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NEW PROJECT HELPS GP'S DELIVER THE RIGHT PRESCRIPTION FOR WORK

A new project has been launched in Bristol, which for the first time places an employment adviser within doctors' surgeries and health centres.

Seven GPs' surgeries and a walk-in health centre have become 'one stop shops' for health and employment advice for patients that are out of work for health reasons, but who would like to re-enter employment, education and training, or in some cases find jobs for the first time.

Although the service can be accessed by anyone with health issues, it is hoped this initiative will help some of the city's 20,000 plus people in receipt of incapacity benefit, get back into work.

Bristol was recently named as the 15th highest UK city for incapacity benefit claimants. As the national figure has now reached 2.7 million, the Government has said it would like to reduce this number by providing help to many claimants who are willing and able to work, but who may need extra help in re-entering the workplace.

The project is being run by employment charity Tomorrows People, in partnership with Skills for Health, Jobcentre Plus West of England District, United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust (UBHT) and Bristol City Council. It is being funded by these partners and the European Social Fund through Government Office for the South West.

The Tomorrow's People adviser spends half a day at each of the seven surgeries at Bedminster, Easton, Horfield, Southmead, Fishponds, Barton Hill and Henbury, and at the South Bristol NHS Walk-in Centre.

Tomorrow's People, an employment charity with a 21-year track record of helping people out of long term unemployment and welfare dependency, engages with patients at the health centres' across Bristol, including some of the most disadvantaged areas of the city. An employment adviser is based in a doctors' consulting room at each practice and patients can either make an appointment themselves or will be referred by their doctor, who may feel that their recovery could benefit from employment advice.

This project is particularly innovative because as well as providing employment advice in GPs' consulting rooms, there is also the provision of a Health Learning Works programme, available to clients who are interested in working in the health and social care sector. The programme will include 'on the job training' with health and social care employers, which can be particularly helpful for those who have not worked for a long time, or indeed at all. Those who successfully complete the programme will be offered roles such as administrators, porters, health care assistants and call centre operatives.

Those who would like to re-train or work in other fields will also be helped by Tomorrow's People which can provide job search and training advice, and referral to other agencies. The project will work on Tomorrow's People's background of success running a similar scheme at Kentish Town, North West London where for the last four years it has had an adviser based on site at a busy GPs' surgery. So far nearly 200 patients have seen the adviser in London, and of those who have completed the programme, 87% have returned to employment or are back in education or training. On average, 82% are still in work 12 months on.



The new project in Bristol hopes to help more than 100 people over the next two years in their quest to get back to work.

David Worthington, Operations Manager for Tomorrow's People in Bristol, said: "Tomorrow's People is delighted to be part of this partnership in helping certain patients in Bristol, with health barriers to work, to realise their full potential.

"The charity brings with it considerable experience in this field, having worked with many patients with long-term health problems who have found work or training a means to recovery.

"We have found that as an independent charity that engages with patients in an environment of trust, like the doctor's chair, our clients are more likely to voluntarily ask for help in getting back to work. This has had an impact on saving doctors time and money – our project in London has saved the practice at least five GP consultations per patient, already saving the surgery thousands of pounds. And it has not only reduced consultancy time and costs, according to the doctors at the practice it has also lowered the amount of drugs, particularly anti-depressants, prescribed to some patients.

"As the Government has found, there are many people who have suffered ill health who would be willing to work given the right help, and Tomorrow's People is delighted to be able to offer its support in helping people on this journey."

Dr Chris Fox of the Wedmore Practice at St John's Lane, Bedminster, which has 7,200 patients including patients from disadvantaged areas with high unemployment, said: "We have always had a high number of incapacity benefit recipients here. Many of our patients come from a large housing estate where there are high levels of [unemployment](#), [single parent families](#) and [drug abuse](#).

"A lot of our patients are out of work and there are many suffering from anxiety, depression, feelings of hopelessness and low motivation that go alongside being unemployed. There is a definite link between being out of work and ill health and we expect the new Tomorrow's People service to make a difference to these patients.

"I and other doctors spend a substantial amount of time talking to patients about being out of work and the problems associated with it, as many see us as having the power to fix anything. Unfortunately in the past we did not know who to refer them to or how to help them, but now we can suggest they speak to the Tomorrow's People adviser. We hope this service will make a real difference to some of our patients."

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Notes to Editors:

- Tomorrow's People is a national charity that has helped change the lives of more than 390,000 people across the UK who had been resigned to long-term, even life-long, unemployment, since it was established in 1984. It helps the hardest to reach long-term unemployed, by giving individuals one-to-one support, helping them find the right job and more importantly, to stay there. On average, 76% of people helped by Tomorrow's People are still in employment 12 months on.
- Skills for Health was established in April 2002 and licenced by the Department for Education and Skills as the UK Sector Skills Council for Health in May 2004. Part of the Skills for Business Network, it works on a UK-wide basis with the whole sector (national health services, voluntary and independent) to develop solutions that deliver a skilled and flexible workforce to improve health and healthcare. For more information visit www.skillsforhealth.org.uk
- Jobcentre Plus is part of the Department for Work and Pensions. The Jobcentre Plus network consists of Jobcentre Plus offices, Jobcentres and social security offices. The aim of this organisation is to help:
 - more people into paid work
 - employers fill their vacancies, and
 - give people of working age the help and support which they are entitled to if they cannot workJobcentre Plus is focusing on customers with the greatest disadvantages, and those not in touch with the labour market. Jobcentre Plus is developing local partnerships to assist these customers overcome barriers to work and assist them in the transition from welfare to work.
- Bristol City Council, through its Regeneration Team, is working in partnership with Tomorrow's People, Jobcentre Plus and Skills for Health on the Health Learning Works programme. The initiative aims to provide a routeway for unemployed people into jobs within the health and social care sector. The council is committed to the principles of Health Learning Works and so is working closely alongside the project co-ordinators to ensure that the programme meets the needs of people in disadvantaged communities, including those in Neighbourhood Renewal areas, and the recruitment needs of health sector employers within the public sector.

Health Learning Works compliments the council's commitment to diversity in the workforce by identifying job opportunities at entry level and hard to fill vacancies for unemployed jobseekers. The council's Regeneration Team is contributing to ensure that any programmes developed benefit individuals, communities and employers.

- United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust cares for thousands of patients a year and is one of Bristol's largest employers. It shares the principles of Tomorrow's People in valuing, respecting and embracing the differences and diversities of all people. It fully supports the aim of encouraging those in disadvantaged, under-represented communities and those who, for whatever reason, find it hard to access employment, to be given opportunities to learn new life and work skills. It is committed to working with partners in the community to support people into the workplace and it believes such partnerships bring measurable benefits to the individuals themselves, the local community as a whole and the NHS, both as a potential employer and as a healthcare provider.



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