



Youth Employability Competences

Engaging and retaining employers



Overview

i) The Ballymun Job Centre (BJC) is a voluntary organisation with charitable status, it has a proven track record of providing quality and innovative employment, guidance and training services since 1986 within the community of Ballymun, Dublin, Ireland

ii) The Advisory Group within BJC consisted of 8-10 employers/youth workers/trainers. The Advisory Group was established through existing links that the BJC had with a network of employers and local services, and met 3-4 times per year initially in the BJC premises and after this online. The meetings were facilitated by two members of the BJC YEC project team, one representative of the BJC Management Team and a guidance staff member. The employers in our group were a mixture of employers with a strong tradition of employing young people as well as those that recruit for experienced positions/high skilled specialist jobs.

Effective Practice Approach

The BJC used a range of different effective practice approaches to engage and retain employers.

- **Inclusive, friendly learning space:** The BJC aims to create a relaxed space when hosting these meetings that is defined by the target group. There are refreshments available, comfortable chairs, there is no technology/devices needed to attend the meeting, seating is placed in a circular arrangement and there are no assigned seats. There is colour in the room and documents are printed in colour where possible. The atmosphere is warm and welcoming, participants are greeted at reception and accompanied down to the room so as to reduce social anxiety of entering group space.
- **Joint practice development (JPD):** The BJC operationalises this concept developed by Fielding, particularly in the employer/youth worker groups. This means BJC will often have materials and discussion prompts ready in advance of a meeting in order to stimulate discussion and once this discussion is established, employers and youth workers begin an exchange of knowledge. It becomes JPD at the point where the varying disciplines share techniques that they use in working with young people, and critique what works well and what has not worked well in their organisation. At this point staff members from BJC let the conversation direct itself, but take notes and record all information. Clarity and further development is often sought on points from previous meetings ensuring there is a steady flow of continuity on idea development from one meeting to the next.
- **Recruitment through established networks:** The BJC is a community centred organisation that is centrally located within the area of Ballymun. Throughout years of EU projects, the BJC has developed a long standing network of partnerships that it utilises for recruitment for the Advisory Groups. Using tried and tested partnerships, in conjunction with reaching out to new organisations has ensured a level of consistency in attendance at meetings.

Additional practices included:

- At the end of each meeting, agreeing the date for the next one so it was booked in everyone's calendar well in advance
- Time management – keeping the meetings short (usually about 1.5 hours) and on track, or when they knew they would be longer, offering a working lunch
- Sending out any reading materials or information to be reviewed in the meeting in advance, asking for questions or feedback before the meeting to support good use of time in the meetings
- Youth workers sharing their stories and experience of the challenges that young people face and how they are overcome
- Allowing time for networking where possible
- Having clear tasks for the employer group helped to keep them engaged
- Giving the employers a broader perspective on the work that BJC do, eg introducing them to colleagues on other projects, to encourage both an understanding of and a buy-in to the organisation

Impact Results

The initial stages of recruitment were not so easy as employers are often sceptical about joining voluntary boards. BJC made contact with a lot of employers to try to get them involved in the project. The first meeting was a real success with a group of 12 employers/youth workers and a very productive meeting. The employers were very willing to commit to attending meetings, and generally, if they couldn't attend, it was because something had come up for them at very short notice. BJC recruited employers from a range of different industries, there were some who had experience working with the YEC target group and others that had no experience recruiting young people presenting with the challenges that some young people faced. This made for a stimulating environment with a variety of opinions and understandings. Feedback from the group was generally very positive.

Conclusions

Engaging busy, time short employers in a voluntary project can be challenging. It is important that they have a clear sense of purpose in what they are doing, as well as feeling that this is meaningful and productive. Efforts to make the meeting as easy as possible to attend, as well as enjoyable, are important.

