental. ”

Employers and respondents with lived experience highlighted the need for ongoing support to help people make the transition to the workplace. It was recognised that a lack of in-work support could have particularly negative impacts, including people exiting the labour market.

“ One of the things that I just think, probably I underestimated, and my line manager always said, was that ongoing support, just how important that is. And I think that's true whether somebody is starting a volunteer role or even transitioning into a workplace. ”

“ It's all well and good giving someone a job, but actually if someone then doesn't have the tools to succeed in that, actually that's gonna cause far more problems for them, and can set people way further back than when they even started in the first place. ”

It was evident that people with lived experience often still had a lot going on in their lives. Therefore, having an understanding employer who could give you responsibility and opportunities whilst also considering wider needs and being flexible and supportive in response to this helped people to succeed in the workplace.

“ I've had up and down moments in this job, I've had periods of sickness. I've had housing problems. I've had problems with my children, personal problems and the reason ICM can take that risk is because the people that support you are very dedicated to that support. You're still developing, and your given a big responsibility... but they also give you that nurturing, that care. ”

Keeping in touch with employees support networks was considered beneficial to ensure that they still had connections and access to support if they encountered challenges. Other aspects of in-work support discussed included training for employers who were less familiar with providing pastoral care, so that staff felt able to 'have the right conversations with the right people'; and offering clear structure so that team members knew what was expected of them and what they could expect from their employer. These features were felt to benefit the wider workforce, not just people with lived experience.

The wider literature also shows that in-work support increases the likelihood of any issues or problems encountered when entering the work place being resolved.¹⁵ For example, research on the experiences of people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness entering employment found that a supportive, available manager, holding regular one-to-one meetings, an 'open door' policy and allowing the individual time off to resolve urgent housing or benefit issues helped people to stay in work, maintain their wellbeing and perform well.¹⁶

Other positive experiences were when reasonable adjustments were put in place quickly. This included providing software to support people with learning needs such as dyslexia or tailoring the role to suit the person completing this, such as amending the hours so someone could travel at quieter times.

¹⁵ Welford J. and Moreton R. (2021), *Upskilling the wider workforce: Workforce development and multiple disadvantage*, CFE Research and the University of Sheffield with the Systems Change Action Network

¹⁶ Hough et al. (2013), *Longitudinal qualitative research on homeless people's experiences of starting and staying in work: summary report*, Broadway Charity

“ If I said 'oh well I need this' for my dyslexia or something like that, they would support me with that. Even if they can't they'll look in a way how to do it in another way... ”

Furthermore, access to training opportunities were appreciated as this supported career development and helped people to learn new skills. A range of training was completed through employers, covering topics including motivational interviewing and mental health. IT training was considered to be particularly important during the shift to remote working.

“ Training to a level where your competent with things like Outlook and stuff like that. I mean it might seem nothing now but twelve months ago, I didn't have a clue. Especially now within this digital inclusion age, I wouldn't know how to set up a Zoom meeting if I hadn't been on the training for it so all that stuff...that's been massive. ”

Training and other opportunities within the workplace also helped people feel part of a wider team. For example, a respondent explained that getting involved in an organisations wider worked showed them that they were not just seen as a number purely there to do a job, which made them feel valued.

“ With [one organisation] it was all about 'do your admin job' and that's it. You don't have to be involved... you don't have to know what is going on in the organisation... You've got this job, so just do this job. Where with ICM you do your job. And there's other things that you can learn, you know increase your confidence, your skills. Learn more, get involved. Getting that portion of motivation from the management that want you to get involved. They want it to develop. ”

However, a few people commented that doing a lot of training in a short space of time at the beginning of a role felt quite overwhelming, and they suggested spreading it out over a longer period to address this.

Something else that people appreciated was being supported to think about their next steps if their contract was coming to an end. For example, one individual who was interested in working with women who had experienced domestic violence, was supported to attend a training course through the ICM training and development fund which has meant they can now facilitate a training programme for this group.

“ So, through ICM they're bettering my career so I'm not thinking, oh god I'm at the end [of my contract], I'm not going to have nowhere. I'm thinking of going a bit higher... ”

When this support was not provided or was limited, interviewees expressed worry about what they were going to do next.

“ Nobody sat down with me sort of going, 'and what sort of areas, this is where you need to be looking', there's been none of that... ”

The literature review identified less research on how people experiencing multiple disadvantage can be supported to progress once they have entered work or training, and this is an evidence gap that needs to be addressed to support people with lived experience to enter more senior roles.

Furthermore, having to regularly repeat their circumstances and needs to new members of staff was found to be frustrating and sometimes upsetting. This appeared to be an issue where there was limited communication between staff members and teams, which created gaps in knowledge when staff left or changed roles.

“ You're constantly having to repeat it... to go through my past and repeat often quite traumatic things to managers and employers to try and explain my behaviour... ”

We also came across examples of people with lived experience feeling like their involvement was tokenistic, or as if they were labelled. It was highlighted that people with lived experience are not one homogenous group and they have different experiences, strengths and skills that should be built upon. However, there were occasions where interviewees felt that they were invited along to things regardless of whether it was related to their job role, or if their lived experience was relevant. This caused frustration.

“ I felt labelled a bit because I had lived experience, “let’s ask [her] because she’ll know about it because she’s got lived experience”. And it’s the same [with the traineeship], anything came up, we’ll get [her] involved in that...sometimes like, just let me breathe, you’re not letting me be myself and doing the role that is intended. ”

Lastly, some people in support roles explained that this could be emotionally draining because they were working with individuals in challenging circumstances, and despite their efforts, they could not always address members' needs. Therefore, one interviewee explained that they were now looking for part-time, rather than full-time, support work to try and reduce the likelihood of burnout.

“ On like a more personal basis, I kind of worry about emotional fatigue because a lot of the work is very emotional work, you have to connect with people to help them... it’s easy to just get too emotionally attached and to just get really drained. And you do start seeing some of the same issues over and over again and it gets very sad and frustrating...I’m having to apply for new jobs and I’m looking for just something part-time because working full-time I get just such bad burn out doing this kind of work. ”

ICM have also invested in providing reflective practice sessions for staff, in recognition of the risk of vicarious trauma amongst staff, and where interviewees had participated in this, they had found it helpful.

7 The impact of being in work, volunteering and/or training on individuals

The section summarises the different impacts that entering and sustaining training, volunteering and/or work opportunities had on people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage who took part in the research.

The literature review demonstrated a range of benefits of education and employment opportunities for people with experience of multiple disadvantage. This included reducing the likelihood of reoffending and supporting recovery or moderating relapse as well as economic, personal and practical benefits – such as improved self-esteem and reducing the likelihood of poverty and social exclusion.¹⁷ Findings from the interviews echoed the evidence base.

For example, everyone interviewed spoke about having increased confidence and self-worth, and a reason for this was that they had a sense of purpose and felt part of society, in some cases for the first time.

“ Where you’re working with people and encouraging people to grow. You really do feel like you’re making a good change in society and boosting peoples’ self-confidence... ”

“ I started to get my self-esteem back. People relied on me; I was cooking food for people that had not ate... they helped me rebuild my confidence because I was part of something again. ”

Linked to this newfound confidence and purpose was a sense of pride, interviewees were proud of themselves and proud to be working at an organisation that supported others.

“ I joined the organisation and I found out exactly what they do. I mean I was very proud. Like, proud to be taking part... ”

They also felt deserving of the opportunity because they recognised their abilities and now saw their lived experience as an asset rather than issue.

“ I think it just helps lift you, raise your confidence more and kind of diminish that imposter syndrome a little bit...I look at myself completely different than I did twelve months ago. I feel that I do merit a place amongst my peers you know. I feel like my contribution is a worthy contribution... ”



¹⁷ Ministry of Justice, 2013; Black, 2016; Henkel, 2011; Pichler et al., 2021; Schuller, 2017; Terry 2016; European Commission, 2019

“ I know now that I can work and make a difference in this field whereas I'd always wanted to work in mental health but I always thought that my own mental health would be an issue and now I know that it's actually a huge bonus. ”

As a result of these different experiences, research participants were now more optimistic about the future and less negative or angry about their past. Where individuals had felt supported to achieve their goals, they were motivated to continue to progress.

“ I've forgiven myself and I'm proud and they're two things I've been looking for since 2014 and I've found it now so I'm really happy about that. ”

“ We had awards and a little party, it made me feel on top of the world even though I was going through problems – it showed me that they really believe in me... It made me feel comfy and supported, it made me want to go more... ”

Having new skills and being in a better headspace also meant that respondents felt more resilient and able to deal with challenges.

“ Them little setbacks in the past would have been a year where now its little blips ... ”

A wider impact of training, volunteering or work opportunities was improved relationships with family or friends. For example, some respondents explained that they now have improved relationships with their children or are part of their lives again after not having this opportunity for a period.

“ It put me in the right frame of mind to start to have self-value again and that self-value came out in me, and I started to become an actively good father again and it changed my outlook on people. I started to appreciate things more. ”

Others explained that having a job had enabled them to secure a property or an income that helped them to have a more stable housing situation. Having improved finances and more stability as well as something to keep people busy also resulted in improved health and wellbeing.

A potentially unintended consequence of entering volunteering or work was that some people explained that they were now more aware of employment rights and what support they were entitled to because of the help they had received.

“ I have this knowledge now, that your entitled to support. It doesn't matter what company and what things, your entitled to certain support if you got dyslexia and stuff like that... before I came here, I wouldn't have known about my rights and stuff, and now I do. ”

Lastly, interviewees spoke of learning new skills through their voluntary or paid role. This included communication skills, IT skills, facilitation skills to support group activities and becoming more aware of different experiences such as homelessness or mental health issues.

“ [Volunteering] got me used to people again, social skills and having conversations about different things...I didn't know how to be around people. ”

8 The impact on organisations

As well as impacting on individuals, the research also identified the impacts of having people with lived experience in voluntary or paid positions on organisations. The section outlines the main outcomes discussed.

Firstly, it was recognised that having people with lived experience in the workforce created a more diverse team, bringing together a range of experiences and knowledge. An employer explained that being open to working with people with lived experience opened up roles to a wider range of potential applicants which helped with recruitment, but more importantly brought valuable insights and skills into the organisation.

“ We've got more hands-on deck but also, we desperately need the insight of those volunteers... they have inherent value. ”

Sharing personal and professional experiences meant that staff members and volunteers had the chance to learn from one another. Staff/volunteers with lived experience had personal insight of the issues people accessing services face, and different team members knew of different services and support options in Manchester. This was felt to benefit people accessing services as the support they received was being informed by different perspectives and local knowledge.

“ I learnt off people who didn't have lived experience and they learnt off me, so I think that's absolutely amazing. ”

“ So, if someone was struggling with a particular case, they felt like they'd tried everything and nothing was working, we'd come together and discuss it with the whole team. So again, you'd get people with professional experience and lived experience saying you haven't tried this, have you tried that, and really sharing it... I think the two can bring so much to each other and everyone used to say they used to learn so much. ”

Their connections with local services also supported partnership working because people with lived experience could put colleagues in touch with relevant organisations.

An example of sharing learning was a view that some services were now providing more person-centred support as a result of lived experience input on how to effectively work with people who are disconnected from services.

“ I worked with somebody and he was from another service...[and] they're fighting for this lady the way I did and I think, you know what, even if I can just leave that like that, that's amazing because this person was not person centred one bit ... but now he doesn't challenge [the client]...He's took some of my person-centred approach to things and I think he realised this is helping more... I think that's really good because I've kind of done that. ”

An employer commented that working with people with lived experience as part of teams helped staff to see the bigger picture and be aware of other things that might be going on in someone's life. This included explaining how previous experiences could impact how they behave or respond to suggestions.

“ Sometimes you maybe need to just take a step back and look at the picture as a whole and I think that's where [person with lived experience] really adds the value. ”

Hence, volunteers and staff with lived experience help to ensure that the voices and experiences of people accessing services are not forgotten about in decision making process.

Added to this, it was highlighted that staff and lived experience are very adaptable to change because of the experiences they have been through, which managers were grateful of.

“ I think historically when I was a manager, you know, you'd introduce something different and it was all, what! So, it was like a luxury really because you'd kind of tell people, right we're going to do this and they were like oh right, okay. They've changed their lives in such huge ways and a little thing at work is like, yeah let's do it. ”

It was emphasised that although additional support may be required to enable people with lived experience to succeed in their role, it is worth the effort because of the longer term benefits their involvement has on clients, the organisation and those members of staff.

“ You might have to be super clear with your communication, you might have to spend time, take time out with people to support them, whether they're having a bad day or to talk things through, to talk decisions, to put extra time in and it can be emotionally draining as well for managers but what you get back is tenfold. It's worth it. It's totally worth it... you just get some amazing outcomes...it makes for a really energised and creative team. ”

Another positive impact was permanent changes to recruitment processes. Through altering recruitment processes to make them more accessible for lived experience roles, some organisations made overall changes to programme or organisational policies after seeing the benefits of simplifying application processes.

“ I just changed it all completely... it's an expression of interest rather than sort of that original application form. There's no interview it's just an informal chat. ”

A limitation of the research has been that we were unable to obtain feedback from employers who do not currently employ individuals with lived experience, to understand what is stopping this. There is also less available research on how employers can be encouraged to offer opportunities to people experiencing multiple disadvantage.



9 Conclusion and recommendations

This report has summarised the research findings from a project exploring training, volunteering and employment pathways for people with personal experience of multiple disadvantage in Manchester.

Key findings have included that:

- There are a range of training and voluntary/paid work opportunities for people with experience of personal disadvantage in Manchester, and where individuals have accessed such opportunities there were many positive impacts for them and the organisations they worked for.
- However, employment opportunities can be limited to certain sectors or job types (such as support worker roles) and have short-term contracts, which limits job (and financial) security.
- People with experience of multiple disadvantage face many barriers to accessing and sustaining these opportunities. Raising awareness of opportunities in a variety of ways, providing emotional and practical support to help people feel ready and able to apply for opportunities, and accessible recruitment processes will help to address some of the barriers identified. However, there are some systematic issues linked to the benefits system and low wages that are more complicated to overcome.
- People often required some form of ongoing support for education, volunteering and job outcomes to be sustained. An organisational culture that encourages people to be honest about any challenges they face, and which meets these challenges in a non-judgemental and flexible way proved particularly beneficial.

- People felt valued when they had the opportunity to access training through their employer or had the chance to get involved in wider organisational activities. Reasonable adjustments being put in place quickly increased the likelihood of employment being a positive experience.
- Negative experiences were linked to involvement feeling tokenistic, having to regularly disclose personal information and feeling drained – because of the emotional toll of the role or because of the number of activities participants were asked to support.

It would be useful to know whether the lessons identified through this project are applicable beyond the not-for-profit and public sector, in Manchester and other places.

Recommendations

Creating good quality opportunities across different sectors

It is not just about preparing individuals with personal experience of multiple disadvantage for the workplace – there needs to be good quality opportunities across a range of sectors. This will require changes to employer attitudes and organisational cultures and practices that encourage and support employers to offer opportunities to people with lived experience. The following suggestions outline ways to address this.

1. Disseminate the [ICM guidance on fair recruitment](#) and employing people who have experienced disadvantage, to support employers in Manchester to think about this and better understand what good practice looks like.
2. Build on the successes and learning from the [Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter](#) and other volunteering charters in England¹⁸, to introduce a volunteering quality standard in Manchester. This will help to encourage organisations to offer positive and supportive volunteering opportunities – and help volunteers to be aware of their rights and responsibilities.
3. Manchester City Council and Greater Manchester Combined Authority should continue to create opportunities for people with lived experience through social value clauses in commissioning processes for local services. However, it is also important that the implementation of such contracts is then regularly monitored to ensure quality.
4. Involving people with lived experience in recruitment processes will help to make processes more accessible but will also provide different perspectives during interviews.
5. Future programmes that support people facing multiple disadvantage, including the Changing Futures programme in Greater Manchester, should be ambitious about possible training, volunteering and employment outcomes for programme participants. There will be benefits in creating links with a variety of organisations who offer good quality opportunities so that options are not limited to entry-level jobs or certain types of roles.



¹⁸ Such as the Salford Volunteering Charter and Volunteer Scotland's Volunteer Charter

Ensuring that training provision is accessible and beneficial to individual's prospects

In addition, it is important that people are supported to develop relevant skills that improve their employability, and that training provision is accessible to those with additional needs. We therefore recommend:

6. Matching training provision with skills requirements and labour market demand to increase the likelihood of this improving the likelihood of someone being able to enter work.
7. Better integration between voluntary and community organisations and education providers to reduce duplication and ensure that learners with wider support needs can access support, rather than stop accessing training.
8. Supporting training providers to think about how they can make their provision inclusive through raising awareness of the multiple disadvantage group.

Sharing learning

Lastly, as previous ICM outputs and this research has shown there is a range of opportunities and support available to people with experience of multiple disadvantage in Manchester, as well as good practice in supporting people to overcome obstacles before joining and when in training, volunteering and work. Therefore, it will be important to:

9. Continue to map support and opportunities available to this group and disseminate this widely to reach as many people in Manchester as possible.
10. Create spaces for organisations working in this field to come together share good practice and insights and consider how challenges can be overcome.

Address evidence gaps

Some evidence gaps remain, and additional research would be useful to generate learning to support efforts to change employer practices and workplace culture and therefore open up opportunities to a more diverse workforce. Therefore:

11. Further research is needed to obtain a greater array of employer perspectives and learn from those organisations who do not work with people with lived experience to find why and whether anything would make this more likely.
12. It would be beneficial to explore how people with experience of multiple disadvantage can be supported to progress once they enter work so that more people can enter management roles (where desired).



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