

Microenterprise and People with Learning Disabilities



EnDevA (NW) CIC

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Introduction

Changes in how people with learning disabilities are supported has provided an environment where a lot more people really can realise ambitions and dreams that would have been unthinkable a generation ago. *Valuing People Now (2009)* sets out the Government's vision that "all people with learning disabilities are people first with the right to lead their lives like any others, with the same opportunities and responsibilities, and to be treated with the same dignity and respect. They and their families and carers are entitled to the same aspirations and life chances as other citizens."

Lancashire County Council's Overall Policy Objectives state, "all people and their families have a fulfilling life of their own, beyond services; that includes opportunities to work, study, and enjoy leisure and social activities. This includes supporting more people with learning disabilities into paid work, including those with more complex needs".

Implementation of policy objectives, including the work of local partnership boards and the introduction of personal budgets, now make a practical impact on the lives of people with learning disabilities and their families. People are now able to opt for the services and support that suit them the most and, increasingly, people with disabilities have aspirations to work and to earn a wage.

The number of people with learning disabilities in employment is low: *Valuing People Now* states that less than 10% of people with learning disabilities are in employment (paid or otherwise) and of that number few work more than 16 hours per week. There is little data available about the number of people with learning disabilities in self-employment.

This research has been commissioned by Lancashire County Council Learning Disability Partnership Board to find out more about learning disability and enterprise, and whether microenterprise can be an alternative to more traditional employment. The project explores what is possible and what has been achieved by people with learning disabilities. It examines the barriers to enterprise and how learning-disabled entrepreneurs can best be supported to achieve success.

The report will contribute to the body of knowledge that exists in this field, and is executed with a view to sharing best practice in the region.

Chapter 1

What we mean by “Learning Disability”

Valuing People (2001) suggest those with learning disability have:

- Significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information, to learn new skills (impaired intelligence), with;
- Reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social functioning),
- Which started before adulthood, with a lasting effect on development.¹

The Learning and Skills Act 2000² states a person has a learning difficulty if:

(a) He has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of persons of his age, or

(b) He has a disability which either prevents or hinders him from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided by institutions providing post-16 education or training.

For the purpose of this research, we have used the term ‘learning disability’ to cover intellectual disability as outlined above including Autism and Asperger’s Syndrome.

Enterprise and Microenterprise

Within this research, “enterprise” is defined as a project or undertaking, intended to provide a product or service. In the context of people with learning disabilities starting enterprises, it is implicit that those people are involved in developing the initiative and have ownership of the enterprise. While they may need significant help and support, the person with learning disability continues to be central in the decision making process throughout. A traditional view of enterprise may be that it is concerned only with generating income. However in this context, we have considered that enterprise may be for economic gain, and it may also be for social good (social enterprise). For example, a person who develops a shopping service for elderly residents and undertakes that work on a voluntary basis will have developed an enterprise within the definition used here.

The term “microenterprise” has been much used and there are a number of definitions. Within the European Economic Union it is defined as a business with five or fewer employees. Globally, the term microenterprise is used to describe enterprise developed primarily through the use of microfinance particularly in poverty stricken countries³. Doreen Rosimos and Darcy Smith of US Company Income Links defined microenterprise as a very small business activity that may or may not produce sufficient revenue to support an individual.

¹ Valuing People paras 1.4-1.7

² Legislation.gov.uk (2000) Learning and Skills Councils Act 2000. Section 13.
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/21/contents> [accessed 24/01/11]

³ Grameen Foundation (2010) <http://www.grameenfoundation.org/>

For the purpose of this research, microenterprise is defined in the terms described by Doreen Rosimos and Darcy Smith extended to include the EU definition of a business with five or fewer employees.

Chapter 2

Advocates for Microenterprises

Interest in learning disability and microenterprise grew after a visit from Doreen Rosimos and Darcy Smith of American company Income Links who came to the UK in 2005 following the success of establishing microenterprises for people with learning disabilities in the United States⁴. They concentrated primarily on the South West region with an aim to provide support and advice not just to people wishing to enter this field, but also to those who would provide the assistance and business knowledge to do this. Their motto was '*anything is better than nothing*' thus the microenterprise should be wholly built around the person who is the 'boss,' with outcomes that suit that person. For example, if the enterprise is to achieve success it is about providing a means of making money that can provide something extra for that person's life, to reduce reliance on benefits or to make enough to have a day trip out⁵. Following their visit, a new organisation was created called In Business.

In Business

In Business is a development of the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities. Keith Bates, as Head of Employment, is a founding member of the In Business team and has sought to open up enterprise opportunities for people with learning disabilities. As an advocate of self-employment and learning disability, a discussion took place with Keith to discover what the In Business teams have learnt from their experiences of assisting people with learning disabilities. Sections of the discussion are reproduced verbatim below.

"When In Business first advertised its service, there were very few takers. People were just not used to the concept of a person with learning disability being able to create a microenterprise. Most people who would normally go into self-employment do so from a background of experience in the type of enterprise they wish to create. Also, that they previously had a job, with the usual discipline this entails such as regular working hours and a paid wage. The difference with a person who has a learning difficulty is that they rarely have this experience, and may come from a background of a less routine way of life, with visits to the Day Centre and other occupations to fill up their days. In Business was able to work with the person and with the whole support team to discover what may be the ideal opportunities to explore work, which would suit that person best. Person-centered support was structured around the skills that were discovered. One of the first tasks the In Business team did was to bring together the learning disabled person and their support team to discover their ideas and aspirations. In the main, it was found that

⁴ Hogg, J. (2005). *Microenterprises South West: A report on the viability of the US microenterprise model and possible implementation across the South West region for the Valuing People Team.*
<http://www.afse.org.uk/news/microenterprise.pdf>

⁵ *Ibid* Hogg (2005)

the support team had very few good expectations of the venture, reverting to their 'nurturing' roles with an assumption that 'it was just not possible'. Support staff's attitudes were then flagged as a barrier to enterprise by the In Business team. Due to their own inexperience of running a business, very often they were risk averse and needed to be brought round to overcome their own fears of the venture working. It was these people in particular that In Business found they had to support more, and give knowledge to of how self-employment could work. Issues such as insurance, tax and income benefits were discussed and overcome. One other major issue was the barrier of transport. However, it was found that when the person stayed within their locale, this was addressed and overcome too.

"One of the many benefits that arose from self-employment was the raising of status in the local community where the person lived – from being a service user; they were now a service provider and a contributing member to that society. In particular, the cases of the person who developed a plastic recycling service, and a gardener who sold his plants. Though there has been a reduction in benefits to some people through the new income they are now earning, no one has entirely come off their benefits.

"An outcome of the work of In Business is the need to provide work experience in all its forms to the person with a learning difficulty as early as they can, for example if they are attending college, then day release to work a couple of times a week makes the learning disabled person a better prospect for a potential employer, as they have experienced the routine of a working role. As with anyone wishing to enter self-employment at 'entry level', the market can be saturated, therefore there was a need to be creative, with a support system in place that was able to satisfy everyone."

A Clean Sweep

Prior to becoming involved in In Business, Keith Bates was instrumental in setting up an organisation called A Clean Sweep, which is based in Bristol. A Clean Sweep began in 1995 and is the oldest example found of a business run by people with learning disabilities. Created with the help of Bristol Mencap, the idea took a number of years to become a reality. This background work allowed for the people who were involved to learn about running a business before they started. With the help of developmental training packs, the members were instructed in the legal and financial implications of running a business. A co-operative model within a company limited by guarantee was adopted. This provided a legal framework where employment creation could be flexible and suited to the members' needs. The co-operative model provided for members to work and earn income but also meant that there was a buffer between their earnings or expenses and benefits.

At the beginning, A Clean Sweep's Board was people with learning disabilities and Keith Bates provided advice. The business was set up specifically as a "low risk" business. They started as a cleaning company because that was the first contract that they were able to secure. The board members agreed that there should be no debt and that there would be no shareholders. That way, they could ensure that the liability incurred by members was minimal. To help in getting started, a small number of grants were obtained, and some funding was given from the TEC. In the first month, members agreed to leave all earnings in the business, which also assisted with their start-up funds.

Keith supported them via his role as a job coach for Mencap for a small number of hours, and an additional one day per week was funded by the Co-op. Keith feels that the Board has always been in control, although there was a point when he felt he was in danger of being a shadow director and making decisions for the Board. At that point he accepted the position of Company Secretary. This provided the organisation with a person with business experience who could provide advice to directors, and work as a member of the team. It also meant that the business stayed entirely run and owned by people with learning disabilities; if the members wanted to, they could ask him to leave. Other support has been provided by volunteers, via Access to Work and from using personalised budgets. Most of the income that has come into the business has been from trading.

All members are employed through the co-operative. There are now 14 people working a variety of hours each week. Some work under 4 hours and others work between 4 hours and 16 hours a week. There is a potential within the business to employ some people for more hours so they are able to come off their benefits payments. Current turnover is about £30,000 per annum. Looking to the future, it is possible that the model could be refined to create an organisation that was more commercially viable. It is felt that there is potential for a partnership arrangement where a partner, such as Mencap, could take on the quality, safeguarding and management, which would leave the co-operative to get on with the day-to-day work.

Keith has started other businesses that are co-operatives and in particular, there is another one in his area where they have set up a co-operative CIC. This has various classes of membership allowing for a majority of members to be people with learning disabilities, but not excluding non-disabled people who might bring specific skills to the Board of Directors. He felt that while this may seem like a compromise, it seemed to work well with no negatives for the people involved.

A Clean Sweep is an excellent example of how a business can be organised and run by people with learning disabilities. With on-going help and support, from both business advisers and advocates, A Clean Sweep is now in its 16th year of trading.

MiEnterprise

MiEnterprise provides business support to people with learning disabilities. The MiEnterprise website has succinctly collated information regarding self-employment in microenterprise. Their articles cover tax, employment status, national insurance contributions, other insurances, licences, keeping records, risks involved, and being supported. The information is presented in a simplified way⁶.

A discussion with Jon Pitts, founder director of MiEnterprise took place, where Jon gave information about how MiEnterprise operates.

“MiEnterprise is a Community Interest Company, based on a co-operative model, where the members can buy shares and have a vote, but keep control and ownership of their own enterprise. As a “supported permitted work provider”, MiEnterprise is able to provide its clients with an advantage over self-employed people who don’t have any support, as they may be able to benefit from higher rates of permitted earnings.

⁶ www.mienterprise.org.uk

“In Hereford, MiEnterprise supports five people who have learning disability and who are trading, and five people who are “test trading” – that is at a stage before they are able to take an income. No one has as yet signed off benefits and no one has yet reduced their benefits due to self-employment.

“Currently, in North Tyneside, MiEnterprise has three people who are near to starting in self-employment. All are using personalised budgets to fund their support and the local authority supports this approach. No one is using Access to Work to fund support for his or her self-employment. The enterprises that are trading are generating turnovers in the region of £1000 to £10,000 per year. All are trading as sole traders. No social enterprises have started up.

Self-employment for people with learning disabilities is yet to be considered as an option by many local authorities.” Jon has coined the phrase “supported self-employment” to describe this type of activity and suggests the model is growing, with strong interest across the UK.

RED CIC

RED⁷ is a community interest company dedicated to assisting people with learning disabilities into self-employment. They offer over 100 examples on their website of how to start a business, from choosing an idea, to what is needed to get established, with easy to follow advice and video footage.

Both RED and MiEnterprise are committed to helping people with disabilities, working alongside Government agencies, to facilitate and learn from this.

Community Catalysts

Community Catalysts is a social enterprise established as an offshoot of NAAPS UK, which seeks to support people to trade, offering practical solutions at a micro level. This includes advice and assistance in setting up microenterprises for those with learning disability. The income generated from the advice and training they provide is reinvested into the company, thus providing funding to continue their work. Community Catalysts have been instrumental in assisting Dance Syndrome, which will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Mid Norfolk Mencap and Dereham Area Partnership

Mid Norfolk Mencap in Dereham are working in partnership with Norfolk County Council’s Learning and Disabilities Department and Dereham Area Partnership to support people with learning difficulties to start microenterprises. The pilot project started in 2009 when finance was secured through the Learning Disability Development Fund. This was used to pay for a business support adviser for six hours a week, a support worker; and it provided a £500 start up grant for each new business. Initially, it was felt that parents and carers had to be persuaded of the key benefits of the programme. A particular issue was about how it would affect benefit payments. Once this was overcome, within a couple of months a number of businesses had started. There were a

⁷ Rapid Enterprise Development (2010) <http://www.redcic.com/index.php> [accessed June 2010]

garden service, a general office service and a recycling/dry log making business. Working as sole traders, the entrepreneurs have been fully supported by Mid Norfolk Mencap, the business adviser and parents / carers. They advise that business decisions have been made jointly with all risks assessed prior to implementation. To date, they have assisted five people with learning disabilities to develop three microenterprises, two of which are still operating successfully. With the help of professionals, support workers and volunteers these new microenterprises are providing their local communities with a valuable service, in addition to providing employment and social inclusion for the people involved. There are three more enterprises at the development stage. Unfortunately due to limited funding, and the original team members now working solely on a voluntary basis, no more candidates are being proactively sought.

EnDevA

More locally, EnDevA (NW) CIC, based in West Lancashire is a business consultancy promoting equality of opportunity in enterprise. With support from Lancashire County Council Partnership Board, EnDevA has provided business support for Bitesize Café and Timesavers⁸.

National Perspective

At a strategic level, the British Institute of Learning Disabilities (BILD) has been instrumental in promoting self-employment for people with learning disabilities, and their website has some excellent examples of the work they have been doing⁹.

Cole *et al*¹⁰ writing for the Social Care Institute for Excellence believe that microenterprises can be a suitable vehicle for a learning disabled person to find their own niche, working to their skills and at a pace that suits them. They suggest that if there is support in setting up the business the right way to suit the needs of the person, an income can be gained with “very little effort in return”¹¹. Furthermore, it has been suggested that for commissioners and managers, microenterprise can be seen as a cost-saving exercise in benefits and health¹², as employment has been seen as a determinant in improving well being and health¹³.

It is clear that interest in learning disability and microenterprise is relatively new, but gathering pace, particularly since Doreen and Darcy demonstrated how enterprise could work for people with learning disabilities. While this is a growing area, it remains an under-developed concept and its advantages and implications are yet to be fully explored.

⁸ EnDevA <http://endeva-nw-cic.co.uk/>

⁹ BILD (2011) www.bild.org.uk

¹⁰ Cole, A., Lloyd, A., McIntosh, B., Mattingley, M., Swift, P., Townsley, R., and Williams Val. (2007) 'Community-based day activities and supports for people with learning disabilities - How we can help people to 'have a good day'. London: Social Care Institute for Excellence.

¹¹ *Ibid* Cole *et al* (2007: 124)

¹² Wistow, R. and Schneider, R. (2003) 'Users' views on supported employment and social inclusion: a qualitative study of 30 people in work' *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*. Vol 31. pp. 166-174.

¹³ Waddall, G. & Burton, A. K. (2006) *Is work good for your health and well being?* Norwich: The Stationery Office.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The scope of the research was established through discussions with Lancashire County Council staff, and took place between August 2010 and August 2011. The research project entailed seeking out and interviewing as many people as possible (advisers, support staff and individuals with learning disability) who had experience of enterprise. This was to include all enterprises, whether successful or not, to determine what was good and what was not so good about their experience, what worked and what did not work.

Secondary research was undertaken to learn about the economic outlook and employment prospects for people with learning disabilities. This embraced government reports such as Valuing People (2001), Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People (2005), Valuing People Now, (2009) Real Jobs for Real People (2009), In Business, (2010) and academic research such as Stephen Beyer of the Welsh Learning Disabilities Centre amongst others. Following this, internet-based research revealed a number of charitable and other organisations around the UK that are assisting people with learning disabilities in various aspects of their lives, including supported self-employment or microenterprise.

Stage 1 – The Research Approach

A mixed-methods approach was taken as both quantitative and qualitative data needed to be collated and analysed. This involved a questionnaire and participatory interviews. Firstly, to identify and gain access to people with learning disabilities that may have experience of enterprise, a letter detailing the research project was sent out either by post or email seeking information about anyone who had

- Set up in self-employment or in business providing full or part-time work activity,
- Set up an enterprising activity that has provided meaningful work activity but not necessarily resulted in income generation,
- Considered setting up an enterprising activity or business,
- Have in any other way been enterprising in developing meaningful work activity,
- Have been involved in the creation of a community group/social enterprise,
- Have done any of the above even if they have since given up.

In addition a flyer was designed and sent out with each letter and email for display purposes where the organisation may have a notice board to attract further responses through word-of-mouth.

The organisations and individuals contacted included the following

- 80 Disability Employment Advisers (DEA)
- 11 senior staff from Social Services and Employment Services for the Lancashire area,
- 57 Mencap organisations throughout Lancashire and the North West,
- 82 Business Support units throughout the North West,

- 24 Connexions teams and young people’s services in the Lancashire area,
- 10 Higher Education Colleges in Lancashire,
- Facebook, Linked In, and Google searches for organisations that assist people with learning disabilities resulted in emails sent to: -
 European Union of Supported Employment (EUSE), Train to Gain, BASE, Manchester Disability Forum, Dr Rohhss Chapman of the Learning Disability Studies Centre in Manchester, People First Cumbria, Aldingbourne Trust, Self-Unlimited, Thumbprint, Inspired Services, Fylde Community Link, Oldham Learning Disability Team, A4E, Remploy, National Autistic Society, Day Opportunities Group, Dove Syke Nurseries, Disability Dynamics, The Westminster Society for People with Learning Disabilities, National Forum for People with Learning Disabilities, Breakthrough UK – Including Disabled People, The Enterprise Trust, Helen Sanderson Associates, Microenterprises – Mid Norfolk Mencap / Dereham Area Partnership, Haringey Association for Independent Living (Hail), Hft Trust Ltd, Bees Knees, SELNET, Jobs First, MiEnterprise, Red CIC, NAAPS UK, Community Catalysts, Midstream.

All potential leads were followed up with an initial telephone discussion or email to establish whether the potential respondent suited the research criteria. A number of leads were discounted at this stage, as they did not meet the criteria.

Stage 2 – Field Research

Those respondents that met the criteria for inclusion were asked to complete a questionnaire, either in writing, or in the form of a telephone interview. If they were in the local North West area, all respondents were asked if they would be available for a face-to-face meeting. Advocates, family members and staff members were also asked a series of questions about their involvement in the project. It was anticipated that some respondents would need support to answer the questions so the presence of an advocate was encouraged. The interview technique was semi-structured, based on the questionnaire, allowing for open questions that enabled respondents to provide further information and to elaborate on answers given. This design allowed time to develop the discussion as well as finding practical information about the enterprise. (See Appendix 3)

An interview took place with a key member of Social Services, and telephone discussions were held with key personnel working at strategic level.

To add breadth to the research, a number of high street banks were contacted by telephone and a post office visited in person to gather information. This was to determine whether or not difficulty with banking was a barrier for individuals wishing to start an enterprise.

Interviews were recorded, either by note taking or digitally, or both. All digitally recorded interviews were transcribed. Following this, all the data presented was analysed to discover common themes and differences, and what worked and what did not work.

Respondents

Organisation	Location	Name
Richard’s Recycling	Skelmersdale	Richard

Timesavers	Skelmersdale	Helen, Andrew and Jonathan
Spice up your Life	Lytham	Joan and Team
Garden Life	Cumbria	Craig and Scott with Dennis
Red Socks Enterprise / Our Place	Standish	Joe
Bitesize Café	Burscough	Lisa and Emma
Car Washing	West Sussex	Christian
Dance Syndrome	Manchester	Jenny and Sue
Gardening Venture – setup	Darwin	Adam
I C Jason Rhodes	Manchester	Jason
Arvon the Gardener	Sheffield	Arvon
Pulp Friction	Nottingham	Jessie
People First	Cumbria	Louise

Some microenterprises identified declined to take part and their wish to be excluded has been respected. In other cases, people came forward with information about enterprises, which did not meet the criteria. One example that is not a microenterprise, Spice Up Your Life, is included in the participant's discussions in Chapter 4 because it offers an interesting perspective.

Interviews

Interviews took place with John, Parent Advocate of Timesavers and Helen, Jonathon and Andy of Timesavers; Joe and his support worker Tracey and father Richard; Richard and his support workers Naomi and Sandra. From Bitesize Café, interviews took place with Lisa and her support worker Lynn, and Emma and her parents. With Dance Syndrome, Jenny and her mother Sue were interviewed. A visit was made to Lytham to meet the team of Spice up your Life. Adam and Jason were interviewed at their places of work. A telephone interview was conducted with Christian who works at the Aldingbourne Trust; and with Dennis of Garden Life – both of whom had completed the questionnaire. Jill from Pulp Friction gave a telephone interview. Arvon completed and returned a questionnaire. Louise discussed her experiences through a telephone discussion. In some cases questionnaires were returned that were not applicable to the research.

All respondents agreed to be identified in the research. Generally, first names only have been used.

Respondents were again contacted towards the end of the research period and given the opportunity to add or delete portions of their narrative.

Chapter 4

Participant Discussions

Richard's Recycling Round

Richard was interviewed with his support workers, Sandra and Naomi. Richard has a recycling round based at Certacs House in Skelmersdale. Certacs House provides managed workspace for small businesses. Richard's person-centred plan indicated that

it was important for Richard to be busy and have opportunities to meet people and be useful. There was little chance of finding a regular volunteering position, and so his family set about helping him to develop his own volunteering opportunity. Thus the idea of collecting and recycling the paper, plastics, glass, cans and cardboard at Certacs House was born.

After a risk assessment and meeting all health and safety requirements, Richard was able to begin his round with the aid of his support workers. Firstly, Richard and his support worker Naomi created a poster, which they displayed in the kitchen area, informing people of what they were doing. They also circulated a letter to all tenants. This led to recycling boxes being placed in the kitchen area, into which people could put plastic and glass bottles, cans and cardboard. Richard also calls at each office weekly to collect paper for recycling. Richard receives no income but he benefits in other ways:

- Meeting new people,
- Learning how to sort recycling,
- Keeping busy,
- Learning about work and reward – after recycling he treats himself to his favourite magazine,
- Feeling part of a community.
- Support Staff are busy and feel a sense of fulfilment also.

There have been barriers:

- Initially, staff used their own cars and this was resolved by Richard getting his own car which the staff drive and use to transport the collected materials to the recycling plant or to the cattery (where shredded paper is used as bedding).
- Items left for recycling were sometimes dirty, or cans have sharp edges. This has been overcome with the help of the support staff being more aware and Richard learning to be more careful. Further posters were put up which requested the office staff to clean out items and to discard any sharp edged items before placing in the recycling boxes.



Image 1: Richard recycling at Certacs House

Sandra says that at first, Richard did not really grasp the concept of what he was doing. Issues such as waiting for entry after knocking on the office doors instead of walking in unannounced, and understanding the difference between plastic and glass have been things he has learnt along the way. Naomi suggests these have been an asset to Richards understanding and have taught him patience, which has been useful in other areas of his life. He particularly enjoys visiting the cattery where he takes the shredded paper to be re-used as bedding.

Richard was attentive and understanding of the questioning and he actively participated in the discussion. His use of an electronic communication aid enabled him to relate his knowledge of the subject and add relevant new words as his skills and experience have evolved. His staff team support him in this project, and he would not be able to undertake it without their help. His support workers state that it has been a learning experience for all of them, and they have all enjoyed the project. Richard's family feel that he was unlikely to have been offered a volunteer position in an established charity or social enterprise. Therefore, this was viewed as the best way to ensure that Richard could be involved in doing something useful. Richard won recognition for his recycling work at the Lancashire Community Recycling Awards 2009, and had his picture in the local papers.

Richard's Recycling Round has inspired the establishing of Phil the Box, a social firm presently employing three people with learning disabilities in collecting and sorting office waste paper. Richard now does up to two hours of paid employment each week in addition to his volunteer recycling round.

Timesavers

A first interview took place with John who is the parent-advocate of Helen, who provided background information about the enterprise. A further interview was conducted with Helen, Jonathan and Andrew, who have set up the social enterprise in Skelmersdale. They hope that in the future the enterprise will provide them with an income. The discussions revealed that all three had been unable to secure employment. They were all interested in administration after being on various placements that had been organised by Social Services.

Timesavers is an unincorporated association set up to provide administrative support to organisations that may need additional help with basic tasks such as shredding, envelope stuffing, and leaflet delivery. Grant funding was secured to provide some support each week. This together with some hours from their personal budgets has enabled the trio to be supported to have their business open for sixteen hours each week. There are six voting members in the organisation: where they can, the three worker members take decisions. Where decisions require it, their three advocate members join them. In this way they are enabled to make all the decisions they can, but they have support and expertise when it is needed. All members meet regularly to discuss the business needs and plan future work. Their parents support the venture and assist with business support. The business is open for sixteen hours per week with members each working between 4 and 8 hours per week. To date they have not come across any barriers to their work.



Image 2: Timesavers

Spice up your Life

Spice Up Your Life is not a microenterprise, but has been included because it provides relevant opportunities for learning.

“The thing that we’re most proud of is the fact that we work on the market, we pay the market fee, we do exactly the same as every other trader, we have good weeks and bad weeks and everybody has to do that”

“It is the value of the social interaction and the skill” (Joan Giddings)

Spice Up Your Life makes chutneys and jams, and was the brainchild of Joan Giddings, a senior support worker at Ormerod Home Group, a charitable organisation in Lytham “I care a lot about how the service users are perceived by everybody else, and it is really important to me that they are seen to be able to do things, not what you can’t do, but what you CAN do”. Joan grew up on a smallholding and was taught how to make her own produce. She felt this was an area that could be easily taught to people with learning disabilities to help them make their own business, and ensure their inclusiveness in the local community. Joan has many ideas for other businesses, such as soap and candle making and hopes to make these a reality in the future.

The team members each work a number of hours in the business every week. The business operates like an independent business but actually trades under the umbrella of Ormerod Group. The finances are discussed at the weekly meetings, but the overall responsibility for bookkeeping is undertaken by Ormerod Group Finance Department. When setting up the business, they sought assistance from Trading Standards, the Environmental Health Department, Ormerod Group’s Chief Executive and Finance Department, Myerscough College and Fylde Business Link.

The interview was held during the regular business meeting with advocates Joan and David and five service users who all have learning disabilities. These five people were all fully involved in making business decisions, such as what products to make, how to package and present them, selling at the market, making the produce in the kitchens and learning how to keep the books. There were three other members of the team who also assist, but they were attending other activities that day. All members are taught every aspect of the business and are fully involved, except for one member with an allergy to onions who is unable to work in the kitchens. Joan has realised this is fair for

all the participants; everyone is entitled to an equal share in the profits and no one does more than anyone else. The team are treated for their work by trips out. They had recently been to London to meet their local MP and had a great day out there. The trips are all centred on learning and they have been to cheese factories and other produce makers to learn more about the business field they are in.

The discussion started off with everyone telling us about the group's activities. With a team of three support workers, the business has established itself as a provider of good quality chutneys, jams and marmalade that it sells at the local Farmer's Markets. Initially, it took a while for the group to be confident in the kitchen, as all aspects of food hygiene and health and safety, from using a knife, to learning about bacteria had to be taught. This was done in conjunction with Myerscough College, who provided assessors for an N.V.Q. in food manufacture. This took 18 months to complete and everyone passed. The whole of the Spice Up team update their food hygiene training yearly with Ormerod's in-house training. "It is very empowering because they've done all the right training". A local company sponsored the group for a year's free printing, and the quality marketing literature produced has helped to reinforce a professional image. Fylde Business Link assists in the finances once a year, and offers on-going support as and when needed. A business plan is in place but there are no plans to expand further. They know there is a market for their products and have been approached by local shops and hotels for their produce but they have made an executive decision not to become too big. Expansion would require investment and risk, and Joan said, "We don't want to be caught up in turning into a pickle factory". They feel business creates social inclusion, and is about having fun and making a profit for days out to all those involved within it.

The team meets up every Wednesday afternoon, to discuss the business and direction they would like to go in, and topics such as what went well, and what needs to be changed. At this meeting, they count the money together, before entering all income and expenditure in their financial records.

Eileen was particularly informative and had a lot of knowledge about the business. Eileen is a chef and champion seller on the market, despite being terrified when she first started selling. Joan says Eileen used to be very shy, and at first did not like to help on the market stall, preferring the cooking side of the business. However with encouragement she is now the best seller they have and her confidence has grown immensely. At first, the other market holders were wary of the group and it has taken some time before they have been accepted. Now however, they are fully included in the market and are often asked to mind other people's stalls if necessary. The idea of returning the jars and getting a card stamped and a free product after 9 returns was Eileen's, which helps greatly in production, as the cost of the glass jars is a large expense. The team have worked out a system of colour-coded lids, which help to identify the products, and the prices are kept simple for ease of adding up, such as £2 and £3 for most items.

Developing a responsibility to others in their community, they have created a recipe booklet, which they give out, free of charge to homeless people. Individual members also entered the 2011 Marmalade Competition in Cumbria (which is the biggest Marmalade Festival in the world) and won bronze medals for both Marmalades entered.

The choice of fruit and vegetable for the chutney and jam is very seasonal and the team have fun inventing new ways to create the chutneys, for example, they invented a kiwi

and banana variety just recently. Joan says that for people with learning disabilities working within environmental health and trading standards legislation has been an eye-opener; prior to starting they had no idea of the regulations they would come up against. However, time and experience have taught them a lot and they had good contacts within these offices that were more than happy to guide them.

The team host pickle parties in people's houses (similar to Tupperware) and play "pickle" games. From earnings, the group has £550 in the bank. They have made enough money to buy a new fridge, freezer and extractor fan for the shared kitchen at Ormerod House.

Everything about the experience of meeting the team was a pleasure – everyone seemed to get along very well, with lots of fun and laughter the order of the day.

Garden Life

Information was gathered via a returned questionnaire and a telephone interview with support worker and partner Dennis. Dennis also provided information about the start-up and financial aspects of the business by email.

Motto: Every customer should be left wanting us to return

Although Craig and Scott were at college together, they did not really know each very well until later. After completing courses in horticulture, they both realised they wanted to work for themselves in this field. They had the idea for the business and with help and support from United Response, the two lads got together and subsequently they advertised for an experienced person to work with them. Dennis responded to the advert and the three of them set up in the garden landscaping business in October 2008. The business is situated in Carlisle and works across the rural county of Cumbria and has contracts up to South West Scotland. At start-up, they applied for funding but were unsuccessful. Undaunted however, and with parental support, they bought the necessary tools to get going. They researched the local market and found there was an opening for the type of work they wanted to do, and even though there would be competition, they felt they could make a living. Working on a full time basis of 37.5 hours a week, in their first year they made in excess of £26,000 net profit and are on target to double this in their second full year of trading. In 2009 they received a grant of £700, which went towards purchasing a van and further tools. Mencap and the Chamber of Commerce have been very supportive, particularly assisting in financial matters. They had a few problems along the way, mainly to do with lack of capital, and how to compete in the sector, however, they perceived these would be from the same for anyone else setting up in their own business. The business is registered with the Inland Revenue as a partnership; they employ an accountant and are fully insured for any mishaps. They keep informed about the local market, are always seeking new ideas to expand the business, and are currently working with a three-year business plan. Craig and Scott's parents are still very much involved. They meet with United Response every six weeks to discuss the business performance. They didn't have any problems in setting up a bank account. Dennis is responsible for the bookkeeping and communication within the business; however Scott helps with the weekly cash flow accounts. Craig and Scott are currently only receiving the basic DLA. The partners were invited to a local university to present their experiences of setting up in business.

Craig and Scott were initially shy when dealing with customers, but at that time the majority were older people who were happy to talk with them and they built up a good level of trust. Since then their confidence has grown as their knowledge has increased.

Now in their second year, the team have just won a major contract with Eden Housing and are set to have a turnover of at least £45,000.

The Odd Socks Enterprise / Our Place

Joe has a severe learning disability and needs constant support from his family and personal assistants. Joe's mother assisted in starting the business when she saw a niche market in her local area to recycle old clothes and realised Joe could be a part of this with the help of his PAs.



Image 3: Joe with his family

Called the Odd Sock's Enterprise, and operating with support from Embrace Wigan and Leigh (a charity providing support for disabled people and their families), Joe's business is well documented. He has won awards for the services he has provided in recycling clothes alongside other people with learning disabilities. With the support of his PAs, Joe and his friends prepared black bins bags and leaflets about the recycling service they were providing, and dropped these into the letterboxes in his town. The recycling team then went back a week later and picked up the bags, which had been hopefully full of items to be recycled. The bags went to a recycling service that paid them based on the weight of clothes gathered. The service worked very well, had the support of the community, and generated an income that was deposited into a bank account. Joe's business has run its course as other charities have started to do the same and the market is now saturated. However, they are still able to collect clothes once a month and obtain some income. The business does not have a constitution and is not incorporated. The bank account was established in the names of Joe's parents and his PAs as a "micro social enterprise" and operates at an annual turnover of less than £5k.

With the money raised, Joe and his PAs have set up a centre, called "Our Place," that provides activities for people with learning disabilities similar to Joe's. They invite people to come and talk to them and show them how to make things, such as baking, or crafts.

Thus the business Joe started has now developed into something else. All of this activity has to be managed carefully so as not to impact on Joe's benefits: It isn't formal employment but rather a contribution Joe is making to his community with the help and support of his PAs.

Bitesize Café



Image 4: Lisa and Emma

After receiving the completed questionnaire forms, interviews took place with Lisa and her support worker Lynn, and then with Emma and her parents. The two girls and their support worker operate Bitesize Café once a month at the Farmer's market in Burscough. The idea originated with Tess Reddington, who was approached by the local Farmers' Market to see if she knew of anyone who could provide catering facilities. Seeking prospective candidates from West Lancs Positive Living, initially there were three members recruited. However one has since left to pursue other working arrangements. Working closely with EnDevA, the entrepreneurs, parents and support worker meet weekly to discuss the business. The girls make bacon sandwiches, tea and toast at the café and, with the support of their parents, take it in turn to buy the provisions beforehand.

Lisa, at 21, had had a couple of work placements and voluntary positions organised from her school. After finding college was not suited to her, she unsuccessfully attempted to obtain employment locally. She is now enjoying her work at the café and has recently passed her Level 1 in Food Hygiene.

Emma had a lot of unsupported working experiences prior to working at the café. She was quite reticent during the interview, but with the help of her parents, understood and responded appropriately to the questions and was helped along by her parents. Emma had suffered from a form of bullying at her last workplace where, because of her learning disability, she was isolated and excluded by her colleagues. This destroyed her confidence. Finding employment at the café has given her a new confidence and increased her faith in people. She enjoys cooking and helping the customers, and has a greater understanding of money. At present, the girls are not taking any wages from the business but hope to in the near future. They have been seeking work providing catering at functions and so far have successfully provided services for two events.

Car-washer

Christian came to the attention of the research project when Aldingbourne Trust responded to an initial letter of enquiry. Aldingbourne Trust is a centre that is committed to helping people with learning disabilities unlock their potential. The interview took place by telephone. Christian is very articulate and was able to converse clearly about his job. He had been a volunteer at the centre for 12 years, until he started car washing with the help of the MD Sue. Sue helped him to get a grant to get started. He washes the cars, buses and farm equipment at the centre, working two days a week and he charges £5 a time. After such costs as materials, an insurance and accountancy fee, which he pays himself, Christian is left with £20 a week. This enables him to work without any loss in benefits. Christian also attends the centre as a student two days a week. He enjoys being his own boss, and has gained in confidence. He also likes having earned his own money to spend. Christian does not believe he would ever gain employment in the usual way and wishes to expand his business by learning how to drive the tractor. This would enable him to undertake further work at the centre. Christian operates as a sole-trader. Christian had no problems opening a bank account.

Dance Syndrome

'I believe I can help other people through my passion for dance!'



Image 9: Jenny and her dance class

Jenny has Down's syndrome and is working hard to set up a dance organisation to enable both able and disabled people to come together through dance. The interview was centred on completing the research questionnaire. Though the questions were directed at Jenny, Sue was able to help, mostly just to gain clarity on the question type, and also to remember events as they had happened.

Jenny had moved out of the family home in 2007 to live in Manchester with her support worker, who was also a dancer. The two had an idea to bring dance workshops to those who are socially excluded but may wish to learn to dance. Jenny's own experience of finding dance classes that were able to accommodate her disability had been difficult. Gifted musically, Jenny plays the flute. However she has always preferred to dance and wanted to pursue this field as an avenue for employment. In the past, Jenny had found it

hard to find any dance classes in her local area, which were able to include her due to her disability. She eventually found a project in Durham and had to travel there two days a week to attend. Between 2010 and 2011 she travelled to Hertfordshire to continue her own training as she found nowhere in the North West that can support a person with learning disability who wishes to train to work in community dance classes.

Recently with a new PA, family assistance and advocates, Jenny has been able to take her ideas forward. Jenny's advocates are Vicky, an Arts professional and Sarah who is a lecturer in social work and learning disabilities. Sarah subsequently introduced Michelle who has supported Dance Syndrome to become legally constituted as a social enterprise. This group of people, along with another member formed the learning disability, of which Jenny is a director. Opening a bank account for the venture was not found to be a problem, as Jenny already had her own bank account so the local branch opened a business account in Jenny, Michelle and Sarah's names, with all three as signatories.

Jenny is a choreographer, and creates dance steps and routines along with a professional dancer. Jenny was successful in obtaining a £2600 grant from Unltd, which has enabled her to advertise, carry out auditions and recruit 14 dancers. From the 35 people who applied, Jenny chose 7 professional dancers and 7 dancers who have a disability. Dance Syndrome dancers devise routines independently or collectively and also develop ideas for their toolkit to use in workshops. One disabled dancer and one professional dancer lead each workshop but because all of the dancers have the same body of knowledge, they can interchange pairings. This is particularly helpful if someone cannot make rehearsal or a workshop at any given time. They are receiving interest and invitations to perform at venues including community settings, carnivals, arts festivals and mainstream theatres. As Jenny excitedly told us, she was invited to work at Salford University, delivering a dance workshop and teaching students there. She was also invited to Chorley to the Arts Partnership MADD – Music, Arts, Dance and Drama – and delivered a five-week program there, giving lessons and choreographing dance, gaining fantastic feedback. MADD has invited Jenny and her team back for a six-week spell to devise and teach two dances for a pantomime.

In one year Dance Syndrome has developed from one learning disabled dancer working with one support dancer to a team of 14 dancers. They meet together regularly to devise and develop their product with everybody contributing to the outcomes. Since February 2011 they have delivered 50 workshops, have been invited to London and across the North West to perform including at the Lowry, and are being approached by the media interested in making a film of their work. They have a self funded Project Manager helping Sue and the Board to manage the activity, have just undertaken a new recruitment drive looking for dancers to help to meet the demand, and have a Development Manager who joined in August to take Dance Syndrome forward and into the future. Dance Syndrome has attracted a patron from the world of dance and a black tie do is in the offing in November 2011.

The enterprise is a company limited by guarantee and a social enterprise. Making a profit is not a primary goal – providing social inclusion is more important. However, lack of funding to develop the enterprise is a major barrier. Sue and Jenny are finding it hard to know which way to turn to find financial assistance. They were given a 10-week business start up course from Business Link, and have also been given a mentor from Business Link for three hours to help them with their business plans. In addition there

has been 2 days from Together Works on financials and where to look for funds. In particular they also need to recruit committed active Board members and a treasurer and bookkeeper.

Jenny has since found her confidence growing and "loves meeting new people."

Gardening Venture

Adam is at the start-up stage of a gardening enterprise, which he hopes to run as a sole trader. Adam planned to take a concession in Four Seasons Garden Centre; a LCC owned training centre operating as a Garden Centre in Darwin. The Centre has allocated him a plot of land and he will grow perennials and sell them in the centre and at outdoor events and markets. He may also make wooden items for sale such as planters and bird tables. The Centre has negotiated a percentage of his sales income rather than leasing the plot to him. However, Adam's start has been delayed due to uncertainty about the future of the premises.



Image 10: Adam

He first had the idea for the business around September 2010 when he approached the Job Centre who put him in touch with Remploy. He received support from a local business adviser at Bootstrap Enterprises who helped him develop his ideas. He has also attended a training course in self-employment at Darwin Academy, which he found very useful in learning about aspects of business such as accounts.

Adam has a support worker Andy who understands what he wishes to do with the business and has helped him to develop his ideas and joined him in business training at the Academy. He also has a very supportive family.

The knowledge Adam has gained thus far has given him a lot of confidence; particularly in understanding that he is able to run a business that he hopes will be profitable one day. So far, he has not come across any barriers that have negated his desire to work

for himself. He has not sought any funding for the business as yet, and has been using his own funds so far.

I C Jason Rhodes

Jason is currently running a successful consultancy business based within the NWTDT (North West Training and Development Team) in Manchester, which improves information and communication methods between services and people with learning difficulties. His motivation is to assist people to be more involved in the decisions that are affecting their lives. He does this by setting up conferences and assisting in delivering them, creating videos, MC'ing and delivering workshops. Jason has produced a book of his experiences with Salford Council, which provides information for others with a learning difficulty about setting up in self-employment and also provides him with some income.



Image 11: Jason Rhodes

Jason's company is limited by guarantee. He is the sole director and his mother is company secretary. He has a very supportive Personal Assistant, Kathryn. Jason spent a couple of years researching the opportunity to be self-employed and sought business advice and support and originally started off as a sole trader before incorporating. He was mentored by Val Bracken, Director of the NWTDT, who has encouraged him throughout to be a self-employed member of the NWTDT team. He also received business supported from David Ball of No Limits. He currently has assistance in dealing with the business accounts, such as PAYE and tax, but he also likes to 'keep an eye' on them. To help at start up in addition to using his own money, Jason received funding of £3000, which he used to purchase equipment for his business including a laptop, camera, video, printer and projector.

Jason likes working for himself, as he is able to control his own, money, which is very important to him. He is also able to choose his own hours, which he feels is a prerogative of a self-employed person as opposed to an employee. There have been some problems faced along the way which have been successfully overcome. These include a support worker's bad attitudes, whose employment had to be terminated, and having to be "checked out" by the Access to Work team. Access to Work funding is enabling Jason to continue with his business, without which he feels he would find working difficult. The Access to Work fund allows him to have two support staff for a

total of 25 hours a week. He is now in his second period of 3 year funding. Jason has contracts for work from local councils and disabled people's organisations such as self-advocacy groups and believes the future is quite secure. Jason won an award as Young Disabled Entrepreneur of the Year from the Independent Living Awards at Arley Hall, Manchester.

Arvon the Gardener

Arvon had been a volunteer gardener for a number of years before venturing into self-employment. Arvon began his enterprise in May 2009, registering as a sole trader. His goal was to make a profit. His business took about three months to get underway. Getting started, he had help in creating leaflets to be distributed throughout the local community from his key worker, Jonathon who is now a Home Farm Trust (HFT) Manager. Jonathon, with the help of HFT head office, also assisted in addressing DWP and HMRC requirements, arranging public liability insurance and getting him a uniform. Initially, Arvon had difficulty in finding customers, as the local area consists mainly of elderly people and students. Bad weather was also off-putting. However, with perseverance, he now has regular customers and a thriving business. HFT have been instrumental in providing support for Arvon, particularly with accounts and providing advice. They also assisted with a grant application which successfully gained Arvon £300 for equipment. Arvon now averages an income of around £38 a week, which is his own earned money. This has increased his sense of identity and self-esteem and gives him pride in his work.

Pulp Friction

Pulp Friction was introduced to the research project via Community Catalysts who have contacts with Jill and Jessie who own the business. A telephone interview took place with Jill, Jessie's mother.

Jill started by detailing how the business came into being. Jessie has learning disability and when she was 16 she decided she would like to have a part-time job like all her friends. Jill realised that Jessie might not be able to gain employment like her peers, even though Jessie's aspiration was to work in the restaurant business, so she knew an alternative was needed. It was whilst visiting a festival 6 months later that they came upon a smoothie bike experience. The customer gets to pedal a bike which has a blender attached to it. Whilst the pedals are turning, the fruit is blended into a smoothie, which is 'home made'. Both Jill and Jessie loved the concept and thought that was a good business idea for Jessie to work at. With three of Jessie's friends, they applied for a Youth Initiative Grant and obtained funding to purchase a smoothie bike.

They took the bike to school and to a local youth centre where it was an instant success. More and more people came forward wanting to be a part of it. They set up a voluntary community group for 16-24 year olds made up of people both with and without learning disabilities and hired themselves out at events. As they became successful, Jill realised this was a venture that could actually work as a business, so she undertook a course in social enterprise. Working with the local county council who gave business support, Jill and Jessie incorporated a Community Interest Company (CIC), as co-directors and registered with Companies House. They subsequently got funding for a second bike and now have over 30 people with learning disabilities and 8 people without working in the business.



Image 12: Jill and Jessie

With their growing success have come other ideas for working with young people with learning disabilities, which includes them in mainstream society. They recently gained access to an allotment. With the allotment, they hope to grow soft fruits for the smoothie business. They are also looking to cultivate mushrooms and grow lettuce leaves to supply to local cafés. With the assistance of a £10,000 grant from Iworks, an employment service part of Nottingham County Council, the CIC will set up a training placement and learning facility for people with learning disabilities to gain experience in a work environment. This will be as an alternative to attending a day centre and the direct payment benefits will come with the person to the business along with their support worker where necessary.

What Jill finds particularly motivating about the venture is the idea that people with learning disabilities can find a niche to suit their own skills. For example, Jessie loves the cleaning up aspect of the business, and others such as Scott found a skill in executing the health and safety, whereas Clare has found a new confidence to interact with people and become more outgoing.

An offshoot of the venture is the creation of a choir, where people with learning disabilities are able to share an interest with those without. Here, they are able to attend sessions and perform without the need of a carer or support worker, truly gaining independence that perhaps would not have been a reality.

Taking the business forward is now a prerogative and discussions are being made with social workers and the DWP with a view to "annualising" the amount of hours Jessie works over a 12-month period. This will entail keeping a record of the hours worked and balancing out the busy weeks and the quiet ones. This is a new concept that could potentially change the outlook for people with a disability who are on benefits.

In the future, the CIC hopes to employ support workers who are independent of personal budgets and direct payments and are there purely to support the business needs and the person who needs them. They are hoping to create a fully mobile catering business that will be run as any other enterprise, with both learning disabled and non-disabled people working alongside each other.

Louise – People First Cumbria

Louise had been a director of People First Cumbria for 17 years, and now has paid employment within this organisation.

When Louise left school and then college she was told she would never have a paid job, and so believed this is what happened to people with a disability. When she joined People First she realised that this was not in fact the case, as all the directors have some form of learning disability and successfully run the company with support. People First Cumbria is an advocacy service that is run by and for people with learning disabilities, with the help of support workers. Their aim is to provide a voice and help people have control in their lives wherever and whenever they need support. The way the organisation works is as Louise reported, “all the directors have the label of a learning difficulty. Any decisions that are made are discussed and a supporter gives us the information and the consequences of each option. Then they would leave the room and let the directors discuss it themselves”. This results in the board of learning disabled people making their own choices and decisions as to how the organisation is run.

Louise has always had a support worker and within the organisation the support worker works alongside a person with learning disability as a co-worker with both having the same hours and the same rates of pay. This ensures both colleagues bring different things to the project.

Louise is now into a three-year project working with women who have learning disabilities. She writes articles for journals or reviews articles written for People First.

People First organisations across the UK make up a distinct group of enterprises owned and run by people with learning disabilities. The model has well-established systems and procedures developed over many years that enable people with learning disabilities to make all business decisions with appropriate support. Typically, they have close working relationships with local authorities and provide advocacy services via contract or service level agreement. People First in Cumbria is larger than a microenterprise, and is more accurately described as a social enterprise.

Microenterprises Not Included

The list above is not exhaustive. There are notable omissions such as Joe Brown’s Eggs, and Thumbprint in Lancaster who chose not to participate. The research primarily focussed on enterprises based in the North West and while relevant and representative examples from across the UK are included, coverage is not intended to be comprehensive.

Chapter 5

An analysis of the interviews highlighted many similarities and common themes, some expected and some surprising. The findings are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The Entrepreneur

Choice: What Choice?

We know that only a small percentage of people with learning disabilities are in employment¹⁴, and this statistic is reflected within the group of entrepreneurs interviewed. Few people had experience of previous paid employment. There were anecdotes of repeated visits to employment advisers and work trials that came to nothing or placements that ended after a period. In all but one case, there was no choice about whether to be employed or be self-employed. The choice, more typically, was whether or not to continue looking for employment or volunteering placement or to try to develop an idea for a business.

Person-centred approach

It is apparent that in most cases illustrated, the entrepreneurs involved benefitted from a person-centred approach that enabled each individual to make choices and be supported to put those choices into action. In some cases, where the person was not able to make those choices, decisions were taken for the person, in their best interest. This research identified examples of enterprise only where a person-centred approach was evident. It is noticeable that appropriate support was able to be provided by voluntary sector organisations, parents and social care providers. Good practice came from all sectors.

The People around the Person

Self-Determination

Significant research has been undertaken around the influences in the lives of people with learning disabilities, and how the people around the person, rather than the person themselves determine the life choices, aspirations and ultimately quality of life of the person concerned¹⁵. A report conducted in 1991 by Disability Matters Limited and the NHS Executive¹⁶ found that the single biggest barrier facing people with any sort of

¹⁴ HM Government (2011) National Indicator 146- Adults with Learning Disability in Employment, 12/06/11. Analysis of Dataset across the UK. <http://data.gov.uk/dataset/ni-146-adults-with-learning-disabilities-in-employment> (accessed 15/08/11)

¹⁵ Martorell, A., Gutierrez-Recacha, P., Pereda, A. and Ayuso-Mateos, J. L. (2010) 'Identification of personal factors that determine work outcome for adults with intellectual disability' *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*. Vol. 52. Part 12. pp 1091-1101. Madaus, J. W., Gerber, P. J., and Price, L. A. (2008) 'Adults with Learning Disabilities in the Workforce: Lessons for Secondary Transition Programs' *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*. Vol 23 No. 3. pp 144-153. Beyer, S. and Robinson, C (2009:30) *A review of the research literature on supported employment: A report for the cross-Government learning disability employment strategy team.*

¹⁶ Disability Matters Limited and NHS Executive (1999) *Working in partnership to implement Section 21 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 across the NHS.*

disability and inclusive of learning disability was service providers' staff attitudes. Anecdotally, that remains true: support staff's attitudes and experiences can act as a barrier to social inclusion for the supported person trying out or doing new and different activities, if *they* are unfamiliar or unsure about the task¹⁷. A good support system with carers who can communicate the abilities and skills of a person with learning disability can effectively enhance their lives¹⁸.

In the cases examined, the people around the entrepreneur were in each case enthusiastic and positive about what could be achieved. In a small number of cases, it was clear that the entrepreneur with learning disabilities was self-determined about what they wanted to do and that those people around the person were providing appropriate support to enable them to achieve their aims. In most cases examined, it appeared that the idea for the enterprise came from someone other than the person with learning disabilities. That said, in all cases, the individual with learning disabilities (or their advocate) reported that being involved in an enterprise was a positive experience.

Parents' Views

Some parents or family members particularly, viewed the enterprising activity as a means of developing skills to enable the person with learning disability to gain regular employment rather than as an end in itself. Others viewed it as a final attempt to find work after all else had failed. Others saw themselves as supporting a son or daughter to achieve their dream.

Parental support was evident in many cases, and it was noticeable that in some cases parents were primary drivers in establishing the business. These findings are mirrored in the recent report "Jobs First: Evaluation and Interim Report"¹⁹ which identifies supportive families as one of the most important elements in encouraging people with learning disabilities to seek paid work.

Business Support

Most entrepreneurs received some form of support from a business adviser. In all cases this was a positive experience and generally people were complimentary about the quality of the business support provided. Business support was delivered from a range of providers including organisations working under Business Link's ISUS programme such as Bootstrap and Business Venture Group, Prince's Trust, Together Works and EnDevA.

http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_4021257.pdf
[accessed 29/12/10]

¹⁷ Bates, P. and Davis, F. A. (2004) 'Social capital, social inclusion and services for people with learning disabilities' *Disability & Society*, Vol. 19, No. 3, May 2004; Williams, V. & Simons, K. (2005) 'More researching together: the role of nondisabled researches in working with People First members' *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*. Vol. 33. Issue 1. pp 6-14.; McConke, R. and Collins, S. (2010) 'The Role of Support Staff in Promoting the Social Inclusion of Persons with an Intellectual Disability' *Journal of Intellectual Disability*. Vol. 54. Issue 8, pp. 691-700.; Bates, K. (2009) 'Developing the selfemployment option for people with learning disabilities' *In Business and the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities*. London: FPLD.

¹⁸ Kyle, S., Melville, C. A. & Jones, A. (2009) 'Effective communication training interventions for paid carers supporting adults with learning disabilities' *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*. Vol 8. pp 210-216.

¹⁹ Stevens, M. and Harris, J (2011) *Job's First Evaluation: Interim Report*.. The Social Care Workforce Research Unit at King's College London. <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/kpi/scwru/pubs/2011/stevensharris2011jobsinterim.pdf> [accessed 19/08/11]

While business support received was deemed to be good, when approached, business support organisations generally did not offer information about any enterprises run by people with learning disabilities that they had supported, and in discussions sometimes did not demonstrate any understanding of the difference between learning disability and physical disability or mental ill health. Business support agencies working on the ISUS programme (business start up programme in North West England) were not able to provide figures for numbers of people with learning disabilities supported or starting businesses.

Support Staff

Where the entrepreneur needed support to enable them to carry out their work, support workers were without exception extremely able, and took an interest in the business, being able to advise on day-to-day activities, and often providing transport. In all cases, the enthusiasm of support staff suggested that being involved in the enterprise was regarded as enhancing their support role rather than causing additional work. Only one entrepreneur spoke of having to deal with unsuitable support staff and this had been rectified. There was a general view that having appropriate support staff was key to the success of the business. In most cases, staff support was provided via personalised budget or via grant funding. In some cases, entrepreneurs had been successful in securing funding from Access to Work to pay for support hours.

Staff members were asked if they felt they had received appropriate training and in general they felt they had been able to develop the skills needed to provide the right support, through a variety of methods. Some had attended training alongside the person they supported, and others had “picked it up as they went along”. Support staff that were interviewed, in all cases, presented as intelligent and resourceful and interested in their work. Within the scope of this research, it has been found that the support staffs have been fully informed of the role they needed to undertake in order to support the person with learning disability in achieving their goal of running a successful microenterprise. This willingness to support the business was a major driving factor in many of the enterprises examined in ensuring the business could be undertaken.

Business Development

Income Generation

The research revealed a wide range of situations in relation to taking a wage from the business. Some entrepreneurs were receiving an income from their businesses that supported them fully and they were rightly very proud of this. For some, the business made a small contribution to their finances and for others the enterprise was totally voluntary and did not produce sufficient revenue from which to take an income. Some people did not want to take an income and were very comfortable just volunteering within an organisation in which they were in control. In some cases, there was an expectation that in time, they would be able to develop the enterprise to a level where it could provide a wage. Typically, being busy and doing something worthwhile was more important than being able to take a wage.

Among the general population, from start-up to break-even can take months or years; there is no standard length of time for how long it can take to build a successful

business. The enterprises examined were without exception starting with limited investment and limited working capital. The businesses were generally being operated on a part time basis, in areas where income is relatively low, and the individuals mostly were starting with limited business knowledge and sector knowledge. In some cases it was apparent that those involved were not providing as high a level of quality, or were not as productive as a competitor might be. It is not surprising therefore, that income generation was modest, and took a long time to develop.

Business Structure

Legal forms used included limited companies, sole traders, partnerships, and unincorporated associations. Some were using a social enterprise model. In some cases, a co-operative model had been adopted. All appeared to be using an appropriate legal form. The legal form is not considered to be critical in determining whether or not the activity is of value.

An organisation that is not an enterprise owned and run by people with learning disabilities has been included in the interviews. That is Spice Up Your Life. That is because Spice Up Your Life offers an excellent example of good practice in a traditional setting. The people involved took part in all aspects of running the business and generally had the same quality of experience as those who actually ran their own businesses. The difference is that the people involved in Spice Up Your Life were actually attending a Day Centre Placement and if that placement ended they would not be able to continue to be involved in the enterprise. In short, there was no real ownership and control.

Not all businesses are successful. Like mainstream businesses, MiEnterprise, In Business and Mid Norfolk Mencap all reported that they had worked with entrepreneurs who had now ceased trading, either through lack of market, lack of funding, lack of interest or for other reasons. Similarly again, some enterprises are likely to stay small and steady, and others are showing significant potential for growth.

Finance

Financing the Venture

Barriers to start-up are common amongst any cohort wishing to create a new venture. Unless there is funding already available, such as own finances, or parental help, it can be difficult to obtain money necessary to start a venture, even a small one according to the British Chamber of Commerce²⁰. This is a frequent occurrence and can prevent the idea continuing to fruition.

In the UK, finance for enterprise is generally aimed at promoting economic aims rather than social aims. The New Enterprise Allowance is a recent government initiative to encourage start-ups in areas of low entrepreneurial activity²¹. It is offered to

²⁰ British Chamber of Commerce (2011) 'Starting and Growing a Business'

<http://www.britishchambers.org.uk/zones/policy/starting-and-growing-business.html> [accessed 09/03/11]

²¹ BIS (2011) 'Bigger, Better Business. Helping small firms that start, grow and prosper.'

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/enterprise/docs/b/11-515-bigger-better-business-helping-small-firms.pdf> [accessed 09/03/11]

unemployed people to kick-start their own business and is worth up to £2,000 in benefits. However, to benefit from this initiative, people must be receiving Job Seekers Allowance rather than disability benefits, and they must expect to leave benefits within six months and become economically active in that time. None of the entrepreneurs have been able to move away from benefits within a six-month period. Notably, Garden Life who have been very successful in developing their enterprise, are after two years approaching the time when they are able to move away from benefits completely. Government initiatives tend also to favour enterprise development that results in the creation of multiple jobs rather than those who wish to create a microenterprise that provides employment for one person²². In Lancashire, Lancashire County Development's Rosebud Micro loan provides loans of £2000 to £10000 and is "aimed specifically at small businesses with growth potential"²³. In general, the entrepreneurs interviewed did not plan to create multiple jobs and in many cases were interested primarily in creating meaningful work activity rather than a sustainable income. In summary, finding loan or grant finance from sources that are concerned with economic outputs is unlikely for entrepreneurs with learning disability.

Very small amounts of start up funding have been available for some of the "for profit" businesses identified. Funders have included UnLtd, Princes Trust, Shaw Trust and local authority grants. Availability of funding varies from place to place and from time to time. Where entrepreneurs had followed the route of social enterprise, finding small amounts of grant funding to kick-start the enterprise had been a realistic option. In most cases, where specialist business support was provided to work with individuals before start-up and during the immediate post-start-up period, such as via In Business, MiEnterprise or EnDevA, this represented a significant cost and was funded by other means such as Learning Disability Partnership Learning disability grant or contract/service level agreement with the local authority.

Having sufficient finance at start-up was a problem for most of the entrepreneurs, just as it is in the general population. In the general population, people starting in business would often be expected to use their own savings, or take a loan. This would be regarded as an investment that will provide a return in the future. None of the entrepreneurs interviewed took a loan. None reported that they had been refused a loan. Loan finance was not considered in any case. Of the entrepreneurs interviewed, none had created a surplus that would have provided for the repayment of a loan, and in general, the length of time for the business to grow and develop would not have been sufficiently fast to enable the repayment of a loan. Generally, loan funding is not appropriate for this group of entrepreneurs. In some cases, the entrepreneur invested their own savings in the enterprise, even where they had little chance of the business providing a return. In business terms this would not have represented a good investment, it is only when viewed in a social context that it represents value for money.

On-going Funding

In general, the enterprises featured are low overhead / low risk businesses. The main costs are in business support and the costs of support workers. Some enterprises have been successful in securing funding to help growth at an early stage in their

²² BIS (2010) 'Backing Small Business' <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/enterprise/docs/b/10-1243-backing-small-business.pdf> [accessed 09/03/11]

²³ <http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/lcdl/finance/micro/index.asp>

development such as Timesavers, Dance Syndrome, Pulp Friction, while others have been unsuccessful in doing so. Some of the more mature enterprises reported periods that were very difficult due to lack of on-going funding A Clean Sweep, the oldest enterprise identified, reported clear correlation between funding and development over the period since its formation in 1995. None of the enterprises included above have generated sufficient income to pay themselves a wage and to pay for support from the income generated. In all cases, additional funding has been required to cover support costs.

Barriers to Enterprise

Banking Facilities

A report commissioned by Friends Provident Foundation and provided by the Norah Fry Institute²⁴ over the period 2005 and 2006, researching into finances and people with learning difficulties and their carers discovered that people with learning disabilities can find banks and other financial institutions difficult to access, particularly in relation to the provision of information and regulatory procedures. Only half of the people they interviewed had an account in their own names, and just over three-quarters of all those interviewed relied on other people to assist and control how they dealt with their money, making it difficult to understand money and its relation to everyday living.

Our findings were:

- No interviewee or advocate expressed dissatisfaction with how they had been treated by any bank.
- No bank, (including the Post Office) interviewed had any easy read information, or provided any material in a special or different format to suit the needs of people with limited cognitive ability.

These findings are contradictory, and reasons for this may be:

- People presenting with learning disability at banks were rare, and it is possible that bank staff treated them as a novelty and afforded them more time and attention than would be the case if they were a bigger group.
- Advocates who were generally confident and knowledgeable accompanied people presenting with learning disabilities at banks.
- People with learning disabilities may not expect to be able to deal with their banking without support.

Opening a Bank Account was expected to be a barrier. However, based on the information that has been discussed with the interviewees, there have not been any issues opening bank accounts. Almost everyone who took part in the research had a bank account, albeit they had been opened with the assistance of parents or as a part of the organisation they were working with. Research with local banks showed that none had information in easy read or large print format and none had anything special in place to accommodate the needs of people with learning disabilities. In that no one with ad attempted to open a bank account without an advocate present, it was impossible to know whether or not provision at banks was adequate for the entrepreneurs featured.

²⁴ Williams, V., Abbott, D., Rodgers, J., Ward, L. and Watson, D. (2007) *Money, Rights and Risks. A scoping review of financial issues for people with learning disabilities in the UK*. Friends Provident Foundation and Norah Fry Research Centre, University of Bristol.

Financing support

Changes to the personal payments system in the UK for a person with learning disability, as first discussed in the White Paper *Valuing People* (2001) have meant that people are able to take charge of their own finances, selecting and organising their daily experiences to suit their own needs by means of directing their own personal budgets²⁵. For the individual, being able to decide where and how to spend their personal budget has opened up new avenues for exploration, particularly in relation to PA support as one now has more choice over where and what to do on a daily basis, as opposed to attending a day centre facility²⁶. The availability of funding to choose and pay for suitable support staff is a key factor in people with learning disabilities being able to start their own enterprises.

Some entrepreneurs believed they could use their personal budget to finance support in their enterprise while others had received advice to the contrary. The Department of Health provides information and guidance for people who want to employ PAs, and for councils and social workers²⁷. However, there does not appear to be any evidence of clear guidance regarding the use of a personal budget for supported self-employment. Third sector organisations such as Mencap, RED and MiEnterprise have provided some guidance.

In all cases, the entrepreneur required support to enable them to carry on their business. The amount of support needed varied enormously from case to case. Support was provided from a range of sources: via personal budget, Access to Work, grant funded support, volunteers or family members

The importance of adequate support is further emphasised in examples including A Clean Sweep and Timesavers. Success and progress would appear to be closely related to the level and consistency of support.

There were mixed experiences regarding how difficult it had been, or was to fund adequate support. There appeared to be a lack of information and inconsistencies in information about obtaining Access to Work or use of personalised budgets. The work currently being developed by Jobs First and Trailblazers may promote greater co-ordination of sourcing for the future and their main research, which will be completed in 2012, will provide further insight.

In some cases, the level of support could be reduced over time. Having had support to learn his business in the early period of operation, Arvon is now able to undertake his work independently and largely without support. Louise at People First reported that good consistent support had enabled her to undertake more work independently as skills

²⁵ *Ibid* Valuing People Now (2009); Cameron, H (2010) *Interview at Social Services*. Skelmersdale Library. September 2010; and McConkey, R. and Collins, S. (2010) 'The role of support staff in promoting the social inclusion of persons with an intellectual disability' *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*. Vol. 54. Part 8. pp 691-700.

²⁶ West Lancs Positive Living (2011) <http://www.westlancspositiveliving.org.uk/> and *Ibid* Cameron (2010) as #38

²⁷ Department of Health (2011) 'Guidance on direct payments for community care, services for carers and children's services: England 2009' http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+www.dh.gov.uk/en/SocialCare/Socialcarereform/Personalisation/Directpayments/DH_076522

and confidence grew. In other cases, support continued to be required at a consistently high level, each individual and each situation being unique.

Competition

A survey conducted by BERR (2008) of UK small businesses, found that the biggest barrier to growth was competition in the market²⁸. Some of the enterprises featured above operate in fields where there are lots of other people doing the same job, such as gardening and car washing. In these cases competition did not affect their ability to find customers. Others had found it difficult to find sufficient customers or to sell sufficient produce. Enterprises with a particularly good product or unique selling point, or that were particularly skilled at marketing, had an advantage, for example Spice Up Your Life and Dance Syndrome.

Social Outcomes

All entrepreneurs had found the experience very positive, gaining in confidence and ability, and feeling that they were part of the local community. Individuals spoke of meeting new people who did not have a learning difficulty and being accepted as equal. As individuals' confidence and skills grew, in some cases they required less support both in their work and in their personal lives.

While all had excellent social outcomes, some enterprises had clear economic outcomes and the potential for economic growth. This fits with *Valuing People* and subsequent policies that have sought to firstly make social changes for people with learning disabilities and consequently ensure their full economic inclusion and contribution to the rest of society.

Potential for Future Development

All interviewees reported that there were opportunities and potential for future development. In some cases, there were clear strategic plans in place and sufficient resources to implement them. In other cases, progress was hampered due to lack of adequate support and sometimes a severe lack of funding both for business development and for support.

Some enterprises, for example Pulp Friction, have been successful in creating many volunteering opportunities for people with and without learning disability, well beyond their initial aim of providing meaningful activity for one person.

Equally, Dance Syndrome has a strong Unique Selling Point and has attracted funding and resources to expand and create employment opportunities.

The potential for the future may not be as anticipated at the outset. Of particular note was Red Socks Enterprise, which had since its inception changed considerably over time. Set up to provide occupation for Joe and his friends through collecting second hand clothing, it had expanded and changed to provide a community centre based

²⁸ BERR (2008) The Annual Survey of Small Businesses' Opinions 2006/07 (ASBS 2006/07) Summary report of findings among UK SME employers. URN 07/389. London: IFF Research Ltd.

activity for a good number of individuals. It is still raising funds and providing meaningful occupation, but it is now a community group rather than a business. It is equally successful, but not perhaps in the way expected at the outset.

There is potential too to replicate good businesses. Spice Up Your Life has excellent branding and special recipes providing a range of chutneys and jams that are unique to them. There may be potential to “franchise” the product. If jams and chutneys sell well on Lytham Market, there is reason to suppose they may sell well in Ormskirk or other towns with similar demographics. A Clean Sweep is a co-operative providing paid work for people with learning disabilities. They undertake cleaning contracts on a commercial basis and provide part-time work for more than 15 people. The model is simple, successful and replicable.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The report highlights how embryonic the concept of people with learning disabilities running their own business is. No evidence was found of previous research specifically about learning disability and enterprise. While there were pockets of expertise around the country, few social care professionals had direct experience of supporting an individual or group to develop their own enterprise.

Within mainstream business support agencies there was little evidence that advisers had experience of working with people with learning disabilities. Information regarding the number of people with learning disabilities who had started in business is not available. Advice was provided that under the Intensive Start Up Support (ISUS) programme, this information is not gathered as data collected relates to numbers of people with ‘disabilities’ and does not decimate information into categories of disability. Very few of the business support agencies contacted came forward with any knowledge of anyone running their own enterprise. There were several instances of people mistaking dyslexia, mental ill health, and physical disabilities for learning disability. This added to the impression that the business support sector in general had little experience of individuals with learning disability wishing to start their own enterprise.

The findings were little different among professionals employed to support people with learning disabilities (such as employment advisers and social workers) to make life choices. Generally, very little evidence was found that self-employment or developing any kind of enterprise is considered or discussed by professionals when advising individuals with learning disability about their options for the future. This is particularly emphasized by a lack of response from any Connexions teams.

Finally, there is little written about enterprise within mainstream guidance. For example, while *Improving the life chances of disabled people* (2005) emphasizes the need for smooth transitions from education to employment for young people with learning disabilities, microenterprise and self-employment are not options discussed.

It is reasonable to conclude, that for most people, the idea of developing a microenterprise as a way of achieving meaningful daytime activity and possibly an income is a relatively new concept.

This research shows that the microenterprises examined did not necessarily perform like traditional business, or develop as quickly. While some of the entrepreneurs interviewed were involved in businesses that enabled them to either sign off benefits altogether or receive some income, in most cases, social outcomes such as meaningful daytime activity, social inclusion and a sense of achievement were equally important. In some cases, there was no intention that the enterprises would create paid jobs and the social outcome was an end in itself. Similarly, even where the entrepreneur sought to generate sufficient income to support a wage, development may be over years rather than months. In summary, the microenterprises were regarded as successful by the participants if they provided meaningful work activity, even for just a few hours each week, while for traditional business to be deemed successful, financial success of the business would be required.

This difference in the fundamental aims and objectives poses a dilemma for DWP and business support organizations in that they are usually tasked with promoting/creating economic outcomes rather than social outcomes. Business start-up programmes are also in the main required to support enterprise development resulting in economic outcomes within a relatively short period of time. Business support programmes do not generally provide for a high level of business support over a prolonged period, but rather short interventions. For people with learning disabilities, not only may the end product differ in character from a traditional business model, but also it is likely to take longer to achieve success and require a higher level of support over a longer period.

Business Support programmes generally aim to effect economic outcomes through the creation of jobs and wealth. In most of the enterprises examined, the primary outcomes are social outcomes. While these enterprises require good business advice, it may be that they require an enterprise support programme that recognises social outcomes equally with economic outcomes.

While the microenterprises examined have to meet the same legal and financial requirements as mainstream “traditional” businesses, they do not necessarily have the same dynamics, and success may be measured in a very different way.

There is no mechanism in the North West for accurately counting the number of people with learning disabilities starting an enterprise or receiving support to do so. It would be useful in the future to have some form of benchmark so that progress can be measured

Financing business start-up can present challenges for any business. The microenterprises examined within this research are unlikely to be the type of enterprises able to secure start-up finance that is designed to promote economic growth. The individuals involved are not likely to move from benefits in a short period of time, and the businesses are unlikely to generate sufficient income to re-pay a loan and pay a wage. In all cases, the entrepreneurs have been receiving benefits for a long time and are unlikely to have savings to invest.

It is unrealistic to expect these microenterprises to be able to borrow money for business start-up. In all cases, the enterprises were low-risk/low capital investment. Any

business that required investment for a capital purchase such as equipment, vehicle or premises would be at a disadvantage. Finance is a big issue, with a majority of microenterprises reporting the requirement for finance being key to development. Finance was also required for training and this too created a barrier to growth in some examples.

Business loans and grants designed for business start-up are generally not appropriate for this group of entrepreneurs.

Some entrepreneurs and their support staff highlight financing support as being a factor limiting development. While Timesavers have been able to finance their support in part through their personalized budgets, several entrepreneurs were deemed to have mild to moderate needs and be above the threshold at which social care could be provided. This group, who it may be argued are the most able to benefit from involvement in microenterprise, are ironically the least able to fund the necessary support.

People with mild to moderate learning disabilities generally could not operate their businesses without staff support. People in this group, who want to develop an enterprise, are most disadvantaged by rules for social care funding.

Clear guidelines are required for the use of personalized budgets and Access to Work in funding support.

The microenterprises examined included companies limited by guarantee, co-operatives, unincorporated associations, sole traders and partnerships and companies limited by shares. Those with clear social aims, who had chosen to adopt a social enterprise/community business model, were able by and large to attract more financial support to develop their enterprise and cover support costs. Spice Up Your Life has been successful in replicating a business model and is similar to, but more permanent than, for example a Young Enterprise company. However, those individuals engaged do not actually carry any legal or financial responsibility for the business, and most importantly, if they were to leave the day centre in which it operates they would have to leave their business.

In all cases, individuals required support to ensure that legal and financial requirements were met. Spice Up Your Life offers the excitement of enterprise without the risk. It is not the same as an owner run business, but demonstrates that (a) traditional services can offer exceptionally good experiences of enterprise that may pave the way for entrepreneurial activity in the future, and (b) that traditional services can provide the skilled support needed to enable individuals to set up their own enterprises.

Most of the enterprises examined were worthy of closer examination. In particular:

- *A Clean Sweep*, based in the South West of England, started in 1995 and is believed to be the oldest company run by people with learning disabilities that is still trading. The enterprise operates as a co-operative and Mencap provides support. It provides part time work for the seventeen worker members who own and run it.
- Although *the people who work in it do not own Spice Up Your Life*, it offers a high quality enterprise experience for its members, and provides an excellent model that could be replicated as a social enterprise wholly run by people with learning disabilities.

- *Garden Life* in Cumbria has created a sustainable business that provides wages for two people with learning disabilities and a support worker. All three are equal partners within the business. This is a unique and practical model providing long term sustainability at low cost.
- *People First* is that largest enterprise examined. They have great experience of enabling decision-making, funding, contracts, and using Access to Work to support employment.
- *Timesavers* operates as an unincorporated association, with two classes of membership: worker members who are people with learning disabilities, and advocate members who provide support and guidance. This provides robust and effective governance.

Each business had something unique that others could learn from. Each microenterprise had a story to tell that was inspiring.

There is significant value in providing opportunities for experience and learning to be shared so that many more people can benefit.

Beyer and Robinson (2009: 34) summarise the benefits that supported employment can have:

‘Although in many cases, the transition to employment will lead to an increase in income for the individual and the withdrawal, or partial reduction of welfare benefit income. For the taxpayer and society as a whole, the benefits may be less obvious in the short term as the cost of schemes helping disabled people enter open employment maybe greater than that previously spent within a sheltered employment or day care settings. However, in the long-term, savings on welfare benefit payments, the payment of taxes on earnings by the worker, savings in the cost of attending other services, the provision of other supports in the community, and the economic contribution of the individual may create a positive economic benefit.’

It would seem likely that, like employment, involvement in microenterprise would create similar positive economic and social benefits that cannot easily be measured in the short term.

Jon Pitts of MiEnterprise coined the phrase “supported self-employment” and this perhaps sums up the difference and most accurately describes the concept. The individual entrepreneurs were in most cases only able to trade due to having a level of continued support that suited their requirements.

A cautionary note is required regarding liability. Every person running their own business or starting in self-employment has legal obligations to HMRC and, if a limited company, to Companies House. There are statutory requirements in business when entering into contracts, which, if not properly executed, may result in a legal action; there are responsibilities about health and safety to consider along with many business matters such as insurance and banking. Additionally, there are rules about claiming benefits and prosecutions can occur when a person breaks the law. Clarity is required in the decision making process: support staff or advisers could appear to be acting as shadow directors; An organisation that speaks for the individual in making a deal may

mistakenly be taken for the principle rather than the agent. There could also be confusion about whether the entrepreneur is employed by the support organisation or is indeed self-employed. Self-employment can be used illegally by unscrupulous employers to reduce labour costs and it is possible that a person may be taken advantage of in this way. There are many potential pitfalls in supporting a person with learning disability into self-employment.

Where a member of staff is required to support an individual to make life choices, it is important that that member of staff is equipped with sufficient information about both the advantages and the pitfalls around starting and running a microenterprise, so that they are able to provide appropriate advice and guidance to enable that person to make an informed next step.

It is recommended that any professional supporting an individual in this way follows clear guidelines and established models of practice, to safeguard both the individual entrepreneur and the support staff/supporting organisation.

Finally, the evidence suggests overwhelmingly, that running your own microenterprise can be a successful alternative to employment or volunteering. The research highlights how successful self-employment, or starting an enterprise has been for the individuals identified, and how suitable it can be for people with learning disabilities with the right support in place. Those people who have ventured into self-employment all categorically state that their confidence and the social inclusion they experience have risen due to their work. Individuals also reported meeting new people and making new networks within the wider community. At best, a level playing field has been reached where people are fully integrated into society as much as any other person can hope to be.

Employment or volunteering had not always been a positive experience: Some people reported that they previously suffered social exclusion in the workplace, bullying occurring or lack of integration with non-disabled people. No examples of bullying were identified within the enterprises examined, and responses consistently showed that people felt empowered and enabled.

For all those people identified, starting and running a microenterprise has led to improved quality of life and this has been achieved without additional costs.