

TAKING THE LONGER VIEW

The Workmate Project, Ballymun

The Workmate Project in Ballymun is an important development in labour market intervention, as it is aimed at a section of the market which is usually neglected in such intervention. The objective of the Project is to assist into employment the most marginalised young job-seekers, those generally excluded from mainstream training.

The Workmate Project was originally set up because of the concern of the Management Committee of the Ballymun Job Centre that the Centre was not able to reach and give effective help to the most marginalised job seekers in Ballymun. There was an awareness that there were many young people of working age who were excluded from the job market. The reason for this exclusion was a combination of factors such as a low level of skills and education, difficult family and personal circumstances. In practice, people without Leaving Certificates are now quite marginalised. Another category of people with special employment problems are those who have social obligations and for whom the lack of adequate support e.g. childcare facilities, make it difficult for them to take up employment. This particularly applies to lone parents, who are predominantly female, and to many young females who are trapped in baby-sitting roles.

The Workmate relationship with the client goes through several stages, though not all clients may follow or complete this precise route:

The aims of the Initial/Exploratory Stage, which lasts one to two months, are to develop a relationship of trust, to explore the client's attitudes and determine their needs, to examine the options open to them, and, in

particular, to assess whether Workmate is an appropriate programme for the client. At the outset clients are offered ongoing counselling, and support.

The aim of the Goal-Setting Stage is to enable the client, over a period of about two months, to set long and short-term goals, in relation to work, education, training and aspects of their personal and social lives.

The Action Plan Stage is aimed at enabling clients to draw up an action plan based on the goals set in the previous stage.

This is followed by an Implementation Stage. In this stage the Workmate staff support the client in carrying through their action plan.

Workmate are anxious that clients would realize their potential wherever possible. Some of the Workmate clients are young people who, because of education and skills deficiencies, have earlier drifted into types of very low-paid employment that they now find unbearable. Realistically, therefore, the participant profile indicates that in many cases the goal of suitable sustainable employment is a long-term option i.e. four to five years, for many of the client group. Because many of the clients are dissatisfied with the kind of work for which they are currently qualified, Workmate staff give active support to clients who wish to further their education, through VTOS, for instance, or training.

It is important to recognise that if more young people in Ballymun are to gain employment, action needs to be taken at a number of different levels to improve the environmental context in which the clients find themselves. Here other agencies have a vital role, and all Workmate can do is apply pressure for change. It is possible that within a different environment many of the clients would progress on their own initiative. Given the particular circumstances of Ballymun they need support at an individual level, which Workmate is good at giving. The real value of the project is its ability to provide the client with individual support, guidance and time. This

type of provision is not available to them from other agencies.

Another important aspect of the project is that it is community-based, that is, it is delivered by a local community organization and not by a formal state agency. This makes it easier to develop a relationship with clients and gain their confidence. The community-based structure also ensures flexibility within the Project.

