

IRG PhD STUDENTSHIP PROPOSAL

Name of proposer: Dr. Stephen Beyer	Date: 30 th November 2007
<p>Title of PhD proposed:</p> <p>The role of supported employment in promoting positive health behaviour of people with learning disabilities at work</p>	
<p>Research question 100 words:</p> <p>To identify:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. what strategies are being used by supported employment agencies to promote positive health of people with learning disabilities at their workplace, and through being employed? ii. what impact have these strategies had on the use made by people with learning disabilities of employer health promotion activities? iii. what impact supported employment and employer strategies have had on this group's healthy behaviour at, and outside work? 	
<p>Justification of the research gap 100 words:</p> <p>People with learning disabilities are being encouraged to enter employment, but may not recognise risk, learn to work safely, or engage in healthy worker initiatives. They are at high risk of poor diet and obesity. They are less likely to volunteer for screening programmes or understand health promotion information. Employment brings independence, but independence can exacerbate unhealthy behaviour, e.g., it is a risk factor for obesity. Supported Employment (SE) agencies help people find, and do a job, but little is known about their role, or success, in helping people to work safely and access employer health promotion initiatives.</p>	
<p>Proposed 1st Supervisor: Dr. Stephen Beyer beyer@cf.ac.uk</p> <p>Proposed 2nd Supervisor: Prof. Michael Kerr</p>	
<p>500 word account of proposed research & methods.</p> <p>SE involves a job coach training a person to do a job in situ. They act as consultants to employers on all aspects of worker inclusion. The role of SE in promoting health needs further exploration; how are people helped to manage health risks at work or facilitated to engage in employer led health promotion initiatives?</p> <p>Methods to answer each research question, subject to a literature review and consultation with IRG colleagues, will be:</p>	

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i) Following briefing and promotion, a web-based structured questionnaire survey of all SE agencies in Britain will be carried out to determine the strategies they use to promote health in the workplace, the health promotion strategies used by the employers they support; and levels of engagement of people with learning disabilities in them. A 100% sample will be drawn from GB representative SE body membership lists, representing approximately 350 agencies.

ii) A purposive sample of 20 agencies will be drawn from the first phase agencies that evidence: risk assessment and training, job adaptation, and cognitive and self-management approaches around health risk; work with employers to develop health promotion; work with employers to include people with learning disabilities in health promotion.

A random sample of 30 people with learning disabilities (with replacement) will be drawn from the case files of these 20 SE agencies. With informed consent by employees, employers representatives will be interviewed on: how they promote safe work behaviour and their wider health promotion activities; how appropriate these are for their employees with learning disabilities; whether, and how, SE agencies have helped people engage in healthy work, and in health promotion; their views on the impact of health promotion activities on their employees, including people with learning disabilities.

iii) With informed consent, the 30 people with learning disabilities will be interviewed (a) about how they learn to work safely in their job and how to live healthily (who helps them, how etc.) and (b) their health status using a simplified structured health screen covering: smoking, knowledge of healthy eating/drinking, exercise, dental treatment and vision testing. Interviews will explore the impact of supported health promotion on their health behaviour at home and work. Family will also be interviewed on the same topic areas, in relation to their relative. A comparison sample will be similarly identified from among employees supported by agencies not evidencing the health promotion criteria and interviewed similarly.

Data from web-questionnaires will be analysed within SPSS. Qualitative interview elements will be digitally taped, transcribed, and themes analysed using the package N6.

The project will provide an opportunity to draw on experience in IRG groups on design of effective health information, factors relating to risk awareness and motivational strategies promoting healthy lifestyle, together with WCLD experience on working with people with learning disabilities. We hope it will provide a platform for subsequent intervention studies to promote better and wider outcomes.