

An evaluation of Working Minds

Summary of full report
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Tim Challis
David Wilkinson
Research Toolkit



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**Working
Minds**

Training • Voluntary Work • Employment

Leeds Mind



For better
mental health

community links

linking community support
to health and housing



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Introduction

“You start opening up. If you’ve been suffering from mental health, it’s a bit like meeting a new friend who knows what you’ve been through ... it helps you feel better, and you think, ‘You know, I can do this.’”

Working Minds service user.

Working Minds in Leeds is a city wide project and is funded by Yorkshire Forward. It specialises in working with people who have experience of mental health difficulties to help them to access and sustain employment related opportunities.

As an organisation, it offers a range of services including: 1:1 tailored support; information, advice and guidance; Job Clubs focused on work preparation; volunteering, mentoring and work placement support; access to benefits and debt advice; post employment support; and mental health awareness training for employers.

Research Toolkit Limited were commissioned (November 2009) by Vanessa Lenzionowski and Fiona Devenney at Working Minds to evaluate the programme’s effectiveness as an organisation specialising in working with people who have experience of mental health difficulties but who wish to access and sustain employment related opportunities. This report provides a summary of the evaluative data collected from three stakeholder groups involved with Working Minds: service users, employers and the Working Minds Board Members.

This short report is a summarised version of our full report produced and available from the Working Minds team.

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“The trainers allowed staff to evaluate potential sources of stressors in their daily role and how to minimise the impact on themselves and recognise the warning signs in others.”

Working Minds employer organisation.

“You can go at your own pace ... nobody says ‘Right, you’ve got this many weeks that you’re going to be with us, and then you have to find a job.’”

Working Minds service user.

Service user key themes



- **Increased self-confidence and self-worth,**
- **The importance of group sessions,**
- **Clear one-to-one support and effective guidance,**
- **Achieving employment is a longer-term (rather than shorter-term) goal,**
- **Voluntary work is a favoured route back into employment; and**
- **Further training opportunities (such as those provided through local Colleges) are important.**

The most powerful impacts that participants identified related to their **self-confidence** and sense of **self worth**; themes with clear links to other identified areas, such as work and training. “They helped me go to college, I’ve done a book keeping course, and that’s given me a lot of confidence,” one woman said, “and I’ve passed my exams, I got a level one in book keeping.”

“I’m doing voluntary work now, and it’s got me out and going to new places, doing new things, working with people.”
Working Minds service user.



Sue’s Story

Sue was introduced to Working Minds when her mental health support worker, who Sue no longer needs, gave her a leaflet about the services it offered.

Sue feels Working Minds helped her cope with the prospect of work better. “I get really frustrated by things, and start getting anxious. They helped me a lot with that.”

Through Working Minds, Sue secured voluntary work with Oblong, a community resource in Woodhouse, Leeds. “It’s very helpful in terms of learning new skills, also getting a portfolio together,” she said.

The programme’s **group sessions** were also highlighted as boosting people’s confidence. “You start opening up. If you’ve been suffering from mental health, it’s a bit like meeting a new friend who knows what you’ve been through,” another woman said, “it helps you feel better, and you think, ‘You know, I can do this.’”

Support and guidance also emerged as critical elements of Working Minds. “The fact that you don’t have to walk in and do something on your own, you’ve got someone there at the side of you...it’s actually quite difficult to go out and confront and do things,” one woman told us, “so for me it’s really good that you’ve got a supporter at the side of you who you know you can rely on.”

“You meet new people, we’ve had mental health problems, most of the people there, so you feel a bit secure, you’re not left out or anything.”

Working Minds service user.

“It’s like having an angel,” another woman said. Participants were particularly positive about the fact that Working Minds’ support carries over into the workplace. “They won’t go away, the support’s still there, you need that support when you start work,” one woman said. Participants discussed the fact that they could not get support like this from any other agency.

Although **returning to paid employment is an overarching ambition** for most of the people we talked to, they regard this as a major goal that will take time to achieve. “A fairly long-term goal, because I’ve got to overcome mental health problems as well,” one woman said, adding, “I want to go back to full-time employment.” A strength of Working Minds to its participants is the **absence of pressure to return quickly to the workplace**. “You can go at your own pace,” a female participant commented, “Nobody says ‘Right, you’ve got this many weeks that you’re going to be with us, and then you have to find a job.’”

Voluntary work as a preferred route back into employment emerged strongly during the interviews. “I’ve got a qualification in teaching, it’s been two years and I’ve never done anything with it...so now I’m doing voluntary teaching or two hours on Thursdays, which is great,” one woman reported.

Speaking of paid employment, another woman said “I would be able to build my confidence up, and I would be able to provide for my son, and that would be the end, for me. I wouldn’t be able to do that right now, so I have to have lots of little goals on the way, voluntary work is the first thing to try.”

Participants also discussed the **economic realities of life on incapacity benefit**, and the importance of training to them. Many were enjoying college courses as a result of Working Minds, they told us.



Debbie’s Story

Working Minds has been pivotal in Debbie’s journey to good health. “Confidence wise and self esteem and everything else were virtually non-existent, but gradually...I’m becoming more able to face the world, and I can see a future, because of Working Minds.”

Her goal is to launch a fashion design business specialising in adapting and refashioning existing clothing, such as that available through charity shops. “Charity shops already have wonderful clothing that can be readapted to modern living, to individual needs,” she said, “so one of the ideas was that I would go around buying certain outfits from charity shops, reinvent them and sell them as they are, either on the internet or to clients.”

Working Minds, and the fashion design course she accessed through it, have helped Debbie counter the stigmatisation of her illness. “For me, because I’ve worked and had my own business and been successful, and had the ideal lifestyle,” she said, “it was all such a complete contrast, that in itself, I kind of stigmatised myself, thinking that I’m a failure.”

Debbie still has a sharp business acumen, and with the support of Working Minds has made good progress towards her self-employment goals, and has already had preliminary meetings with Business Link. “I’m apprehensive ...I need to find a safety net financially...that’s the only scary part, thinking of ending your benefit.”

“I’ve just come back from the Mind shop, and it’s getting me on the coal face again, I’m not behind the till, but the thing is I’m interacting with people, so without Working Minds I wouldn’t have been able to be in that position.”

Working Minds service user.

Employer views



- **Almost all employers rate Working Minds training and development events as ‘excellent’,**
- **Almost all employers believe that the content of training sessions are focused upon their needs as employers in the region,**
- **Case studies used by the Working Minds during team training are useful in highlighting relevant mental health issues; and**
- **Training offered through Working Minds enables employers to identify and access further specialised support should they require it.**

Working Minds provides training and development events for local employers. These sessions focus on a range of topics of relevance for those employer organisations who wish to learn more about mental health issues.

In a recent survey (based on 236 responses) of employer mental health training courses run by Working Minds, 92% of respondents rated them as excellent or good, and 91% agreed that the content was focused upon the needs of the employer. The use of case study material, by the Working Minds training team, to highlight issues of interest and relevance to the employer organisations was viewed as being particularly relevant. “The cases really helped to incorporate the business aspect”, pointed out one representative from a public sector employer. Another indicated that the material was “Very useful, an eye opener, which puts everything into perspective”.

A number of the employer organisations felt that the training enabled them to benefit from specialist support and information that facilitated the development of in-house policies and practices in relation to current and potential employees who may be suffering from mental health issues.

“I thought the structure and synopsis of the various mental health issues presented in Working Minds training were very interesting as I wasn’t fully aware that mental health affects us all in whatever social situation we are presented with.”

Working Minds
employer organisation.

As part of this evaluation work, we asked a small number of employers who had undertaken training in mental health issues what impact the training had on their organisation and their employees. A number indicated that the training had a lasting effect on how staff members reacted to and dealt with those with identified mental health issues, a typical response being: “Staff are far more aware of the limitations placed on people with mental health issues.”

In addition to the recognition of mental health issues suffered by others, many employer representatives acknowledged that current work practices may have an adverse effect on their own mental health. A number had implemented, since the training, practices that reduced their own exposure to stress in the workplace: “Those people who identified changes in work practice to reduce stress have taken up that practice” one said.

“As a staff team we have developed our confidence in supporting Centre users who are experiencing distress. We now have information available to signpost them to appropriate support organisations.”

Working Minds
employer organisation.

Board Member perspectives



- **Board Members indicated that Working Minds provides a service that effectively connects employer organisations with those who are experiencing mental health issues,**
- **Some Board Members believe that the employment targets set for Working Minds were unrealistic,**
- **Board Members felt that Working Minds engagement with clients was supportive in enabling them to progress in their life goals; and**
- **Some Board Members felt that models of delivery offered by other employment services providers could be utilised by Working Minds.**

“In my view the purpose of Working Minds is to provide intensive tailored support to some of the most vulnerable people in Leeds. The aim of the support is to help give them the confidence to feel that they are able to consider accessing employment - helping them see that this may be of huge benefit to them - and help them prepare for this next step in their lives, supporting them along the way.”
Working Minds
Board Member.

We asked the Working Minds Board members (representatives from a range of public sector and charitable organisations) a range of questions in relation to their perceptions of the effectiveness of the organisation.

Board Members generally viewed Working Minds as providing a service that connects employer organisations with those who are experiencing mental health issues. Some commented that the work of the Working Minds team positively challenged established views - particularly in relation to work being good for mental health. Other comments included that Working Minds facilitated greater connectivity between a range of organisations through its partnership approach to working: “connectivity is achieved through effective partnership working to support customers who are experiencing mental health issues”, one Board Member commented.

There was some recognition by Board Members that the employment targets set for Working Minds were, perhaps, unrealistic. This has been even more difficult to achieve in the current economic climate, which has: “... placed significant pressures in securing employment for all those seeking work – with this customer group facing additional challenges,” reflected one Board Member.

“[Working Minds] have modelled new ways of working with customers ensuring services are joined up and act in the best interests for the customer and not led by organisational requirements. They have developed forums where active participation of service users is sought to drive and influence the model of delivery.”
Working Minds
Board Member.

Board Members also indicated that Working Mind’s engagement with clients was supportive in enabling them to progress in their life and employment goals: “they seem to have a genuine desire to help [clients] overcome some of their difficulties,” reported one. Another Board Member suggested that Working Minds might usefully benefit from exploring models for delivery and support provided by others operating in the support agency environment: “there are big players in the employment support world that will present serious competition, they need to anticipate this. Employer training is definitely on the Government agenda, Working Minds should consider how best they can contribute to this.”

If you would like further information on the activities of Working Minds, please contact:
Working Minds, Leeds Mind Head Office, Grove Villa, 82 Cardigan Road, Leeds LS6 3BJ.
Tel: 0113 274 5165. Email: workingminds@workingmindsleeds.org.uk.

This is a summarised version of a full report produced by Research Toolkit Limited for Working Minds (April 2010).
This summary available at: http://www.research-toolkit.co.uk/images/reportsetc/Working_Minds_summary.pdf
Full report available at: http://www.research-toolkit.co.uk/images/reportsetc/Working_Minds_full.pdf