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LEWISHAM
LOCAL

BUILDING PEOPLE, CHANGING MINDS: BUILDING FOR INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT IN LEWISHAM

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BUILDING PEOPLE, CHANGING MINDS

Foreword from Vicky Foxcroft, Shadow Disabilities minister and MP for Lewisham Deptford

As Shadow Disabilities minister and MP for Lewisham Deptford, I recognise the importance of inclusive, adjusted workplaces.

Adults with autism, mental ill health, and learning disabilities, while wanting to work, are feeling excluded due to barriers and obstacles in many job roles.

Creating more inclusive workplaces leads to individuals gaining work skills, confidence, self-esteem, and social integration.

Building People Changing Minds has done an amazing job in supporting people with learning disabilities or mental health problems in Lewisham to find employment. I support their continued engagement with local employers and partners and believe that an increased capacity for the project will benefit neurodivergent people and Lewisham businesses alike.

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Project Introduction

Building People, Changing Minds (BPCM) aimed to support adults with learning disabilities and/or mental health problems in Lewisham to gain work placement experience and skills through voluntary work placements and increase their confidence, connections and a reference from a reputable organisation.

The project was funded by London Borough of Lewisham's NCIL (Neighborhood Community Infrastructure Levy) to address two key priorities:

- Support for people with learning disabilities and/or mental health problems to find employment opportunities.
- Projects that will assist in Lewisham's Covid-19 recovery by demonstrating a benefit to Lewisham's communities at a borough wide level.

The project was delivered by Lewisham Local and supported by Lewisham Speaking Up. Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network delivered another project with similar aims focusing on supporting people seeking sanctuary.

The need for supported employment in figures:



Adults with Learning Disabilities

- There are an estimated 1,198,000 people in England who have a learning disability (2% of the general population)
- Only 6% of adults with a learning disability known to their local authority in England are in paid work (HSCIC 2015)
- About 10% of the prison population have a learning disability.
- About 60% of adults with learning disabilities still live with their families.
- Up to 50% of people with a learning disability experience chronic loneliness, compared to around 15-30% of people in the general population (Mencap)



Adults with Mental Ill Health – MIND (2019)

- More than one in five (21%) agreed that they had called in sick to avoid work when asked how workplace stress had affected them.
- 14% agreed that they had resigned and 42% had considered resigning when asked how workplace stress had affected them.
- 30% of staff disagreed with the statement 'I would feel able to talk openly with my line manager if I was feeling stressed'.
- 56% of employers said they would like to do more to improve staff wellbeing but don't feel they have the right training or guidance.

Introduction from Lewisham Local

Building People, Changing Minds was all about bringing together and placing faith in Lewisham's local assets, a reflection of Lewisham Local's central mission. On one side, this took the form of believing in and advocating for the value and potential of Lewisham's neurodiverse peoples. On the other, it required placing trust and confidence in our local employers to understand and harmonise with our aims and see the benefits in a more integrated and inclusive workforce.

BPCM succeeded on the strength of its relationships. Once the Placement Coordinator had identified a match between referral and employer, we placed trust in both parties to build a relationship of mutual benefit and understanding. Communication and a balance of commitment and flexibility characterised our most successful placements.

Lewisham is unique in that small businesses represent 93% of all businesses in the borough. We soon learned that their creativity made it easier to make space for the placements within their workstream and their size made it easier to develop the personal relationships that placements relied on. Small businesses move quickly – identifying gaps within their workstream to match the skillset of a referral and creating a placement to suit.

The largest provider of placements, however, was our community sector, whose readiness to incorporate placements into existing volunteer programmes proved a valuable development pathway. Lewisham's rich voluntary community sector was willing and able to see the value of Building People, Changing Minds and find a place within their structures.

The most delicate part of each placement journey was the start: building trust within placement participants, some of whom had been outside of the working world for decades. To ensure we navigated this well, we relied on keyworkers and supporters from our referral agencies to accompany placement participants to their inductions, interviews and placements. Their presence was invaluable as both a reassurance to our placement participants and as a communication advocate.

Building People, Changing Minds was overall characterised by an acceptance of and belief in the value of neurodiversity and a generous coming together of Lewisham's assets to create spaces where this potential could be properly realised.

Introduction from Lewisham Speaking Up

Being involved in a project like Building People, Changing Minds was important for Lewisham Speaking Up. The employment rate for people with learning disabilities has been going down in recent years, a worrying trend in times when there are many unfilled vacancies. Whilst the overall UK employment rate has been around 70–75% in recent years, the rate for people with learning disabilities, known to social care services, is just over 5%.

At the same time, many people report that they would like to work. Our recent People's Parliament report on employment shows that people with learning disabilities place value on work beyond the financial. This includes benefits to mental health, self-esteem, social life and 'feeling like a normal human being.'

The fact that work experience is integrated into mainstream society was crucially important. Many people with learning disabilities say they feel left out or excluded from society and want to feel accepted. One of the strengths of Building People, Changing Minds is that it is rooted in the Lewisham community, offering people an opportunity to contribute to their own community. This was equally true for the businesses offering to host work placements, as well as for those taking up the placements.

As an advocacy and rights based organisation it was important for us that the voices of people with learning disabilities were included in the management of the project. We supported two people to sit on the project steering group and provided guidance on how to make the whole process as inclusive and accessible as possible. We also hosted the project lead at our office for one day a week, so they could get to know some of the work we do and learn more about the employment barriers faced by people with learning disabilities.

Seeing people getting work experience placements and, in some cases, progressing to paid work has been great. The project has been too short and it seems that it is ending just as things are getting going. However, the learning will be invaluable and we hope that this paves the way for similar longer term projects in the future.

Marsh Stitchman, Director, Lewisham Speaking Up

Our Referral Partners

The project increased its referrals through network building with a community of referral agencies:

Referral Agency	Number of BPCM Referrals
Adult Learning Lewisham	9
South London and Maudsley	9
Lewisham Local	7
Self referral	6
Drumbeat School	4
Lewisham College	4
Lewisham Speaking Up	4
Community Connections Lewisham	3
Three Cs	2
Metro	2
DWP	2
Aurora Nexus	1
Lewisham Council	1
The Albany	1
Lewisham Works	1
Lewisham Young Mayors Team	1
Lewisham MENCAP	1
Total	58

Our Placement Hosts

Age Exchange

Ageing Well in Lewisham

Body Shop

ChART Big Local (Chinbrook Action Residents Team)

Citizens UK

CocoCollective

Deptford Methodist Mission (Disabled People's Contact)

Dinner for One Hundred Ltd

Dog's Choice Daycare

GCDA

Gennys Emporium

Grinling Gibbons Primary School

Horniman Museum and Gardens

Lendlease

Lewisham Donations Hub

Lewisham Homes

Lewisham Local

Make Mee Studio

Migration Museum

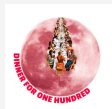
Sydenham Garden

Telegraph Hill Playclub

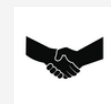
The Albany

The Felix Project

Trinity Laban



THE BODY SHOP



Partnerships



Local Employers

We utilised several communications channels to reach out for local employers to host our placements. This included our own Lewisham Local networks to local businesses offering a discount through our Local Card scheme and voluntary community sector groups. We also used Lewisham Council's business newsletter, Lewisham Speaking Up's referral partners and DWP's directory of Disability Confident employers, South London and Maudsley's Community Links Forum and Lewisham Works' forums and events. We would also like to thank Goldsmiths, University of London and Lewisham College for their continuous support with providing spaces to deliver our employer training. These partners represented another part of Lewisham's community ecosystem that enabled the project to be successfully delivered.



Outreach

Targeted outreach at events enabled us to effectively explain the aims of the project to people who could benefit and then take in-person referrals, allowing us to get a more rounded profile of the participants needs and interests.

We promoted the project via events including Lewisham College's, Change Grow Live's Recovery Day, a pan-London Peabody Employment Fair, Department of Work and Pensions drop-ins at the Forest Hill Job Centre and assemblies at Drumbeat a local Special Educational Needs School as show below:



Support to Placement Participants and Hosts

Training

Training provided us the first opportunity to form an in-person partnership with our placement hosts and proved valuable in building their confidence to host placements. We emphasised that the training aimed to create confident Placement Hosts rather than expert Placement Hosts. Training enabled hosts to proactively open conversations relating to subjects like reasonable adjustments, and triggers.

Access Grants

Through BPCM, we supported Placement Hosts with Access Grants of £100 to go towards any reasonable adjustment that would improve the participants workplace experience. These were successful in resourcing smaller employers for ergonomic adjustments and for covering expenses relating to travel and food.

Access Riders

Access Riders were a key part of our project causing long-term change in our placement participants going forward. These self-advocacy documents are designed to communicate a person's access needs in the workplace and can accompany a CV on an application. The Access Riders serve a dual purpose of saving a placement participant having to explain their access needs anew with each job application and building a culture where conversations relating to access needs are more normalised.

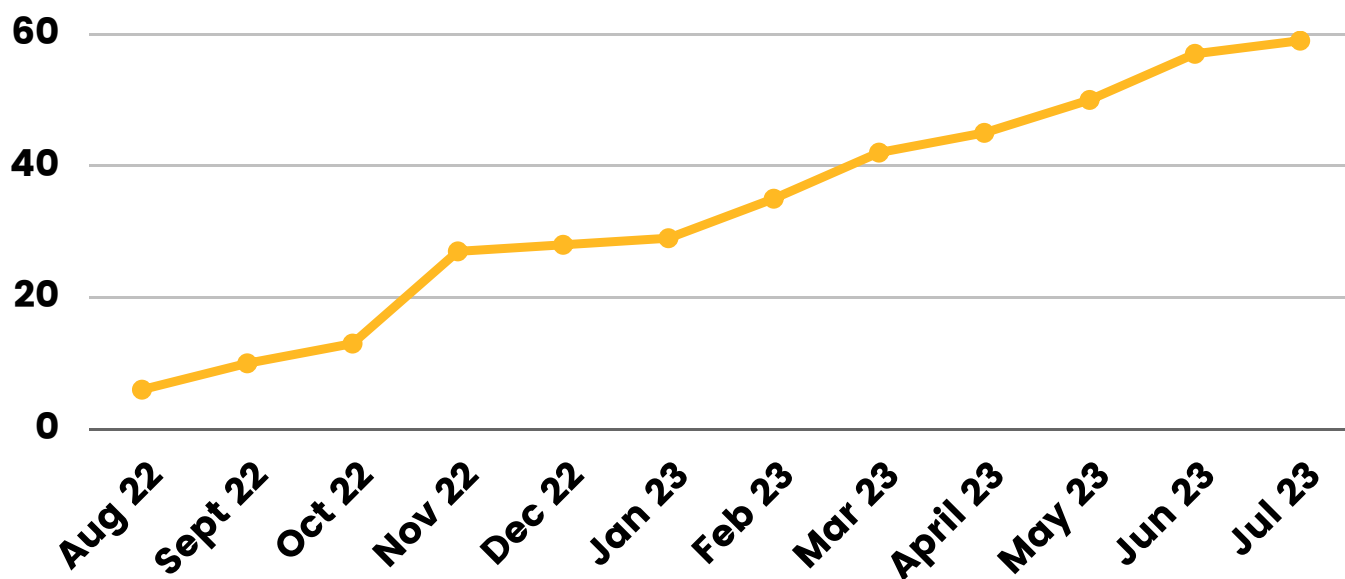
Aftercare

Supporting Job Applications

Throughout the project we supported Placement Participants with CV and job application drop-ins. These sessions enabled us to help Placement Participants gain the confidence to progress from our BPCM placements into paid work.

Statistical Overview of Building People, Changing Minds

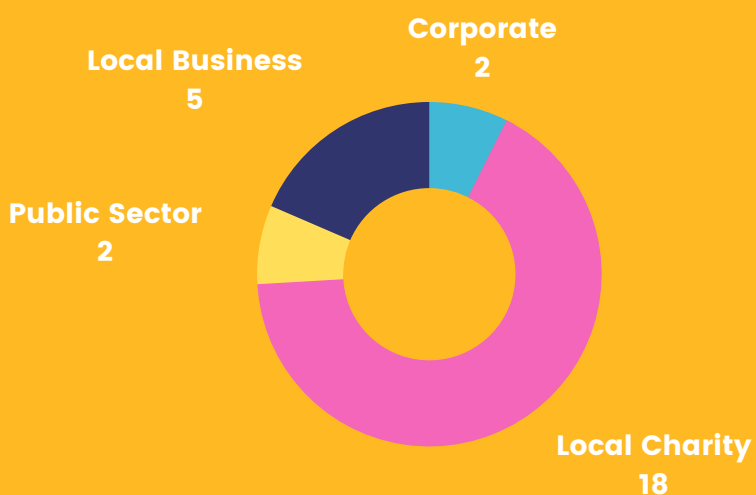
Number of Referrals Over Time



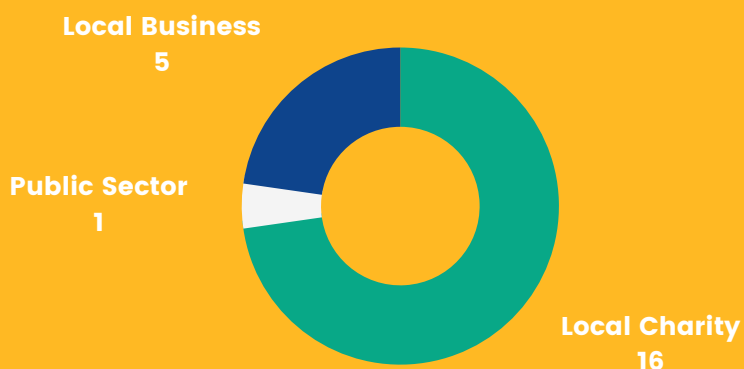
Our referrals tended to increase during 'term time' periods of September–November and February–June. This can be explained by the project's dependence on partnerships.

Our partnerships with South London and Maudsley and Adult Learning Lewisham stood out. These were successful due to the capacity of staff members to give time to support their referrals and the matching priorities of the organisations.

Our Placement Hosts



Placements Hosts with Successful Placements



Capturing Information and the Placement Process

It was important for us to capture detailed profiles of our placement participants to ensure their needs could be met with reasonable adjustments in our placements. We achieved this through qualitative questions such as:

1. “What kinds of adjustments might you need to carry out your placement successfully? This might be extra support that you need to do your placement”
2. “What would your ideal job be? Please tell us here where if there were no limitations relating to your mental ill health or learning disability, what your dream role would involve”
3. “Please use this box to bring to our attention anything relevant in a workplace context that may be triggers for your mental ill health and/or learning disability”
4. “How do you relate to your mental ill health, your learning disability or your autism? How do you identify with your condition”

Asking our Placement Participants to describe their relationship to their condition (question 4) gave us a more nuanced picture of their experiences and sharing this information with our Placement Hosts enabled them to better personalise the placement.

Question 2 enabled us to capture information on our Placement Participants aspirations, helping us to broker a placement experience tailored to their interests. In doing this we inverted more typical supported employment approaches that begin with a person’s limitations, instead focusing on their skills and potential.

Another key element to effectively placing individuals into work was building an Easy Read referral to accompany the business read to ensure adults with learning disabilities still had the opportunity to self-refer to undertake a placement.

Learning from our Challenges and from Placement Withdrawals

Mixture of Support Needs

We learnt from our experience of early withdrawals from some placements and made changes to mitigate the more common reasons. Complex needs were a common feature within our placement referrals, with complications relating to physical health, mental health, housing all contributing factors in a participants withdrawal. After one such withdrawal early on in a placement we learned to reform the induction and interview processes adopting a “show and do not tell” approach helped to structure our placement inductions.

Finding the Right Placements and Managing Expectations

Our project structure changed to ensure that a placement was fully confirmed before communicating with a Placement Participant about the opportunity. Matching a placement to a referral sometimes took time in order to properly fit around a participant’s interests – this lag did incur withdrawals due to changing circumstances.

We found many referrals were also more motivated by the social side rather than specific skills of employment. This did cause some complications in finding a balanced approach to the work and social sides of the placement.



Placement Participants

Case Studies



Anya Ellis at Dogs Choice Daycare

“There was a value in having someone there to build a relationship. I felt comfortable knowing that if I didn’t enjoy the placement I could step out at any time”

Anya began her BPCM placement at Dog’s Choice Daycare in Deptford in early 2023 based on her interest in working with animals. after graduating from her BPCM placement she secured a paid role work there. In her words she described her experience:

“I always liked animals and found them to be very therapeutic, in the past I’ve volunteered at a farm before but they didn’t understand neurodiversity and it was just quite difficult. I like quite a set structure so I ended up having to leave there. So obviously a placement here has been good, coming from a place where they understand neurodiversity, I feel reassured”

Growth:

“Now I have finished the placement and work here as a proper job it has improved my confidence in terms of work. I’ve had jobs in the past but didn’t really enjoy the social aspects and found them difficult so working here with the animals has bene a dream for me”

When asked about what reasonable adjustments Dog’s Choice introduced to make the workplace more comfortable, Anya explained “A proper set routine helped in terms of not having unexpected things happenings. Adam and the team are very understanding and they are chill and easy-going”

On the specific support provided by BPCM, she told us “Before the project it was quite hard to go into things in the world of work. Having an access point that the placement provides was really nice and the way it flowed into actually getting a job afterwards.

Latoya Matthews, Dinner for One Hundred

Latoya began at Dinner for One Hundred, a pizzeria in Telegraph Hill in early 2023, after graduating from her BPCM placement she is now in a paid role there:

“I’ve grown a lot of confidence working here, the pay is good. My dream is still to one day run a café so I will see what my future holds. They help me a lot here, they give me a lot of work to do which I am good at and I work hard and do the job really well, I am quite proud at doing my job”.

Speaking on her future plans, Latoya explains “I want this to be a full time job one day but I know that can’t happen because of my benefits, they will stop if I increase my hours. If the government can change that then I can do the weekends here, I would love to do the weekends here”.

Case Studies, Placement Hosts .



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Employer Focus: Dinner for One Hundred



Inclusivity

"I was aware of the project but for me and Jacob, this feels like a very natural place to be, we both have experience with SEND children and inclusivity in general, I think incorporating that into the business is what we want anyway. Rather than being a business that's purely about making money its important to be a force for good in the community and that leans towards wanting to engage and include people of all backgrounds. I think when Jacob [Placement Supervisor at Dinner for One Hundred] was approached by you guys it felt very natural as its part of our ethos and what we're about"

Community Duty: What can other businesses take from Dinner for One Hundred's example?

"I think a lot of our success leans into being a small business, if you have the availability of small independent businesses being run by local members of the community it becomes more likely that a business will want to engage with neurodiverse people. I think larger businesses lack a driving force to make the effort.

Something I want to stress is that we are not doing someone a favour here, this is not a source of charity, of course inclusivity is a huge part, but Latoya is just someone who does a fantastic job. I think it comes down to untapped potential".

On the barriers to embracing neurodiverse employment on a greater scale

"If anything, stumbling blocks [to neurodiverse employment] are completely put in the way. I think there needs to be far more resources available. The fact that it takes someone as involved as yourself for us to be able to connect to Latoya when we're a company that is super willing to do this. If there were more resources and a clearer vision coming from the top and more funding available we would be able to do this much more easily and regularly. I think the same could be said for other businesses, austerity is what it comes down to, there just aren't the resources to support it"

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Conclusions

A future opportunity to Build People and Change Minds.

Building People Changing Minds was an effective project and demonstrated effective employment support for individuals with mental ill health and learning disabilities through investing in building relationships with employers and brokering work placements. We believe with increased resources Building People, Changing Minds could engage more employers and support more individuals from across Lewisham. Placements carry a compound benefit: increased employability for individuals through gaining more confidence, social integration, self-esteem and skills and more work place opportunities in local employers through our support.

Our placements depended upon the strength of relationships that the project facilitated, to increase the scope and success of this model we suggest a three-part approach comprised of:

- Increased capacity to build a network of referral agencies and conduct in-depth, in-person assessments of our referrals.
- Increased capacity to deliver employer training and recruit placement hosts from local employers with in-person visits.
- Increased capacity to provide after-care with supporting job applications, applications to further education or applications to additional supported employment schemes.



BUILDING PEOPLE CHANGING MINDS