

Accessing Employment 'What we heard'

Winter meetups 2022

In winter 2022
we held a series of
meetups on the topic of
accessibility to employment.

A total of 48 people came to 6 in-
person and 2 online events. The people
who came were mostly disabled people
and people with mental health conditions;
at some there were a few professionals. This
report is a summary of what we heard.

Key Themes

Challenges:

Low employer awareness

Few opportunities

The benefits system

Poor transport links

Lack of confidence

Individual barriers

Positive Experiences:

Supportive managers

Organisations that help

Supportive co-workers

Volunteering

Workplace adjustments

Self-employment

Ideas:

System changes

Confidence building opportunities

Employer awareness about rights and adjustments

Better volunteering opportunities

Inclusion training for managers and teams

Rural work opportunities

Part 1 – Barriers and challenges

At Barnwood Circle meetups disabled people and people with mental health conditions shared barriers and challenges that they experience when looking for a job or being employed.

Key Themes:

Low employer awareness

Few opportunities

The benefits system

Poor transport links

Lack of confidence

Individual barriers

1. Low employer awareness

a. Poor workplace adjustments

- ✦ Not enough support provision at work or in volunteering.
- ✦ Access to Work support often thought of as equipment only.
- ✦ Flexible working hours are not often available.
- ✦ Lack of flexibility for carers / parent-carers in the workplace.
- ✦ Juggling childcare responsibilities is an issue.

b. Difficult recruitment processes

- ✦ Too much emphasis on exam results for applications.
- ✦ Lack of flexibility at recruitment stage.
- ✦ Application forms are barriers – over complicated.
- ✦ Needing support for CV writing and interview training.
- ✦ Being out of practice due to being out of work for a long time.
- ✦ Having a criminal record is a barrier.

“The biggest barrier for me is that I have to spend all my time and energy into caring for my daughter who has autism”.

“There’s an assumption that disabled people are not capable of degree level jobs. So being offered low skill and low paid work opportunities”.

c. Discrimination

- ❖ Poor attitude or low awareness around disability.
- ❖ Discrimination and stigmatisation against disability and mental health conditions.
- ❖ Poor awareness passed down from generations of employers.
- ❖ Disclosing a disability can be seen as negative by employers.
- ❖ Not having a disability recognised by employer (e.g., ADHD).
- ❖ Employers do not understand invisible disability.
- ❖ Employers pre-judging – labels are a barrier.
- ❖ Employers being unable or unwilling to make adjustments.

2. The benefits system

- ❖ Pressure from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) – not given a choice.
- ❖ DWP workload results in lack of compassion.
- ❖ Affordability of paid work, fear of losing basic income of benefits.
- ❖ Benefit system not supporting the transition from benefits into employment.
- ❖ Not knowing what is possible – permitted work rules.
- ❖ Lack of services to help with finding work (e.g., Job Club).
- ❖ Job Centre feels uncomfortable.
- ❖ Job Centre staff apply unrealistic demands and pressure.

“So many disabled people and people with mental health challenges do not work because they are discriminated against”.

“You get treated differently when you have a disability. Some companies stigmatise you and push you to the bottom of the pile”.

“Some of my Job Centre experiences have been patronising. I had to go to groups and do things I didn’t feel were right for me”.

“You’re just a number to [the DWP]”.

3. Lack of Confidence

- ✦ Lost confidence.
- ✦ Anxiety about approaching employers.
- ✦ Previous negative experiences and rejections putting people off.
- ✦ Disclosure of disability - hesitant to talk to employers.

4. Few opportunities

- ✦ Lack of opportunities available, such as work placements.
- ✦ Some volunteering schemes only give you one shot at an opportunity.
- ✦ Limited types of work available in rural area.
- ✦ Lack of careers advice in schools.

5. Individual barriers

- ✦ Physical barriers to carry out certain tasks, due to disability.
- ✦ Difficulty accessing Personal Assistants (i.e., to support at work or volunteering).

6. Poor transport links

- ✦ Transport is limited and not easily available in rural areas.
- ✦ Travel / commuting costs are high.
- ✦ Not clear what transport support is available.
- ✦ Buses are unreliable.

"Finding a PA so I can get out and about and access opportunities. I've got the hours but I can't find the right person".

"One of my biggest barriers is my health. I can't deal with things on an energy level"

"Buses only take 1 wheelchair per bus – I hate to be late for my volunteering job – so to make sure I can get to work on time, I have to leave extra early".

Part 2 - Positive Experiences

At the meetups people talked about their positive work and volunteering experiences in Gloucestershire.

Key Themes:

Supportive
managers

Organisations
that help

Supportive
co-workers

Volunteering

Workplace
adjustments

Self-
employment

1. Supportive manager relationships

- ✦ Regular check-in meetings with my manager; short daily communications.
- ✦ An understanding employer who helps you navigate the hours you are permitted to work.
- ✦ You have to research what you need before talking with employers as they don't always know what I need.
- ✦ Working on things that I enjoy.

2. Supportive co-workers

- ✦ Being inclusive and accommodating at work.
- ✦ Asking how you are.
- ✦ Having someone on hand to help me settle into the job.
- ✦ Mentoring at work (peer/advocate).
- ✦ Knowing other people's personality types (e.g., Myers Briggs Personality Type).
- ✦ A work buddy and ally.
- ✦ Training included in the role.
- ✦ Having a good team helps.
- ✦ Having a good manager, like-minded people and a nice work culture.

"I enjoyed working in a team as a Kitchen Assistant. It felt good and I felt welcomed."

"They let me take my own time to do things and to decide which area of work suits me best."

"I have been really lucky working with friends. It's really important."

"I worked at the Co-op for a while, the people make a big difference."

3. Workplace adjustments

- ✦ Flexibility in the role.
- ✦ Employers making adjustments that are right for me.
- ✦ Employers being flexible (i.e., I can start work earlier).
- ✦ Being able to work in a space with fewer distractions.
- ✦ Being given a spare electric chair to use at work.
- ✦ Doing team meetings in different styles. (i.e., following the format but being creative about it).
- ✦ A lower counter for people using wheelchairs from each side.
- ✦ A hearing loop when there were screens in place during the pandemic.

4. Organisations that help

- ✦ Having the right amount and type of support and people with the right skills to help you navigate it.
- ✦ Having knowledge to inform the conversation about adjustments.
- ✦ Support from agencies like GEM and Forwards.
- ✦ A job coach who knows about you, job markets and disability rights.

"I had two great job opportunities after my CV was put online."

"Adjust my job role - use my strengths."

"Having flexibility for carers in the workplace is really beneficial."



5. Volunteering

- ✦ Being offered a paid job after volunteering.
- ✦ Volunteering opportunities are great for boosting confidence.

6. Self-employment

- ✦ Self-employment can be a flexible way of working.

"Working with XXX is my best experience of working since I have been ill. They helped me so much with my confidence and self-esteem. Now I am helping others."

"The best thing about volunteering is that I can help the general public and be around other people. I don't like being bored."

"I've had good experiences with volunteering."

"Volunteering is rewarding, it gives you a purpose and you meet other people going through similar situations. So, you can share your information and help each other out."

Part 3 - Opportunities, ideas and solutions

People offered ideas that could make a difference for disabled people and people with mental health conditions who want to work.

Key Themes:

System
changes

Confidence
building
opportunities

Employer
awareness
about
rights and
adjustments

Better
volunteering
opportunities

Inclusion
training for
managers and
teams

Rural work
opportunities

1. System changes

- ✦ Funding to make workplaces more inclusive and remove barriers.
- ✦ Companies should be accountable to present the data on who they are employing and how many applicants have been successful.
- ✦ A smaller county version of the Disability Confident Scheme would be good and an empowering mechanism.
- ✦ More career advice needs to be given in schools.
- ✦ People knowing their rights around employment.
- ✦ A good employer list (i.e., people with lived experience sharing stories of who is a good employer).
- ✦ Educating employers to understand diversity.
- ✦ Enforce disability training for employers.
- ✦ Get businesses together to provide transport for employees.
- ✦ Better public transport available at an affordable cost.
- ✦ Social workers that act legally and support the individual.
- ✦ Better access to Personal Assistants (PAs) so that people can go to work or volunteer with the support they need.

“There needs to be system change. The job centre and employers need to have basic compassion and people skills for their stuff, so they can stay in a connective mode, remaining open and empathetic”.

“People shouldn’t feel like they have failed when it’s the system that has failed them.”

2. Employer awareness about rights and adjustments

- ✦ Infrastructure and working practices to better protect employees (i.e., not just putting the company first).
- ✦ An advocate who understands the systems and the needs of the individual.
- ✦ Having a key member of staff available in the workplace who is responsible for accessibility.
- ✦ Equality recognised.
- ✦ Employers more in touch with the Disability Act.
- ✦ Mentoring and advocacy available in the workplace.
- ✦ Job descriptions – change language to be less ableist.
- ✦ Help to navigate permitted hours of work.
- ✦ Fair wages for everyone.
- ✦ Application processes simplified and a variety of non-online application process options (i.e., video option), and help with an online application process.
- ✦ Simplified interview process.
- ✦ Flexibility and workplace adaptations.
- ✦ Flexibility to adapt a role to the employees' strengths.
- ✦ Use accessible language.
- ✦ Employees having some influence over workplace surroundings.
- ✦ Being able to move around at work, alternative workspaces.
- ✦ Taking pets into work.

"Organisations should involve disabled people at planning stages when they are setting things up."

"I found being interviewed on Zoom much less stressful or pressurized."



3. Inclusion training for managers and teams

- ✦ Supportive employers make a huge difference.
- ✦ Listening and treating people well.
- ✦ An open culture that is adaptable.
- ✦ Having inclusive employers.
- ✦ Provide support for employers.
- ✦ A job application process to focus on ability to do the job and not exam results.
- ✦ Use point score without identifying characteristics (i.e., age) when shortlisting.
- ✦ More knowledge to inform adjustments and improvements.
- ✦ Employers give information about what support is available.
- ✦ Highlight the positive rather than the negative attributes of disability.
- ✦ Employers having more of a trauma-informed approach.
- ✦ Employers state whether they are Disability Confident.
- ✦ More lived experience of disability and mental health conditions across the board, at every level.
- ✦ Open-minded people – respectful colleagues and employers.
- ✦ Chipping away at stigma around disability, including invisible disability.
- ✦ Peer support at point of accessing a role.
- ✦ A buddy or mentor at work.
- ✦ Peer support from someone you can trust and who understands.
- ✦ Focus on people's strengths and positive assets seen.
- ✦ Training in employment rights and confidence building.

"Talk to me
about my
strengths, interests
and aspirations."

"Flexibility –
a lot of employers
are too rigid."

4. Opportunities to build confidence

- ✦ More drop-in sessions like Autism Work Club.
- ✦ Impartial external support groups.
- ✦ Advocates to support employees in the workplace.
- ✦ More support to take up work or opportunities.
- ✦ Confidence workshops – “be seen, be heard.”
- ✦ Organisations that help people get back into work (e.g., bring back GEM).
- ✦ More supporting organisations.
- ✦ Bite size refresher courses (e.g., Back to Workplace/Stepping Stone).
- ✦ Adult Education as a source of support.
- ✦ Support in transitioning into the workplace after some time out of work.
- ✦ Job Centre filters in job searches for good [Disability Confident] employers.

“A job coach that knows you, knows the job market and knows about disability rights.”

5. Better volunteering opportunities

- ✦ Long-term volunteering opportunities.
- ✦ Generate more apprenticeship schemes and paid work placements.
- ✦ Make more voluntary places available to learn skills.
- ✦ Volunteers to be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses.
- ✦ Opportunity to trial work or volunteering.
- ✦ Taster sessions of job helps to understand overview of what the job entails.
- ✦ 'Trial shifts' rather than a job interview.
- ✦ Paid work experience.

6. Rural work opportunities

- ✦ For rural areas there should be more jobs and a local Job Centre.
- ✦ More social enterprises and self-employment opportunities.
- ✦ Encourage businesses to move into rural areas.

"It's important
for me to
experience new
things."



barn
wood circle 

Email talktous@barnwoodtrust.org

Freephone **0800 4220404**

What's App **07519 325601**

