

ROCHDALE WORK AND SKILLS PROJECT



FINAL REPORT July 2015

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Background:



Following independent evaluation of Rochdale Borough Housing (RBH)'s Worklessness Strategy, RBH wanted to increase their residents' ability to access employment and training, and to discover the diverse barriers and challenges which need to be addressed so that all residents can feel empowered to seize opportunities. RBH have embraced community-led research as the methodology which will help them gain insight into the complex barriers to seeking employment and accessing support, and guide the deployment of existing resources to effectively reach all residents.



Our Life, a social enterprise specialising in community-led research, was accordingly commissioned with the aim of identifying the support needs of residents in Kirkholt and three other RBH estates in Rochdale. Our Life have been leading the field through developing an innovative and very successful community research approach, "community explorers". This approach harnesses residents' abilities to relate to each other in an informal exchange about issues which matter deeply to them, and has the potential to move beyond the gathering of information to become a catalyst for residents to take action on the issues.

RBH's tender document emphasised the crucial understanding that one-size will not fit all: residents in the 50 neighbourhoods all face different challenges based on their context (the different geographical opportunities and constraints in each

area) and their identity (age, ethnicity, gender, long-term unemployment, health, mobility etc). Community-led research by a diverse team of residents will enable RBH to understand the multiple barriers to gaining employment and accessing support. It will also create the foundation for users of existing services to co-design solutions.

The project would focus primarily on Kirkholt estate to maximise the impact and ensure alignment with other new ways of working within the context of the Greater Manchester Public Service Reform, and also consider how any recommendations might be different in other places where RBH owns properties

Aim:

The ultimate aim of the project was to identify existing barriers which affect RBH's residents' ability to take advantage of employment and training services already provided by the Council and training providers, and how these obstacles can be removed.

Diversity was a guiding principle: research had to identify all profile groups (including Under 25s, Over 50s, long term out-of-work residents and BME groups) and work appropriately with each constituency to establish what they find helpful in supporting their work readiness and job search, and what they do not find helpful. Differences will also be explored within each social group – commonalities will not be assumed at the outset.

This research included consideration of:

- Any gaps in service provision which RBH can seek to address with partners

- Increased understanding of how to target different activities at different people, with approaches which work effectively for different social groups.
- How the populations living in RBH neighbourhoods differ from the Borough's average, and how responses may therefore need to be tailored to meet differing needs in different locations.
- How residents can progress from this research role to take advantage of new routes to work, using the skills, knowledge, passion and confidence gained through involvement in this project's training, analysis and delivery

Our Life devised a programme of activity to develop a group of unemployed residents into an effective team of community researchers, reflecting in their membership the existing diversity of their peers.

This work involved:

- recruiting and developing a residents' group of motivated and trained 'community explorers', supported by and connected to existing partner organisations in the area
- training the community explorers to use community engagement methodologies and reflection to enable them to create a baseline of current provision (mapping out the physical and social assets in the area, and identifying opportunities for improvement based on what works and what barriers need to be tackled)
- devising a method of recording each conversation so that the results can be shared subsequently with other stakeholders in a collective action-planning event
- supporting the outreach engagement work by the community explorers through co-producing a series of key questions to explore with other residents, and analysing

how to reach each target group in the most appropriate way

- creating a series of recommendations and actions that residents and agencies can pursue through co-production to enhance employment and training services in ways which will attract everyone by addressing diverse needs
- meeting with other communities in three estates owned by RBH to present findings and consider the most appropriate ways of responding to needs on other estates
- supporting the personal development of the community explorers to enhance their own employability

The Project:

At an initial meeting with the project commissioners in February 2015, Our Life's Community Engagement Specialist, Nick Beddow, asked the agencies to consider the key issues which they hoped the community's research would illuminate. The commissioning team identified the following puzzles:

- Figures show that not many people take up available courses. Why is this?
- Are residents aware that RBH has volunteering opportunities, traineeships and apprenticeships each year?
- How do people around Kirkholt get jobs/ make a living?
- What sort of work is available for Kirkholt residents?

Recruitment:

In late February, Nick visited the Kirkholt estate to map the existing community activity on the estate and consider the best starting point for recruiting 'community explorers'. Nicky Morris from RBH shared a wealth of information about the estate's community groups and facilities. With relatively few organised community groups, and existing volunteers heavily involved in the

Big Local 'Kirkholt Million' work, it was decided to focus on individual recruitment initially. A leaflet was created to advertise the project, and displayed in the Drop-In Centre and local shops on The Strand:

Kirkholt – Well-being Explorers



Are you passionate about your community and want to help your fellow residents?

We are looking for ten Kirkholt residents who are interested in finding out what others think.

You will be trained to talk to your friends and neighbours about the challenges in finding work. What helps? What hinders? How do people here find jobs? Are current training courses and work clubs useful? What would make it better for people?

The results will help us understand how to support people better when they are looking for work.

**Earn £20 in High Street vouchers
for 3 hours a week
for up to ten weeks, starting soon**

A first Information session at Kirkholt Drop-in was attended by only two people. They had heard that other residents had been deterred by concern about potential impact on benefits. Through outreach work on the streets of Kirkholt, and a visit to the Children's Centre Key To The Door group, six more potential explorers were eventually recruited and the training began in March 2015.

Training:

The initial sessions concentrated on getting to know each other and sharing personal experiences of job-hunting, life on benefits and the nature of the community. The group of residents used a map of the estate to identify local assets and trouble-spots, and reflect on how to reach all communities. By the third session the group had started to agree the key questions which would

make sense to other residents, in language which people could quickly understand and respond to. A questionnaire was devised and redrafted to create their key resource for community interviews, introducing their role and purpose and offering open questions with a few prompts suggested by the explorers and based on their personal experience:

Kirkholt Support for Job seekers

- Are you looking for work at the moment or in the recent past?
- We are Kirkholt residents who are trying to find out what helps and hinders our people from finding jobs.
- We have a short questionnaire which asks you about your experiences in job-seeking and about the types of support which you find useful.
- Our findings will help the Housing Association and Council put their money into the sort of job-seekers services which will really help Kirkholt residents
- Would you be happy to talk for a short while?

<p>1. When you are looking for work, what helps? (work club? training? adverts in shops or papers? online search? job centre advisor? work experience/placements? apprenticeships? volunteering?)</p>

<p>2. What's not been helpful?</p>

<p>3. What support would you like to see provided by RBH & Council? (121 helper? courses/ new skills? childcare? help with costs of transport? cheap access to computer and printer? Training in using computers? business advice? CV writing ?)</p>

<p>4. Any other comments?</p>

5. Personal details						
Male / Female						
Age:	0-21	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	60+
Ethnicity:						

The group intentionally placed the questions about personal details at the end of the interview because they felt residents would be reluctant to offer this general information at the beginning of the interview. It was going to be difficult enough to raise issues about job-seeking as the group had already recognised that questions about work and benefits may be perceived as snooping by officialdom. Once the group were happy with the Questionnaire, they agreed a policy to ensure that they were not being placed at risk: interviewers would work in pairs, primarily with people they already knew, and no door-knocking would take place. The explorers tested the questionnaire by interviewing friends and family, and agreed a target of eight interviews a week by each pair of explorers. Every Monday morning the group would meet with Our Life to discuss the emerging lessons from the interviews, and share their feelings about their role. While enjoying the role and growing in confidence, the Explorers found people’s hardship stories very unsettling, and used our team meetings to air their concerns and support each other emotionally.

Results:

From April to June 2015 the Explorers interviewed 263 residents on Kirkholt estate.

PROFILE OF INTERVIEWEES – 256 (7 people withheld personal details)

Age	White British female	White British male	BME female	BME male	Totals per age group
0-21	24	23	5	6	58
21-30	41	31	7	10	89
31-40	35	14	9	8	66
41-50	17	7	2	3	29
51-60	4	8			12
60+	1	1			2
Totals	122	84	23	27	

Basic Findings:

The simple data reveals Kirkholt residents' priorities. The following section will amplify on these findings with typical quotes from interviews.

WHAT HELPS PEOPLE?

- Online search for work – identified by 117 people
- Volunteering – for confidence, new skills, social support networks – 85 people
- Adverts in shops and newspapers – 68 people
- Work experience – 67 people
- Job Club – 40
- Apprenticeships- 36
- Family and friends contacts – 33
- Training Courses – 33
- Placements/ work experience -27
- Drop-in support staff – 20
- Job Centre Advisors - 18
- Having skills/experience – 4
- Job Fairs – 3

WHAT HINDERS PEOPLE?

- Job Centreplus – sanctions, behaviour – 137 people
- Costs – 50 (childcare, travel, clothing)
- Stigma and discrimination – 36
- No access to computers/internet – 29
- Shortage of Job Club hours – 24
- Low confidence/ depression – 23
- No jobs – 14
- Lack or too much experience/qualifications -14
- Job Club not as good as in past – 14
- Requirements on CVs – 13
- No feedback from employers about interviews – 10

PEOPLE'S IDEAS TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION

- 1-2-1 help with job applications, using PC's and internet, mock interviews and literacy – 196 people
- Help with costs – 177 people (travel and clothes -90, childcare 87)
- Courses to build confidence and new skills – 128
- More Job Club/ Drop-in – 33
- Business advice – 21
- Volunteering opportunities – 18
- Improve support at Jobcentre Plus, and clear advice on Benefits – 17
- Apprenticeships for all age-groups – 14
- ESOL classes – 9

Analysis Of The Findings:

In June, the Explorers analysed the findings and grouped the issues into four themes:

1. Agency Support on the estate
2. Job Centre Customer Care
3. Wellbeing
4. Communication

1. AGENCY SUPPORT ON THE ESTATE focused on:

- **physical resources** (access to PCs, internet, printing, free phones, jobs boards)
- **personal support** (121 help with CVs, job applications, benefits advice, use of PCs)
- **training courses and placements** (to build confidence, PC skills, opportunities for all ages),
- with **more drop-in and job club sessions** as focal points for this support.

The **positive aspects** of current agency support are:

- the Drop-in on The Strand. People welcomed the access to free phones, and the importance of having affordable use of PCs for online job-seeking and cheap printing for job applications and benefits documents:

“the drop in is really good for using telephones or computers”, Male, 31-40, BAME.

- The Work Club on Wednesday afternoons helps some residents:

“I can search for jobs on the internet and print CVs”, Female, 21-30, British

- the Drop-in workers were praised (*‘fabulous’*) for giving help and advice (including occasional help with using equipment). The Drop-in is the focal point for many in the community and helps people to break out of isolation:

“the girls are helpful, I get to know others, and use the free phones”, Male, 51-60, British

- Opportunities for volunteering :

“volunteering work helps you get used to working as a team”, Female, 51-60, White British

“volunteering in charity shops to build my CV”, Female, under 21, White British

“volunteering to give you a little confidence. I’ve been out of work for 5 years”, Female, 31-40, Black British

- Work preparation: people cited work experience as a key factor in helping to convince future employers

“Work Experience worked for me as now I work full-time. I think if more people did this then more jobs would be filled”, Female, 41-50, White British

Residents welcomed apprenticeships, training courses, and placements to gain new skills, receive 121 support and gain confidence.

- English As A Second Language (ESOL) courses:

“People to help with the language barrier. I don’t speak much English. I can’t understand adverts in shop windows”, Male, 31-40, Portuguese

“I need help with English to understand papers and application forms and to use computers”, Female, 31-40, African

- Employment Agencies had found work for some people

The current perceived **shortcomings in agency support** are:

- Lack of access to PCs and internet every day, when Job Centre Plus require job seekers to be searching online daily:

“I’m not able to afford the internet at home to look for jobs. There’s nowhere on Kirkholt which opens five days a week to gain access to the internet and printer”, Female, 41-50, White British

“On Wednesday both the Drop-In Centre and Library are closed so there’s nowhere to go on Wednesdays or the weekend for job search”, Male, 51-60, English

“the computers at the Work Club are always going down. They need updating”, Female, 21-30, British

“When I go to the Job Centre and they say I haven’t been looking enough online for work, but what they don’t understand is when the Drop-in is shut for Bank Holiday and weekends I’ve no computer – what can I do? They just threaten me with more sanctions”, Male, 21-30, Irish

- Lack of staff capacity to offer 121 support at the Work Club and Drop-In:

“it is down to us searching for jobs as there aren't enough staff on”, Male, 31-40, White British

“the Drop-In is brilliant but nowhere near big enough for the traffic, and there’s not enough staff or one-to-one help”, Female, 21-30, Scottish

“the drop in is good but they are also limited. There are only two phones and usually a queue to use them. The staff are always busy”, Female, under 21, White British

“More one-to-one support. When I first moved to Kirkholt the jobclub was run by an outside agency. They had lots of vacancies and they did one-to-one support. They did CVs and helped with interviews. They were like the perfect Job Centre”, Female, 41-50, English

“been in the drop in a few times and computers always full”, Female, under 21, British

- Lack of Benefits advice left people confused about their entitlements and wary of seeking training, placements or volunteering:

“I want the Job Centre to tell us what we can claim for instead of hiding stuff from us”, Female, 21-30, Black

“It’s unhelpful not knowing what will happen to rent and council tax – what will I have to pay when working? How much will it increase by?”, Male, 31-40, White British

Residents would appreciate the following **improvements in agency support**:

- more 121 support to help residents with CVs, use of PCs and job applications

“I could do with some help for interviews. I fall apart when I do get one”, Female, 31-40, Irish

“One-to-one help is vital – it’s confusing on the internet if you don’t know what you are doing”, Female, 21-30, English

- An enhanced Work Club, as it was under Employment Links:

“A decent work club, like there used to be, with 121 support and job boards and help with any form or CVs, and help with lack of confidence”, Female, 31-40, English

“They should have an open job club where you meet other people who are jobless and maybe make some new friends as well. I’ve come from London and everywhere is new”, Female, 21-30, Asian

“we need the work club every day as get sanctioned if not on PC every day”, Male, 51-60, White British

- Training to support literacy, use of PCs and internet, ESOL and general confidence building

“I struggle with English so I don’t go to the Drop-In or anywhere else. I need help with English”, Female, 21-30, Somali

“Basic English and Maths and computer courses and confidence-building courses”, Female, 31-40

- Apprenticeships for all age groups:

“With all these firms working on the estate, can’t RBH get them to show us all some skills as part of the contracts for the work they get?”, Female, 31-40, British

“work experience for old and young together: one to learn, one to teach from a lifetime of experience”, Male, 51-60, White British

- Benefits Advice

“not knowing what benefits you are entitled to when you start work. No one to advise on this”, Female, 21-30, British

2. JOB CENTRE PLUS - CUSTOMER CARE

The positive aspects of Job Centre Plus were perceived as:

- Job Centre Advisors were praised by 18 people:

“my Job Centre Advisor helps me a lot trying to find jobs”, Male, 21-30, White British

“I’m finding it hard to get back into work - I have no qualifications and my advisor helped me get into volunteering”, Male, 21-30, BAME

- The Remploy programme had helped some people find work

However, 137 people voiced concerns about the treatment they received at Rochdale’s Job Centre:

“sanctioning everybody left right and centre. Security are really rude and act like bullies”, Female, 31-40, BAME

“the Job Centre don’t want to help you, just to punish. They are always after taking money from you. Security are horrible – they really put you down”, Female, 21-30, British

“advisors give wrong info about courses and benefit entitlements” ,Male, 51-60, White British

“people being sanctioned all the time & having to rely on foodbanks”, Female, over 60, British

“Job Centre not helpful when you have no experience and want to help better yourself to gain experience & qualifications. And job centres are not sympathetic when you have special circumstances”, Female, 41-50, White British

“Job Advisors are too quick to sanction people. They don’t explain the rules properly”, Female, 41-50, British

“the staff are not the most helpful in the world: if you say the wrong thing, you are in trouble”, Male, under 21, BAME

“I won't go to the job centre anymore. They are really rude and critical”, Female, 31-40, BAME

“really horrible - they don't care about each individual case”, Female, 21-30, British

“The way they treat you at the Job Centre. I was late once because I struggled with childcare when my daughter was sick. I lost 3 weeks money and was made to go back to the Job Centre twice a week, which was a big drain on my money”, Female, 31-40, English

Residents want a Job Centre Plus which supports them in finding work and training, and recognises the value of volunteering in developing skills, teamwork, and building the person’s confidence and wellbeing. Volunteering should be embraced as a positive action by job seekers, addressing many of the personal barriers which hinder them in feeling employable. Residents feel that it should not be deemed as making someone ‘unavailable for work’ if residents are flexible in their volunteering and comply with other requirements for job searching.

“I know someone who volunteers and they have found it easier since volunteering because they have some confidence back”, Female, 21-30, White British

“volunteering can help you get back to working and it helps you meet new people as well”, Female, 21-30, British

3. WELL-BEING – this aspect focussed on volunteering opportunities, help with expenses (travel, childcare for interviews, discount vouchers for clothes), a local food-bank, and community peer support in using PCs.

- One of the greatest barriers to finding work or seeking training opportunities was loss of self-confidence:

“if you have been out of work for a time you need to try to get confidence back again so no idea where to start”, Female, 31-40, BAME

“Sometimes when you have been out of work for a while you lose confidence. You don’t want to leave your house. You feel useless”, Female, 21-30, English

“I’m getting interviews but not attending cos of lack of confidence – it makes you feel not good enough for jobs”, Female, 31-40, Portuguese

“Work experience would be good. It’s been so long since I’ve worked that I’m lacking in confidence now”, Male, 41-50, British

“The depression I have ended up with. The daily struggle to just try to get up and get on every day”, Female, 31-40, Scottish

- Age discrimination was affecting many residents’ confidence:

“Employers want the younger generation”, Male, 41-50

“I also find a problem with my age. People already dismiss me. Age shouldn’t be a problem if you have experience”, Female, 31-40, Scottish

“I find my age a problem before I even start. Why employ me when you can pay kids for half the wage?, Female, 31-40

“I’m disabled and older – I am never given a chance. They just look at your age”, Female, 41-50, English

“Apprenticeships would be great but most things are aimed at youngsters so age is against me”, Male, over 25, English

- Many residents thought that there was stigma attached to living in Kirkholt and this deterred potential employers: some people had decided not to mention that they lived on the estate and therefore gave their address as Rochdale.

“the area: there is a stigma about living on Kirkholt. You are put in a category that people don't want to deal with”, Female, 31-40, White British

- The costs of job-seeking, interviews and training were major barriers for many residents. Job seeking costs people money when they are already facing financial difficulties on benefits:

“the money you have to lay out to sign on, to go looking for work, getting to an interview”, Female, under 21, Portuguese

“Having to spend money on bus fares to get job interviews”, Female, 41-50, English

“Childcare is always a struggle. I'm on my own so I can't do any nights or early mornings”, Female, 31-40, Scottish

“I had to refuse a job because it starts at 6am - I have noone to watch my daughter until school opens”, Female, under 21, BAME

“Printers all need ink and paper, so it's too expensive . If printing off job forms it should be free”, Female, 21-30, English

“Could we have a discount with the charity shop for clothes? We need help with money during the first month at work (most pay at the end of the month). Help with childcare – a friend of mine is limited because of her baby girl. It's hard finding all the costs of fares, clothes and then finding childcare costs as well”, Female, 41-50, English

Some aspects of Wellbeing can be addressed by residents themselves, taking positive action on their own behalves:

- Volunteering opportunities were seen as the biggest boost to damaged self-esteem and confidence:

“volunteering can help you get back to working and it helps you meet new people as well”, Female,31-40, British

“I know someone who volunteers and they have found it easier since volunteering because they have some confidence back”, Female,21-30,White British

- the support of family and friends was frequently deemed essential to avoid the debilitating effects of isolation faced by people seeking work
- a local Foodbank is needed as people are struggling to transport food home from Rochdale's food-bank and can only access the existing foodbank a few times a year. Sanctions are making food banks a necessity for many people.

4. COMMUNICATION - greater awareness of available services (ESOL, training, apprenticeships, placements, jobs in Council, events); use of explorers to publicise and research

- job seeking was aided mainly by online searches, emphasising the need for PC & internet access, free newspapers and shop-window adverts; only one person mentioned leaflets
- Employers were criticised for failing to contact interviewees to let them know about the outcome of interviews
- Many residents complained about perceived lack of support, unaware that there were services available (eg for ESOL, work club, apprenticeships, training). Publicity needs to be continuously developed, with word-of-mouth being very effective compared to other methods: many residents relied on family and friends to circulate information.
- the role of the Community Explorers was praised for raising awareness of issues and services, and giving people the time to air all of their thoughts and experiences:

"The interviewer was very polite. It was quite enjoyable having a conversation with someone. I don't get out a lot, and tend to get stuck in the house because of a touch of depression", Female, 41-50, English

"It helps talking to people that understand, like the girl asking these questions, rather than officials", Female, 31-40, English

Findings from visits to three other RBH estates

In June 2015, the Explorers worked in small groups with Our Life's Community Engagement Specialist to visit Stansfield, Alkrington and Heywood estates. These visits gave the Explorers an opportunity to ask other residents about local experiences and discover if the findings from Kirkholt were applicable in other areas and contexts.

Stansfield: On June 8th three Explorers and Nick visited Stansfield in the morning. The estate was deserted, with few focal points (with only one shop open. The Tenants and Residents Association building was closed down due to the expense of renovations, and its phone number disconnected). Three initial attempts at street interviews at the bus-stop were rebuffed: the mention of Jobs issues swiftly ended the conversation as people were very wary of talking to strangers about such sensitive issues. The Explorers felt like fish out of water on the estate (thinking it posh and feeling that they were on show and being stared at). Door-knocking was therefore not an option. Clearly the Explorers approach is best suited to work on their own estates where people know and trust them and the Strand provides steady footfall. The group visited Littleborough shopping centre to seek local residents to talk to, and were able to confirm that there was very little support for jobseekers and few places to meet, with the local Primary School off the estate offering the best possibility for locating future support services.

Alkrington: On June 10th two explorers and Nick arrived on Alkrington estate to find a similar challenge; the streets were deserted, with a single shop open. The group decided that the questionnaires made them too off-putting to strangers, so they adopted a very informal approach, chatting to passers-by about work in the area and what it was like finding jobs. The issues were broadly the same, but without a Drop-In Centre people said there was nothing on the estate to help them and were looking towards Middleton and Manchester for jobs and training opportunities, as transport was easy. Residents tended to approach Middleton Library or Lighthouse Project for support, including a food-bank. The local community centre on the estate wants to offer job clubs and Citizens advice if they can receive help with laptop PCs and information on job vacancies. Residents on Alkrington felt cut off from

the affluent surrounding area: the community centre within the Health Centre grounds did not cater for the estate's residents and had no job clubs. The library was closed and heavily fortified with shutters: it has internet but is closed on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.



Angel Meadow, Heywood: on June 15th, two explorers and Nick visited Angel Meadow. This estate is very close to the main street in Heywood, which means that residents have good access to volunteering opportunities in several charity shops, and work opportunities in local supermarkets and packing jobs on Pilsworth Industrial estate. However, most of these jobs are very short-term, ending before three months. Residents praised the Recovery Republic project on York Street as a model for how a Drop-In should operate: the explorers were made very welcome by the volunteers and support agencies in the building and were told about the holistic approach to wellbeing which has led the project to start with mental health support and extend into support for gaining confidence, skills, CV development and employment through an Empowerment For Work course. One of the past volunteers has gained a paid part-time post within the project. The project offers a very modern and

welcoming environment, with free access to PCs, refreshments, a cafe, activity/training rooms and a second hand shop.



Other support was available from Middleton's Lighthouse project, where people gained support in writing CVs, and computers could be accessed at the library and health centre. The contrast with the other two estates was very striking: the Recovery Republic and the lively high street enabled residents to feel more connected to daily life and opportunities. The Recovery Republic manager will welcome any visits from RBH and the Kirkholt residents to share thinking about the design of drop-in centres.

Feedback Event and Action Planning:



Rochdale Work and skills action planning event

29th June 2015 9am – 1.30pm

Kirkholt community church, OI11 2lw

On 29th June 2015, the Explorers presented their findings to 18 agency workers, representing RBH, Rochdale Borough Council (RBC), Job Centre Plus, and social landlords .

Nicky Morris from RBH introduced the meeting, outlining the challenging employment and training situation in Rochdale, and explaining RBH's corporate strategy and the commitment to refresh their approach to employment and training through a new worklessness strategy focused on partnership and co-design.

The Explorers and Our Life presented a power-point slideshow to explain how the project had been organized, and the explorers spoke movingly about all of the issues they had gathered from the interviews. The value of employing residents to lead their own community engagement was discussed, as the residents trusted their peers and spoke openly and frankly about their experiences and views. Official surveys often struggle to engage people, and a focus on worklessness is especially difficult to raise in communities when people are fearful about sanctions. The community-led research transcended these barriers: peer relationships enabled the group to reach deeply into all profile groups on the estate. The skills and confidence gained by the explorers have improved their own wellbeing, and their contributions to the power-point slideshow discussions proved their abilities to speak assertively in front of a professional audience.



After a question-and-answer session, all of the participants worked together to create a shared action plan for each of the four themes identified in the research: Agency support on the estate; Wellbeing; Communication; and Job Centre Customer Care. Each table focussed on a single theme, and recorded ideas for action by communities, communities and agencies together, and agencies. After the first session, the recording sheets were shared with a different table to gather more views and offers of support (a 'world cafe' approach), with key points fed back to the whole meeting. By the end of the morning, some very lively conversations between agencies and explorers had inspired four sets of action plans, which will be taken forward on the estate and help to inform RBH's future Work and Skills Strategy.

THE ACTION PLANS

1. AGENCY SUPPORT ON THE ESTATE

- Explorers and RBH team to engage explorers and others in the community who want to help
- Rochdale Council to train and support community champions including new recruits, with focus on work-related skills and how to gain employment
- RBH to shift the emphasis of its structure and staff towards supporting volunteers

The above three actions will aim to create a team of multi-skilled RBH community champions who can support other residents in IT, work, skills, housing, wellbeing, welfare, mental health etc

- The entry point would be the Drop-In and community champions, building trust and early confidence through 1-2-1 contact
- This would progress to create a learning pathway, including lifelong learning, community learning and entry-level skills: a clear offer will be mapped by RBH and Council
- Access to adult skills provision, linked to employment opportunities (known job opportunities, contact with employers, work experience) will all be publicised by word-of-mouth by explorers and RBH

The above three actions will aim to create a pathway of skills provision, meeting the holistic needs of each person from confidence to help with CVs to skills development and further progression

- Identifying common pitfalls, difficulties and barriers and devising a strategy to tackle them (MTD team)

- Train and support volunteers and staff, and provide community champions for welfare and wellbeing (S & W team)
- Keep information up-to-date and well-communicated via RBH

The above three actions would aim to create a well-informed, up-to-date alert for future welfare system changes, and include a lobbying function

- MTD big team to create a protocol for joined-up volunteering to reflect current needs and context
- MTD to improve standards of support for volunteers eg a local community union branch
- RBH, Council and CVS to map and share volunteering policies across the public and voluntary sector
- RBH and S & W team to use all of the opportunities for community-led/ peer/ convivial groups
- Co-ordinate the provision that is available
- Negotiate some flexibilities eg adult apprenticeships and traineeships (with Procurement plus and others)

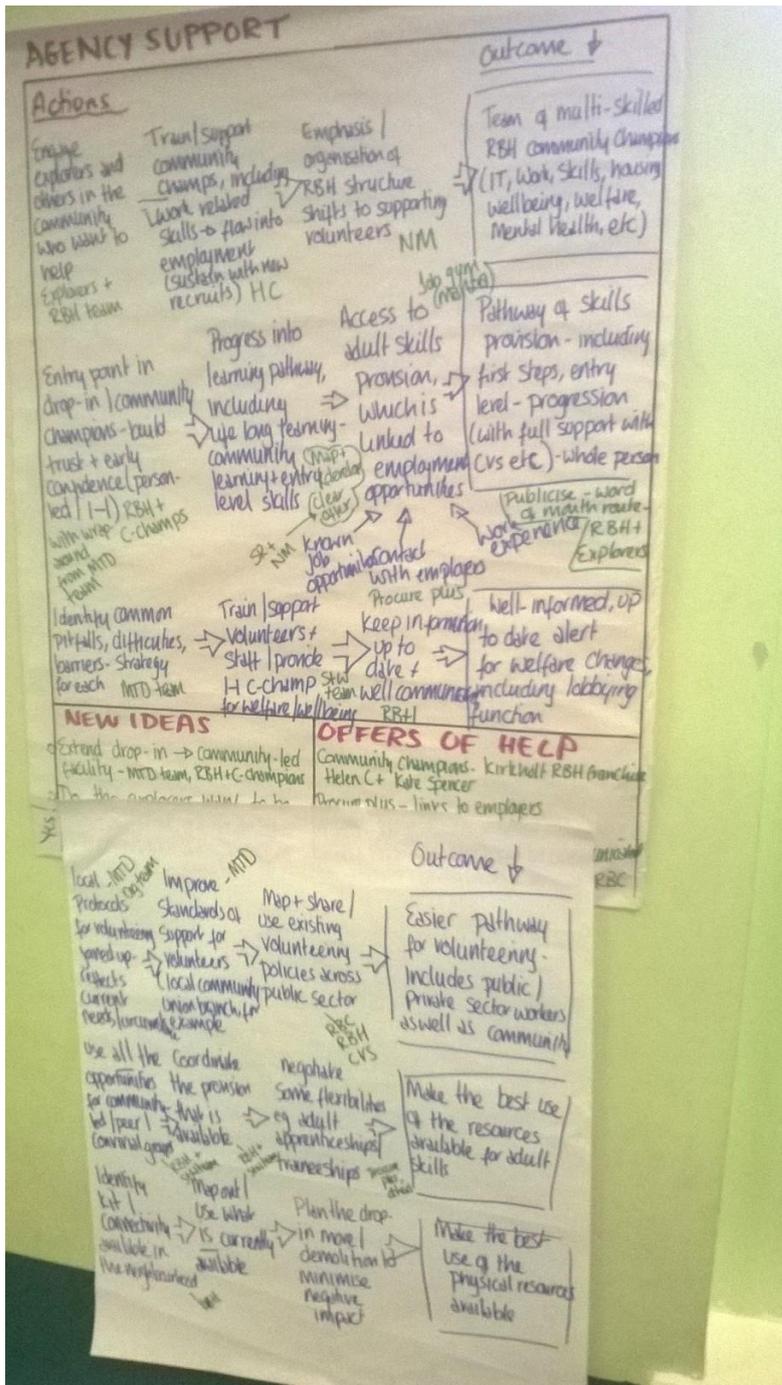
The above three actions will aim to make the best use of the resources available for developing adult skills

- Identity kit/connectivity available in the neighbourhood via RBH
- Map what is currently available
- Plan the Drop-In's move and demolition to minimise negative impact

The above three actions will aim to make the best use of the resources available for developing adult skills

- Extend the Drop-In hours as a community-led facility (RBH, MTD team, community champions)

- Ask if the Explorers want to be the new start of a community champions project in Kirkholt
- Bring together all offers of help: community champions, Procure Plus's links to employers, Mantra's Job Gym, a communicated skills & work map shared by explorers throughout the estate, Skills & Employment team, RBC



2. JOB CENTRE PLUS

“A more welcoming culture”

- common sense and flexibility with allowing people to wait inside when it's raining/when pregnant or with young children. JCP to check policies and procedures
- Stop asking 'why are you here?' and ask 'do you have an appointment?'
- adopt a less confrontational and more positive manner
- customer service training for security guards as part of the service contract, with feedback from G4S about specific actions they take to improve their approach
- understand they are necessary and provide a service but need to be more positive
- occasional lack of compassion from Advisors – they will need specific feedback
- training needs can be identified from feedback
- make the complaints procedure clear – use drop-in centres to feedback
- get rid of the myths about sanctions
- communicate the role of Advisors to all clients, ie what they can and can't provide

“Support to find jobs, training and placements”

- Flexible Support Fund gives access to travel and registered childcare costs
- Reimburse out-of-cycle interviews – an advance Day Saver travel pass

- Monthly free bus pass if you find work, then discounted for three months
- ESOL – can refer to courses
- Interview clothes vouchers
- Hardship provision in case of sanction
- M.A. service including budget provision

“Volunteering”

- Lack of consistency amongst Advisors that volunteering is a positive thing. Some advisors don't recognise volunteering if it's not within a relevant sector. Need to recognise the social skills and work-readiness skills (soft skills) gained through volunteering
- Job Centre Plus pressure to meet own targets is not always complementing opportunities for volunteering
- Job Centre Plus links with the community need to be created, promoting positive stories
- RBS to attend the Skills & Work Operational Forum to cascade outcomes. Can a resident attend? This would offer a good opportunity to experience a meeting environment

3. WELLBEING

- Promote existing volunteering opportunities in the community (Q Gardens open day)
- Skill sharing in communities eg through emails at Drop-in
- Promote community union membership – empowerment and ownership
- Pre-and-post volunteer support ie CV support, pathways for career
- Gold standard of volunteering (Council – Kate Spencer?)
- Council’s First Steps will start with IT training on Friday in July, opening TRAC offices for residents training. Develop TRAC as an informal meeting place for a natter and a brew, mentoring volunteers to help people feel welcome and spread the word
- Vouchers for clothes- Drop-In could make a deal to outfit people for £6
- Ask British Rail and Buses for reduced prices scheme
- Ask Kirkholt Million to fund wellbeing ideas (Dave Broome, Council)
- Promote community ownership rather than bureaucracy, but still offer accreditation
- Set up a Kirkholt foodbank
- Bike scheme/ bike bank with volunteer bike-maintenance project
- Commitment to engaging local residents and enabling them to shape services
- Joined-up structure to support volunteers – map volunteer activity and contact details (Anne, Council)
- Volunteering should be a worthwhile experience - not be used as a way for businesses to exploit free labour– people need to gain skills and support, and be safe-guarded.

- Need inductions and work schedules, ensuring good communication and buddying
- Get Business Support to develop volunteering opportunities within 'Social responsibility'
- Social landlords to map skills and target their initiatives appropriately
- Free resources: clothes swap, clothing bank, donations sought from Riverside and RBH – these are all good volunteering opportunities
- Explore good practice elsewhere eg Stockport Homes, Eastlands, City South volunteer programmes, Recovery Republic

4.COMMUNICATIONS

- Use community volunteers to spread the word about available services
- Set-up explorers in other neighbourhoods
- Ensure that all agencies keep up-to-date with services across Rochdale so they can promote to residents eg. schools, Sure Start centres, Churches, Housing Officers, Income Officers, PCSO's
- Promote word-of-mouth through Facebook and Rochdale Online etc
- Build information-giving around social gatherings (eg Big local, Link For life, Family Funday) – this leads to confidence-building, trust and encouragement to go to services
- Put up really visible eye-catching posters in Drop-In window and insert into Drop-In newsletter
- Continue to support Drop-In Centre staff to tell everyone about what's available. What other venues in other neighbourhoods?

- Positive communication: when someone is on JSA, take the opportunity to refer them to relevant support/agencies
- Information booklet at the Drop-In on who to phone, FAQs – keep updated
- Tenant welcome pack in Kirkholt drop-In
- Come for A Cuppa sessions, as a skills swap and for explorers to keep updated on services (quick win)
- Suggestions Box in Drop-In
- Community interpreters
- Skills Swap scheme
- Explorer offer to visit schools to talk to parents and meet each month to keep up to date with services

