MyLife

Pathways to Employment Workbook

Recruiting personal assistants, screening, training and keeping them: A solution created by families for families.

Contents

1.	Overview	1
2.	Background to the first P2E project	3
3.	Aims of the initial project	5
4.	Business benefit and service improvement	8
5.	Running the course from start to finish	10
6.	The matching process	17
7.	Keeping in touch and continual professional development	18
8.	Funding for the course	19
9.	Conclusion	20

Appendices:

1. Examples of marketing materials
2. Introduction power point
3. Hand-outs / power points for each session
4. Data collection information
5. Examples of quotes and evaluations
6. Short film of apprentices

Chapter 1: Overview

As the concept of personalisation has rolled out across the country, there is no doubt that many individuals who need support and their families want choice, control and real quality support. However, despite how good the theory is, the practical reality of making this happen is another story.

If you want something different, you have to do something different.

Caroline Tomlinson, co-founder of In Control and pictured above, has worked extensively in the public and voluntary sectors. She is a strong parent activist for personalisation and her son Joe was one of the first people in the country to benefit from a personal budget. Caroline has a team of ten personal assistants working on a rota basis for her son Joe because of the complexity of his needs. Many local families wanted something similar for their adult children, but simply were struggling to find and retain personal assistants. Those families approached Caroline, who heads up My Life. She has always been known as an ideasí person, and after many discussions Caroline designed a unique but now tried and tested way of finding personal assistants, that individuals and families in Wigan borough and Lancashire are really benefitting from. It is called 'Pathways to Employment' or P2E for short, and is delivered through My Life, a charity based in the North West of England.

My Life is a membership based organisation, with the ethos that those who put something in (the membership fee) will get something out. It is just one good example of how members approached My Life and we designed a solution. The concept is transferable and, through using a social franchise model, we are interested in working with other families, providers, councils and communities to role this out more widely.

The Pathways to Employment methodology was born from listening to people. What people said is that it is very difficult to find personal assistants who are suitable for the role and who have 'stick-ability' in the job. The reality of finding someone from a PA register to deliver quality support is not the way to do this. The families were of the view that if someone is on a register, this poses questions about if they are a suitable worker, after all, most good people tend to be already in work!

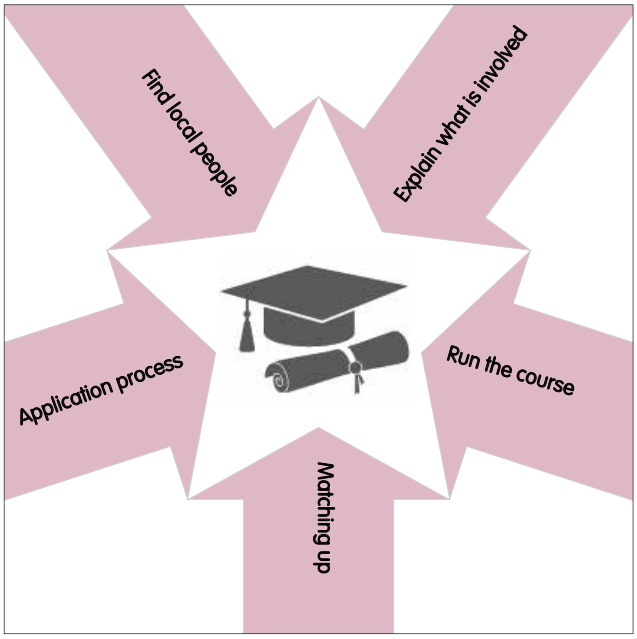
Pathways to Employment takes an asset-based approach to finding personal assistants and quality support staff. We believe that the community holds the answer to quality support; it is just a case of matching the community with the individual, or organisations that are looking for support. It is all about using the concept of connection and conversation, building trust and confidence and then matching people together.

The Pathways to Employment process is delivered in a number of stages:

1) **Finding local people**
We go out into the community and talk with individuals. We have a large presence on social media, so we use all of our connections to bring people together.

2) **Explaining what is involved**
We offer several introductory sessions, which clearly tell people about our expectations, the opportunities, and how to apply to go on the free course.

3) **Application process**
We have a positive attitude application process. This is to enable people to understand that it is a privilege, not a right, to be involved. Applications are invited by creating a poster, which explains the reasons for application and the unique skills and qualities of the person applying.



4) **Running the training course**
We run a five-day course (usually on a Friday or Saturday, over five consecutive weeks). The course is based on values, building self-confidence, teamwork, asset based community development, communication skills and meeting potential employers. We expect students to attend every session, and we chase up references, have conversations with referees, complete disclosure and barring checks and undertake background checks on social media sites. We organise a party for all those who graduate, where we invite family, friends and potential employers.

5) **Matching-up process**
We work on matching those who require staff with those graduates from the course who have the required skills. In most instances, we will provide families with at least three individuals to select from for each post available. We also offer ongoing training and support to both personal assistants and families.

To be able to be matched with a potential personal assistant or support staff, individuals, families and organisations first need to be members of My Life. The cost is £5 per month (or a one-off payment of £60 per year) for families, and £1k per year for provider organisations (organisations tell us it costs at least £1k for each failed recruitment).

Chapter 2: Background to the first P2E Project

Organisational Background

My Life is a community and user-led organisation. It was originally formed in July 2012, initially as a not-for-profit community interest company, and in July 2015 as a charity. It is a small organisation, making a big impact. The management structure includes four Trustees, who oversee the strategy and development of the organisation to ensure it remains true to its core ethos and values, and is financially sound and transparent.

Currently, My Life employs 27 staff and a wide variety of associates, as we believe in creating an entrepreneurial spirit. We have a growing body of self-employed partners who give their skills, gifts and talents for reward. They offer a wide range of opportunities, which My Life promotes, funds and co-ordinates. This enables new and evolving social entrepreneurs to have a platform from which to springboard their ideas. We also have proven entrepreneurs providing My Life with the skills required to run an effective enterprise.

My Life is a membership organisation, with a current membership subscription of over 300 members, which is a diverse mix of individuals with disabilities, family members/carers and organisations. This breaks down into 100 direct payment recipients, 40 self-funders, 70 personal assistants and 90 supporters/ community members and provider organisations.

My Life's main role is to facilitate community connections and help create good lives for people with disabilities. The aim is that by having people well connected, this will combat social isolation and loneliness and keep them healthy, safe and well.

We do this by:

- arranging/facilitating a wide range of opportunities for people to get involved and connect with others, either through events, activities, training and conferences,
- providing support on a practical level to help people put into place good support, either by helping them right a good support plan, employ their own staff or find a care provider,
- working with professionals from all across the sector, to create a joint approach to enable people to have choice and opportunity to lead a good life.

P2E Background

This piece of work came directly from our conversations with parents, carers and personal assistants (both formally and informally).

The My Life Team includes individuals who have direct experience of having a personal budget and employing their own staff directly, and others who have used the provider organisation route. We have worked with individuals and families to really begin to think creatively about what good support for them should look like. The further down the line we have got with this, there is increasing evidence, voiced to us directly by our members and through other groups, that it is difficult to recruit and retain a good personal assistant.

Equally, and increasingly, personal assistants have told us that the role can be very isolating and that they do not have the support structure in place to be able to maintain that role, which often results in them moving employers. There are some good examples of micro-management of issues for those with larger support teams, however this has been sporadic and expensive, therefore not sustainable.

Our solution came from thinking about what we could do to meet the needs of the target groups: individuals with disabilities as the employer (or their guardian as the employer) and PAs. We wanted to create something that gave them the background and firm foundations on which to start off from and the right knowledge and tools to do this. Effective matches between employers and PAs would reduce staff turnover and lead to meaningful support being achieved.

We know that there isn't a 'catch all' approach to this work; each situation is unique. However, we thought we could explore how, by providing different opportunities:

- we could create a better social care workforce,
- provide the individual input when needed, and
- create a sustainable network within which groups of individual employers and personal assistants could begin to support each other and seek their own positive solutions, rather than developing a support structure which just created yet another dependency.

Our idea, funded by Skills for Care, was to deliver specialist training for PAs and employers, such as autism, postural care and epilepsy awareness, but also, as a direct request from PAs, providing work shadowing opportunities. This would give PAs real hands-on experience and personal development opportunities. We also wanted to work with individual employers to explore how pooling of personal budgets could, in reality, work and to test that model out.

The next strand was not just looking at recruitment, it was giving PAs the skills to work independently and think outside of the box, and training them to think about what creative support they could give to the individuals they supported each and every day, such as setting up micro-enterprises.

The third strand was about how to get over the perceived 'shortage' of people wanting to work as PAs, and really bringing the heart back into social care through getting people to see it as a worthwhile career. We came up with the solution of a 'Pathway to Employment', a unique, never done before, values-based training course.

The final strand was about creating a network of support for PAs, which would address the issue of feeling isolated in the role.

The alternative was to create something which offered a one-to-one approach for families. Whilst this has its benefits, it would have been costly to deliver and we didn't feel that it would be as effective. This is because it is the connections we make with each other by participating and communicating that results in people finding their own solutions, rather than relying on an expert service.

We were very clear that we wanted to create something sustainable that could be replicated and shared, that provided the best outcomes for the least investment, and that would always mean empowering individuals to lead it themselves.

Chapter 3: Aims of the initial project

The project directly aimed to address:

- individual employers being unable able to recruit, train and retain Personal Assistants,
- attracting new PAs into the social care workforce,
- the lack of structures/networks to effectively support PAs in their roles,
- providing opportunities for the personal assistant workforce, which is typically disconnected from training opportunities,
- for My Life members, enabling them to see the possibilities and the sorts of meaningful opportunities during the day.

To guage if we were successful, we used the numbers attending the training/activities/events to reinforce our initial identification of the need for the project. The aim was that by the end of the project, the collated evidence and anecdotal evidence from individual employers would show that they now had personal assistants in place in which they felt confident would deliver good support to themselves (as the employer) or to their loved one. Also, that personal assistants would report feeling better supported and more able to carry out their roles with confidence, and enjoy it!

To find out if we had achieved these aims, we intended to use a variety of methods:

- recording numbers of attendants at each training session,
- evaluations completed by participants at the end of each training session, which recorded what impact it had made on them as individuals,
- personal stories/anecdotal feedback and remaining connected with the individuals to see how their lives had changed as a result of the input from the project.

We believe that the outcomes of this project will continue to be seen far beyond the lifetime of the funding.

What we did

Our initial step was to produce a plan of training/ events and promotional opportunities for the lifespan of the funding, which took into account the best times to deliver, coincided with major events throughout the year, and when the specialist trainers were able to deliver their sessions.

We then produced marketing information/leaflets and distributed them far and wide amongst our networks using in a variety of methods (post, email, website, social media, public spaces and via word of mouth). We used networks such as the local authority data hub, which is a list of parents in the borough who have disabled children.

To attract new personal assistants, we aimed to reach community hubs such as libraries, communty centres, shops and the local media.

In the main, the plans for the project remained largely as anticipated. However, the 'Pathway to Employment' training evolved as a result of feedback and more involved working we had carried out with individual employers and provider organisations during the course of the project.

By sharing our ideas with provider organisations, it soon became clear that recruitment for them was also an issue. Our model of taking people through values-based and screening training before they began their recruitment process could actually be more meaningful and allow them to attract great staff too.

From this we began to see an opportunity to open up our membership to offer a 'provider membership' which could provide sustainability for the project beyond the initial investment from Skills for Care. To make this happen, we broadened the length/content of the 'Pathways to Employment' training to accommodate, and thus provide, even greater opportunities for potential Personal Assistants.

The resources for the specialist training were all largely already in place, however the specialist trainers tailored the sessions to meet the needs of the group. For the training, we now have in place plans and materials for a 5-session training 'journey'. The session plans were based around what we already knew from other courses we had previously run, and based on an already very well developed model of Partners in Policymaking.

The sessions included:

- knowledge transfer,
- the new social care model of personalisation, and
- key skills to become a PA, based on values and being person-centred.

We also used practical sessions, such as inviting individual employers to work with the group and sharing their expectations, and leaders from provider organisations.

As a direct result of this project, we would now like to get the training accredited, and would welcome further discussion with Skills for Care about how this might translate into the newly launched 'Certificate in Care'.

Each participant built up a portfolio, which included one-page profiles which they could share with potential employers. To graduate from the course, participants had to attend all five sessions, had assignments to complete in-between sessions, and each received a certificate at the end of the course. Each session has been evaluated and we have had fantastic anecdotal feedback from the evaluations and comment cards. The 'proof in the pudding' will now be to successfully secure employment in the social care workforce for those who graduated from the course, by matching them effectively to individual employers.

Outcomes

To date, we have run the Pathways course ten times, since Autumn 2013. There has been an average of 30 participants on the each course, of which 95% on average complete the full course and 75% have been matched into work (the majority as personal assistants and a few with provider organisations). For those not in work, they have been matched into volunteering roles, or we have worked with them to look at other employment.

The other big outcome is that potential employees are much more confident in selecting the job they want, rather than being flattered to take whatever is offered.

Chapter 4: Business benefit and improvement

My Life's core values and aims are to enable individuals who need support, because of disability or long term health needs, to live a good life. A massive part of being able to achieve that, we believe, is for people to be surrounded by others who know, love or care about them. We can only do that by being part of the community, and more often than not, people who need support rely upon their support staff to be able to access their community.

The difference between good support and bad support can impact massively on how this happens for people, and all too often can still leave them the most excluded amongst the excluded. By listening to our members, we have been able to think about what the best solutions could be to make a real change in the way social care is delivered.

Skills for Care funding the development and delivery of that idea has made an huge impact on our ability to make change happen. It has improved our own credibility and we have been described as 'well ahead of the game' when it comes to finding innovative community solutions. This project has also been able to kick start our way of looking at a sustainability structure for the work are able to do and will ensure longevity in the future.

When we consult our target audiences, in particular those who are new to our organisation, we find that course participants have been spreading the word about what we are aiming to do. This has enabled us to reach more people that could benefit from the My Life offer. As Pathways to Employment develops to the next stage, we will also be able to share with others how we have managed to get unemployed people back into employment, and doing something they love.

Sustainability

My Life is a membership organisation: people pay in to get something out. This means that we are not then reliant upon government funding or grants, and our members can retain autonomy and ownership.

This project has enabled us to extend our membership offer, thereby increasing the sign-up of new members and provider organisations. The provider membership officer brings in a higher cost membership at a more commercial rate, so that we are always able to keep reasonably low the cost to individuals. It also enables us to reinvest ourselves into local community projects of choice, led by our members.

As yet, we haven't reached the membership levels that we need in order to be fully sustainable and no longer require further investment. We would welcome further conversations with Skills for Care and other bodies that could support us in taking the model further and to test it out thoroughly, so that we can then share it with other like-minded organisations across the country.

Scaleability

The model we have been able to develop as a direct result of this funding could be replicated anywhere in the country. We now have a blueprint of how to recruit people to the training, the course content, materials and what have we learned, to be able to develop it further. We could assist other organisations to use our model and, with funding, be the facilitators for that. We are not-for-profit organisation, so any income generated would enable us to continue to deliver the model in our area.

We have developed a model which any community leader/organisation could deliver.

Transferability

As above. This model could work in any setting for personal assistants/care assistants. In fact, we believe the model of recruitment could be used for several jobs within the sector to ensure that we recruit the right people from the offset, as recruitment is such a huge expense for the sector.

We certainly want to develop the concept further, explore how much further we could go with it, and be able to assist as many people as possible. Our current plans are to apply to further funding streams to enable us to invest in the infrastructure needed, and to grow our membership so that this work eventually becomes self-funding. We have already contacted our project manager at Skills for Care and would welcome further dialogue as to how we could make this happen on a wider scale.

Good practice and learning

Most successful:

- Pathways to Employment training - recruiting and retaining good people from the community into the social care workforce and thus achieving great outcomes for individual employers.

Most challenging:

- Running a project with limited infrastructure, balancing all the parties involved and to ensure high quality at all times is a challenge, but something we relish!

Recommendations to other ULOs:

- Listen to your members/beneficiaries.
- Get people involved in the whole process - create a sense of belonging.
- Take people with you that want to do it for themselves.

Chapter 5: Running the course from start to finish

Recruitment

We start with the recruitment of local people which is where the asset based approach begins. We believe the assets to provide high quality care and support already exist within the local community.

The first step is to do an asset map of what is in the local community and we look at where people go to meet, socialise, learn, worship, and are likely to bump into others, etc. Then we visit these places and start having conversations with local people. This includes:

- Supermarkets
- Town centres and villages
- Jobs fairs
- Parent groups
- Schools and colleges
- Community groups
- Churches and mosques
- Local shops

The conversations are about what can you do and 'bring to the party' and recognising individual skills and talents. We talk about transferable skills and engage people in conversation rather than selling. The best people to talk to are those who have experienced the course, or something similar. It is about passion and sharing and describing the potential jobs in a really positive way.

Conversations are simply not enough, you need to give them something to take away with them. We produce flyers that are eye-catching and appealing to ordinary people.

The introductory sessions

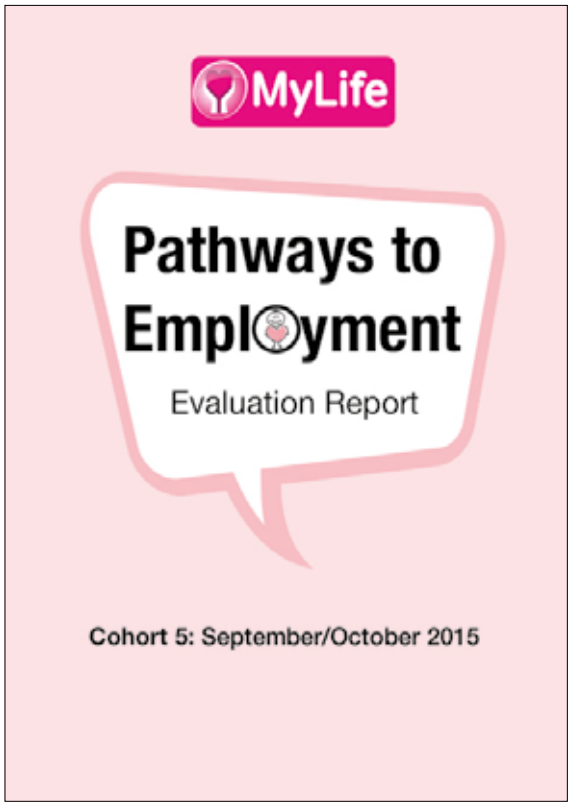
These are an excellent way to engage with people, to answer any questions and to put people at ease. They are about meeting people, making them feel welcome and giving them an insight to our expectations.

At this point, it is important to know the actual dates for the 5-day training course and to make sure you promote them. There must be times as this will be the main issue for individuals to make their mind up.

We talk about the training course including:

- It being a **privilege** and not a **right** to attend. Although it is free to participants, it still costs money to deliver.
- People must commit to all five of the sessions.
- They must arrive on time.
- They must respect each other.
- They should join in as and where then can.
- They must let us know if they cannot attend for any reason.

For the introduction, we use Powerpoint slides, which go through each of the sessions and give an insight into feedback from previous participants.



Applying for the course

Individuals are invited to apply for the course by producing a poster in any format, which describes what gives them a 'fire in their belly' for doing the job. Posters can be created on a computer, or by writing/ pasting objects onto a piece of paper. The format really doesn't matter, it is the 'making an effort' element which is critical.

They are given a deadline to put their posters in before attending the course - usually the week prior to the first session. After social media checks, we then contact those successful to tell them that they have been accepted onto the course, which reiterates the privilege, not a right.

Pathways to Employment
Course Content
Session 1

Title:
Why things are like they are

Aims of the session:

- To initiate the art of listening.
- To give participants an understanding of the disability movement and our past history in the UK of care services.
- To enable participants to understand about personalisation, direct payments and personal budgets, and how the role of a personal assistant is integral to many people with support needs living a good life.
- To develop the individual skills of participants, including listening, self-confidence and working as part of a team.

Content:

- The history of the disabled people's movement.
- A story about how personalisation works in practice.
- Performance coaching, using a variety of different skills including laughter yoga.
- Self-reflection.

Pathways to Employment
Course Content
Session 2

Title:
Person-centred practice

Aims of the session:

- To encourage participants to think in a person-centred way.•
- To meet families looking for PAs and to see what person-centred means to them.
- To develop the individual skills of participants, including listening, self-confidence and working as part of a team.

Content:

- Appreciative Inquiry.
- Morning Routine.
- One page profiles.
- Important to / Important for.
- What works and what doesn't work.
- The David Cohen story.
- Meeting families for a round the table discussion.
- Reflections on learning

Pathways to Employment
Course Content
Session 3

Title:
Asset-based community development, combined with team building

Aims of the session:

- To encourage participants to think about the wider community and what it offers.
- To discover each participant's own skills and gifts and what they can bring to the life of another.
- To stretch individuals out of their comfort zone and experience how to work as a team.
- To discover skills, gifts, connections and leadership.

Content:

- Half full or half empty glass.
- I can, we know someone who can, no-one can.
- Plan a wedding.
- Sharing stories of how it made me feel.
- Team building session.

Pathways to Employment
Course Content
Session 4

Title:
Understanding the service system

Aims of the session:

- To understand about how education, health and the care systems work.
- To meet people working in the statutory sector.
- To meet personal assistants and the people who need support.
- To develop the individual skills of participants, including listening, self-confidence and working as part of a team.

Content:

- From my front room to number 10.
- Discovering the options for continual professional development.
- Developing interviewing and presentation skills.
- Meeting PAs and the people they support for an around the table discussion.

Pathways to Employment
Course Content
Session 5

Title:
Bringing everything together

Aims of the session:

- Keeping people safe.
- Understanding the role of a personal assistant.
- Discovering what makes a great employee.
- Reflecting on what we have learned.
- Graduating and celebrating our time together.

Content:

- Presentation on safeguarding.
- Presentation on HR elements of being a great employee, rights and responsibilities.
- The All Star Circus.
- Sharing the gifts.

Chapter 7: Keeping in touch and continual professional development

Keeping in touch

Once the course is completed, it is important to ensure participants keep in touch. We do this by offering volunteering and shadowing opportunities. This gives individuals the opportunity to build up their practical experience and knowledge base. For all those who have volunteered, we do see them gaining employment much quicker and they are easier to match.

Once the individuals are matched, we keep in touch with them and ensure we contact them every so often - Facebook has been excellent for doing this. Our aim is to do a longevity study in the near future to look at what has worked for PAs and what hasn't. We are really interested in what motivates them and keeps them in the job.

Continuing professional development

My Life has established some good links with learning providers, enabling personal assistants to complete an apprenticeship in health and social care. We have taken 40 individuals through the process, which has enabled them to keep linked up with us.

The mandatory training is a good opportunity to keep them connected.

Wherever possible, we try and source funding to enable PAs to access training courses, such as:

- First Aid
- Food Hygiene
- Safe Moving and Handling
- Health and Safety

We know that different things appeal to different audiences, so we bring in other training providers and provide a free venue, so that we can get a variety of people attending a wide range of courses. This has included courses on:

- Care Act and Children and Families Act
- Advocacy Training
- Asset Based Community Development
- Applying for Benefits
- Being a Good Employer
- Person Centred Practice
- Personal Health Budgets
- Face Painting
- Mindfulness
- Dance classes
- Cookery classes
- Laughter yoga

These are excellent ways of keeping in touch and keeping the relationship with personal assistants.

Chapter 9: Funding for the course

We have accessed a wide variety of funding streams for the course including:

- Skills for Care, to pump-prime the idea.
- The local authority, to assist in building the supply of personal assistants.
- Providers, who also benefit from the course.

Our challenge has been that we have had no continuity to build an infrastructure to support the course run throughout the year. This has meant that we have been unable to continually supply the demand.

We have been doing some work on actual costs for the course and running approximately eight cohorts throughout the year. The cost is likely to be approximately £280 per head, but will offer a strong infrastructure and a continual flow and supply of personal assistants.

As personal health budgets start to be a real option for people, the demand is going to significantly increase. Our proposal going forward will be that for each PA found and matched, we would need to charge the personal budget/personal health budget holder this amount to make the project sustainable.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

The Pathways to Employment course is something that is really hard to capture in a toolkit/workbook. We describe people having to 'feel' the process, as what we want to do is encourage potential PAs to emotionally join up to the concept and see it much more than simply a job.

Our delivery model does work. but after each course we have had to stop, reflect, re-evaluate and learn from the experience. We have had to ensure that what we have discovered is both sustainable and transferable and therefore we continue to evolve the model.

We are now looking at how we can share the model with other organisations through our 'Train the Trainers' programme, which has been funded through Skills for Care. This workbook will go some way to explaining this, but as a continuum we invite organisations to have conversations and to come and get a feel for it in practice.

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