

Leonard –Cheshire Initiatives for an Inclusive Society

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ABSTRACT

Workability/ Jobability

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The Leonard Cheshire Workability Project has been running for 5 years and has proved to be a huge success through which 3000 disabled people have been offered an opportunity to participate in the Information society. Over 1000 people have reported completing the programme and have changed their lives and are now working in some form or continuing with further and higher education.

Jobability, an enhancement of the Workability project offers direct access to employment opportunities for disabled people and employment services as well as allowing on-line CV compilation and auto tracking for suitable jobs.

These programmes have been recognised both in the United Kingdom and abroad as enabling projects for disabled people encouraging independence and self-determination. They have won a number of internationally recognised awards for excellence.

PAPER

The Leonard Cheshire Employment Programme for disabled people

The two cornerstones of modern society are communication, and the sharing of information, both of which have been transformed in recent years through the ICT revolution. However, the revolution has not been an inclusive one. Disabled people have been left behind, resulting in marginalisation and increased social exclusion.

Our aim is to reverse this trend; close the digital divide; promote economic/social independence and well being by allowing disabled people to participate in society through employment, which in turn increases self worth and health by utilising modern technology.

We are unlocking the potential of disabled people to find employment and use the Internet as an accessible media for information.

We achieve this by providing disabled people with Internet-linked PCs in their home, on-line training, advice and support in their search for employment with a dedicated Internet portal; **Jobability.com** for matching abilities with opportunities.

Programme participants/clients are unemployed, disabled people resident in the United Kingdom.

Clients can access local and national services, selecting those suitable to individual needs, including accessing health and welfare information. We enable disabled people to participate fully on-line and on equal terms in today's ICT dominated society.

In the UK, it is still often the case that access to Community Health Services and information relating to disability is often placed in an inaccessible place or in inaccessible formats, much is being done to overcome these difficulties, we address these issues whilst offering pathways to employment leading to a better quality of life and health.

In general disability equals poverty, poverty equals disability, both leading to social exclusion. Employment often unlocks this cycle of disadvantage, bringing not only economic betterment, but also social benefits and an increased sense of wellbeing.

Disabled people are twice as likely as non-disabled people to be unemployed. In the UK, of 2.4Million-disabled people are on state benefits and not in work, nearly 1Million wish to work. Every week 3,000 people leave work because of disability or illness, with 90% of these destined never to return to employment. (Source: Disability Rights Commission UK).

We are breaking down barriers and providing disabled people with skills and support needed to gain employment and access to information and services.

We provide people with the freedom and opportunity to study and work at their own pace on a one to one basis via the Internet.

Clients receive (free of charge) a fully Internet compatible computer, complete with any necessary adaptations and Microsoft software plus a training programme via the Internet; offering ICT courses. Clients have individual tutors for one to one study via distance learning. Clients receive employment/re-employment guidance to match their skills to local opportunities.

We have developed an exciting new concept of locating employment through the creation of a website (**www.jobability.com**) which provides a flexible way of finding work. Jobability.com only lists vacancies from companies committed to enforcing equal opportunities, which look for ABILITY and not disABILITY.

Clients' use acquired ICT experience to explore options of self-employment and home based work, in addition to the more traditional forms of employment.

New initiatives are continually explored to widen opportunities and give clients choice in their future work environment. Future initiatives will compliment existing services and enhance emerging regional development strategies by creating new working partnerships.

The greatest success of the programme is enabling disabled people to participate fully on equal terms in today's ICT dominated society, using the Internet for communication and information. Generally, when an individual feels a valued member of society they also enjoy better health.

Disabled people no longer need to be isolated by their disability or doubly disabled by being excluded from the digital society. Through the programme disabled people become computer literate allowing them the freedom to participate in their local communities; communicating and giving/receiving information and interacting with social and welfare departments as their needs dictate via modern technology.

Additionally, each client will have support through a network of experienced ICT volunteers, who provide one-to-one encouragement, offering assistance and moral support as necessary. Throughout the programme, the client will be interactive with peers, through associated

colleges who are partners within the programme using notice boards and tutorials. This aspect reduces isolation and provides new contacts within a safe environment.

With decreased marginalisation and increased participation in the local community, clients develop a sense of self worth. Whilst it is not quantifiable, clients appear to exhibit signs of better health and are generally more confident and able to cope with everyday life. The programme opens and extends horizons, allowing individuals to compete on a level playing field, which in turn leads to full integration into society.

The origins of the Leonard Cheshire Employment Programme lie in the successful Workability Project that received recognition for its pioneering techniques by being awarded a number of prizes across the UK and Europe*. The programme has been successfully adapted and extended to comply with the bureaucracy created by the devolution of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales from the traditional political model of the UK. The programme now includes **Jobability.com**, which utilises ICT to match skills with economic demand. The programme complies with differences in funding mechanisms of statutory education and employment programmes so clients can take advantage of services provided via their respective Government.

Clients in each country also have greater access to other Leonard Cheshire services including: the Disabled People's Forum, 'care at home' services, respite services and specialist health therapists through their regional office. The programme is developing within each country following a central procedure but taking advantage of local facilities. In this light it can be seen that the programme is transferable to other countries whilst retaining its prime objectives of ensuring self-determination and enabling the disabled person through ICT whilst accepting changes to suit local conditions. A number of other European countries are interested in operating their own programmes.

The programme is an enabling tool offering opportunities to disabled people. The programme has accepted almost 3,500 individuals and has distributed in excess of 3,300 Internet linked computers. We have recorded almost 1,200 positive outcomes to 31/08/2003, with 62% of disabled people entering employment/self employment (full and part-time), and the remaining 38% participating in voluntary work, work experience and further education.

The programme has been an enormous success allowing clients to take greater control over their personal destiny, by opening up increased lines of communication through ICT which otherwise may have been closed to them. This in turn allows individuals to become more aware and more interactive with health and social welfare decisions, which directly affect their daily lives.

The programme aims to continue and adapt to socio-economic dictates to meet technological advances in society and more importantly the ever-changing needs of disabled people.

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AWARDS

eWeek 2001, Brussels, October 2001

ICT02 Wales, Newport, April 2002

fforwm Annual Awards 2002, finalist, Cardiff May 2002

eWeek 2002, Paris, September 2002

Stockholm Challenge, finalist, Sweden October 2002,

London, Computing Awards for Excellence 2003, finalist