

Case study: dealing with health barriers

Portsmouth City Council

Our customer thought his working life was pretty much over two years previously, having suffered a series of heart attacks which ended his employment abruptly. He had received Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) to keep him afloat during those two years, but his GP had recently carried out a Work Capability Assessment and had told him that he was officially fit enough for work. At the age of 59, he then came to us as a mandatory referral from Jobcentre Plus for the Pathways to Work programme. This is a specific programme for those receiving ESA or incapacity benefit because of a health condition to help them find work.

He was really down when I first met with him, wondering what on earth a man of his age could do for work. It was not just his heart that had been a problem either, he was also virtually deaf in one ear due to a series of ear infections he had had over the years.

While we were putting together an action plan I discovered that he had had lots of different jobs over the years: delivery driver; mechanical engineer, warehouse work, taxi driver. I stressed that if he could do something like that in the past there was really no reason he couldn't do the same in the future. We needed to find something he could do within the constraints of his health issues which did not involve too much heavy lifting. We hit upon the idea of light delivery work.

To help him look for and start to apply for this sort of work though, we needed to work on his motivation which was at rock bottom. I took a dual approach to this. Through the Pathways process, I gave him a financial incentive by telling him about the £40 a week he would be able to claim for a year if he found at least 16 hours of work a week and earned no more than £15,000 gross under the Return To Work Credit (RTWC) programme, and I was able to refer him to our in-house confidence building and motivation workshops. The combination of these two actions resulted in success. Soon after completing the workshops he found work as a self employed driver using his contacts for three local companies and was successfully able to claim for RTWCs after we managed to help sort out all the necessary paperwork around business planning and forecasting. It is not as straightforward for those moving into self-employment as it is for those in employment!

I am still in touch with this customer as part of our in-work support protocol, and the difference in him is really noticeable. He often tells me that he really feels that his life has changed for the better.