

Case study: adviser training

Age UK Employment Services Milton Keynes

When new advisers first come to us we tend to deliver training in bite-sized, two-hour sessions as we're keen not to overload them with information. We tell them about the service we offer, our funding, how the different things we do fit together so that they get a picture of how it all works, and what we are trying to achieve with our 50+ customers. Following on from this, we like to make sure our advisers fully understand the issues they may have.

A valuable training method we use is asking advisers to shadow experienced staff. Time and again, this has provided a really powerful technique. To make most use of it though, we meet with the adviser prior to one to one or group sessions with customers to tell them what we are planning to do. After the session we ask them to reflect on what was done and what went well and not so well. Once they gain confidence they take over some elements of the activity. Gradually we increase the number and complexity of those elements as they grow in confidence.

One of our advisers who has been with us over a year commented: "Shadowing my manager over a period exposed me to a variety of different customers and helped me to develop a broad range of knowledge and skills. This has enabled me to tailor support to individual customer needs. The over-50s were not a group I had worked with before and I have learned to understand and empathise with the particular problems they face in seeking employment."

We sometimes ask new advisers to be our 'helpers' on our networking, interview, transferable skills, job clubs and CV writing courses. They help out and have the opportunity to take part in some of the activities. This gives them the chance to put it into practice what they have learnt.

We also ask our advisers to use the internet to identify possible jobs for specific customers as part of their training. It doesn't take long for them to understand some of the frustrations our customers experience when they fail to find jobs they are looking for. This gives them good insight into how our customers feel when using the internet to find work.