Supported Employment

Securing Opportunities in Challenging Times

ANNUAL REPORT 2008
Foreword

The Board of the Midland Employment Support Agency is delighted to publish its 2008 report. We all know that we face a period of economic turmoil with increasing unemployment and limited resources to meet the various challenges. For people with disabilities who want to obtain employment in this environment the challenge is immense. However we believe that supported employment has played a vital role, and will continue to be critical, in both maintaining and increasing the number of people with disabilities in gainful and meaningful employment. We can face down the challenges presented and look forward with confidence to 2009.

Supported Employment offers people individualised supports in establishing a foothold in the employment market. Moreover it offers timely and crucial help to overcome the many obstacles people with disabilities meet while in employment.

Everybody is a winner with supported employment. People with disabilities feel that they are making their contribution and are moving out of the poverty trap. Employers and colleagues gain by having a more diverse workforce with committed employees and society gains both economically and socially by focussing on inclusiveness and integration.

The Board wish to acknowledge the support of FÁS in providing the core funding for MESA’s services. Close working relationships have been forged locally throughout the four midland counties with both employment and community services.

No service can exist without the skills and experience of qualified staff. MESA is fortunate in having a highly committed and dedicated team of Employment Officers and administrative staff to carry out its work within communities.

MESA also recognises the role of a host of other statutory bodies and non governmental organisations in providing support, advice and practical facilities.

Supported employment is only possible when employers are open and willing to give people the opportunity to fully participate in a working environment and employers in the midlands both large and small have not been found wanting in this regard. The Board of MESA would like to formally acknowledge the support, assistance and cooperation we receive daily from the many employers and co workers in a range of different businesses.

I would like to make particular mention here of MESA’s Co-ordinator, Mr Tony Reilly, for his continuing commitment and dedication beyond the call of duty to Supported Employment in the Midlands.

On Behalf of the Board of Directors of MESA

Adrian Stewart, Board Chairman
Company Mission

“MESA supports people with disabilities into paid employment while providing effective solutions to employers’ staffing needs.”

The Company exists to support people with disabilities into paid employment while providing effective solutions to employers’ staffing needs. MESA is funded through FÁS to deliver the National Supported Employment Programme throughout the counties of Laois, Offaly, Longford & Westmeath.

Introduction

2008 was a year during which MESA demonstrated its ability to respond to the changes and challenges presented from both inside and outside the organisation. Tightening labour markets and a realignment of staffing numbers saw the entire MESA team adapt quickly and identify new approaches in delivering a quality Supported Employment service to job seekers with disabilities throughout the midlands. Throughout the year MESA delivered the National Supported Employment programme to 290 with a total of 96 new service users presenting to our service via the FÁS Gateway system. MESA will continue to build on the excellent achievements to date and strive to ensure that the progress made in supporting job seekers with disabilities to secure and maintain mainstream employment are not eroded in the current climate.

I would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the entire MESA team who continue to show great professionalism and resolve in these challenging times.

During 2008 MESA continued to forge links with employers throughout the midlands. These relationships with large and small, public and private employers are instrumental in securing and maintaining ongoing successful placements for our service users. Our current database has over 500 employers who receive regular contact from the Employment Officers. To further strengthen these links MESA developed and launched our new company Newsletter at a function in Tullamore where FÁS, local employers and service providers were in attendance. Furthermore, our website is an outstanding resource for job seekers and employers with the FAQ’s and employer/employee testimonials proving very popular. Further changes to the service are imminent on foot of the recently completed WRC evaluation entitled “Review on the Operation and Effectiveness of the Supported Employment Programme.” MESA is supportive of the recommendations and we welcome the reduction in working hour criteria from 18 hours per week to 8 hours per week which we feel will make the service accessible to a greater number of job seekers with disabilities.

Finally, I would like to thank MESA’s Board of Directors who give generously of their time, knowledge and expertise in guiding the company to developing its service to such a high standard.

Tony Reilly
Co-ordinator
Midland Employment Support Agency Ltd.
Target Area

In 2008, MESA provided a service in the counties of Laois, Offaly, Longford and Westmeath. Details of office locations are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOWN</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TULLAMORE</td>
<td>Unit 53, 1st Floor, Bridge Centre, Tullamore, Co. Offaly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MULLINGAR</td>
<td>C/o Friary House, Friars Mill Road, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOUNTMELlick</td>
<td>C/o Mountmellick Development Association, Irishtown, Mountmellick, Co. Laois</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LONGFORD</td>
<td>C/o Dawn Learning Centre, Grafton Court, Longford, Co. Longford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATHLONE</td>
<td>C/o Community Training Centre, Lyster Street, Athlone, Co. Westmeath</td>
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Supported Employment

“Facilitating the integration of people with disabilities into paid employment in the open labour market by providing the appropriate supports.”

As a strategy for enabling people with disabilities to access open employment, Supported Employment has been very successful in achieving its objectives. While the National Programme has been adapted from the traditional model, the following key principles remain common to both models:

- Integration
- Paid employment
- Placements in the open labour market
- Support available throughout entire process

Supported Employment has a structured process, which involves the following steps:

- Vocational Profiling/Job Matching
- Job Finding
- Job Analysis
- On the job training/coaching
- Follow up

While the traditional model of Supported Employment was initially developed for people with learning difficulties, the National Programme has demonstrated that the service can successfully be applied to all disability groups.

Supported Employment Review

A comprehensive review of the Operation and Effectiveness of the National Supported Employment Programme was undertaken and completed in 2008 by WRC consultants.
This report is available in full to download from the FÁS website. This in depth report identifies the following key areas under which recommendations are made:

1. Develop Operational Clarity in respect of the target group for the SEP and develop appropriated Assessment Procedures.
2. Identify and document operational procedures in respect of key areas of programme implementation.
3. Develop a national identity for the Supported Employment programme and devise and implement a marketing strategy for the programme.

The Supported Employment Directors Forum in collaboration with FÁS have established a sub group for each of the above and each group is tasked with devising a strategy and action plans for the implementation of the recommendations. All sub groups have representation from all the key stakeholders involved in the delivery of the National Supported Employment Programme.

MESA was delighted, when asked by FÁS, to play an important role in helping to develop a nationwide marketing strategy as part of the remit of the National Identity sub-group.

Referrals

While participants of the National Programme must come through the FÁS Gateway system, a considerable amount of time was spent introducing and promoting MESA’s service and the concept of Supported Employment, to the relevant agencies, community groups and organisations in the Midlands. The working relationship that exists between MESA Employment Officers, FÁS Employment Service’s staff and Disability Service Providers is crucial to the success of the programme. Sharing of information, expertise and consultation between the organisations, has ensured that the end user receives a professional service in an effective and efficient manner. This approach had a significant impact on the numbers of people presenting to MESA’s service in 2008, as the following statistics verify.

REFERRAL SOURCES – 2008

** Total Referrals for National Programme in 2008 = 96**

The 18% “Other” category include referrals from A.P.T., CICs, NCBI, Deaf Hear.
Pilot Supported Employment Programme

In 2006, MESA in partnership with Aontacht Phobail Teoranta, set up a Pilot Supported Employment Programme in response to a demand for a service from job seekers with disabilities who wished to work but required significant support to do so.

Service users would be persons with a disability, in transition, who do not wish to engage in further training programmes or are no longer eligible, who wish to work but would need support to do so, do not meet the criteria for the National Supported Employment Programme but are deemed to have the potential to progress to employment after an intervention involving more continuous intensive support.

Independent Evaluation of Pilot Programme

An independent review of MESA’s pilot programme was carried out in 2008 and revealed the following.

Findings from the Evaluation

Of the twenty five individuals who accessed the service, eighteen job seekers, their families and employers were interviewed in person or by telephone leading to forty one participants in total. Feedback from job seekers showed that of current service users 72.7% are employed and 27.3% are still in the job seeking stage. Only two service users are still in receipt of on site support with two more progressing to the National Supported Employment Programme. Benefits of employment on service user’s quality of life were identified and these included an increase in confidence and personal appearance,
an increase in motivation/energy levels and time spent out of the house, the pride of having a job, an improvement in physical and psychological health, an increase in work skills, extra money and the opportunity to meet more people.

Support needs were identified also and these included lack of appropriate work attitudes, low levels of marketable skills, inability to make an informed decision regarding an appropriate career, poor literacy levels, lack of confidence, motivation issues, learning tasks and retaining learning, and transport barriers. Support needs were addressed through participation in local jobs clubs, on site job coaching, one to one support, vocational profiling, participating in job sampling placements, attending local literacy programmes and regular job coach contact with the service user and the employer.

Feedback from employers showed that all stated they were happy with their employee’s performance. Benefits on the workplace of employing an employee with a disability were identified and included creating an awareness of disability, promoting the image of the company as an equal opportunity employer, promoting the image of the company as demonstrating community responsibility and introducing a more caring attitude in the workplace. Employers identified barriers to employing individuals with a disability and these included fear of the unknown, fear of losing customers if the job did not work out, the perception that it would create an extra effort and time demand for employers, and a poor perception of service user’s ability. Barriers were addressed through work placements, on site training, on-going support and advice.

Conclusion

Results from the evaluation show that although service users presented with high support needs, these support needs decreased over time and lead to high employment rates. Also the project has been successful in progressing employees onto the National Programme. This project has introduced individuals to the world of work that otherwise would never have that opportunity. The majority of service users believed they would not find a job without the support of MESA and all participants stated they would like to see this service continued and would recommend it to others. A waiting list of twelve individuals already exists although the service has not been publicised. In conclusion, MESA’s Pilot Project has demonstrated itself as a successful and a cost effective Supported Employment service. In conclusion, this evaluation proposes for the continuation of this service in its own right, or integrated as part of the mainstream programme.

MESA’s pilot programme finished in 2008 and the full evaluation report (see www.mesa4.com) along with a funding proposal was disseminated to a number of relevant organisations and statutory bodies.
Company Promotion/Networking

MESA put significant effort and time into developing effective networks in order to promote a quality supported employment service. MESA developed a database of employers and in 2008 MESA Employment Officers met with and promoted its service to 410 employers in the midlands area. While the Company has established local networks with organisations like FÁS Employment and Community Services, Disability Service Providers (including Mental Health Services), DSFA, Community Partnerships and various employer groups, MESA also has formal representation on:

- The National Co-ordinators’ Forum.
- Midlands Chambers of Commerce
- Athlone Mental Health Association
- National Job Shadow Committee
- PwDI

Participation in the above has enabled MESA to contribute to the development of best practice in Supported Employment and to address issues in order to remove the barriers to employment for people with disabilities. Establishing and developing effective networks encourages, promotes and supports MESA in delivering a quality service to our customers in an effective/efficient manner. A good interagency working relationship has assisted MESA in:

- Identifying potential referrals
- Identifying employment opportunities
- Sharing of information
- Identifying areas of best practice (Nationally & Internationally)
- Providing the best possible service for the end user

(L-R) Kevin Macken, Assistant Manager FÁS, with FÁS Staff and Tony Reilly, Co-Ordinator, MESA, at the launch of MESA Newsletter and Annual Report.

(L-R) Tony Reilly, Co-ordinator MESA with Hugh Byrne, Byrne, Casey & Associates and Tony Corry, MESA Board of Directors.
In addition, MESA undertook the following promotional activities to raise awareness of its service:

- Circulated MESA’s promotional literature and delivered presentations to relevant agencies and organisations throughout the midlands.
- Delivered Ireland’s first National Job Shadow Day throughout the midlands, which provided a large number of job seekers with the opportunity to observe competent employees going about their daily duties in a variety of work settings.
- MESA’s service featured in several local newspapers as a result of Job Shadow Day.
- Further developed our user friendly website www.mesa4.com
- Participated in Chamber of Commerce events in the midlands including “speed networking” events in Tullamore, Athlone and Mullingar.
- Continued to drive the actions identified in a research project as part of a disability sub-group, which examined employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Provided Information Stands at C.I.C. sponsored Disability Awareness Days across the midlands.

Future Promotion

It is planned to continue to promote our service by:

- Continuing to promote and further develop links with local employer groups – Chambers of Commerce, Lions Clubs etc.
- Continuing with awareness raising employer events;
- Identifying and partaking in relevant Disability/Employment events/publications
- Further development of our website, which will be updated on a regular basis.
- Further development of our good working relationship with employers and local media as a result of the links made during Job Shadow, Employer Quiz Nights etc.
Staff Training and Development

At MESA, we endeavour to provide quality and relevant training for our staff to assist them in providing the best possible service for our clients. MESA identifies staff training needs through annual performance review meetings and in line with our policy on training and development and limited training budget, we endeavour to support all staff in their professional development.

In 2008, all MESA staff received training in Positive Psychology and Marketing. This training was funded by FÁS and delivered by Shane Martin and Eoin Brawn.

A number of training workshops were held throughout the year including Wellness and Recovery, ASIST-(Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) and Mental Health Training. A very successful team building day was enjoyed by all in Petersburg, Co. Galway.

In addition MESA supported staff in other training programmes including Applied Addiction Studies and Introduction to Psychology.

Achievements

In 2008, MESA with a team of 6 Employment Officers, achieved the following:

- Delivered the National Supported Employment Programme to 290 participants.
- Through our pilot Supported Employment programme provided a service to 18 individuals with more significant support needs.
- Demonstrated that the programme could successfully be applied to all disability categories.
- Sourced 44 new mainstream jobs which were full or part time, based on participants’ wishes and/or abilities.
- Supported 86 participants in maintaining and developing their placements.
- Sourced a total of 96 new referrals who subsequently presented to MESA, via the FÁS Gateway system.
EMPLOYMENT CATEGORIES – 2008

- Clerical/Admin: 25%
- Catering: 9%
- Production/Construction: 9%
- Retail/Sales: 21%
- Cleaning: 2%
- Security: 34%

IN EMPLOYMENT DISABILITY CATEGORIES – 2008

- Mental Health: 42%
- Physical/Sensory: 39%
- Intellectual: 17%
- Other/Unknown: 2%
Job Shadow

MESA hosted an outstanding job shadow day in April, with widespread participation across the midlands. A wide range of dream jobs were incorporated ranging from: admin roles, supermarket, security, clerical, horticulture, amenity maintenance, etc. Job Shadow gives people with disabilities an opportunity to “shadow” or observe a workplace employee as they go through a normal day at work.

Participating in Ireland’s first Job Shadow Day a number of local employers found that they had the opportunity to gain greater understanding of different disabilities as well as realising that job seekers with disabilities are definitely worth consideration when recruiting. Speaking to the local media Tony Reilly, National Job Shadow Chairperson, said “it was also a great opportunity for job seekers with disabilities to learn about potential job opportunities and gain greater insight around job requirements and employer expectations.” Tony went on to say “that while Job Shadow was a National one day event delivered around the country by various service providers, the idea originated with local company, MESA.”

Soccer pundit John Giles, supporter of MESA’s Job Shadow Day: “This excellent service cannot work without employers being open to considering a person’s ability to do the job. Job Shadow will serve to highlight this and help address some of the concerns around employing a person with a disability”. John firmly believes “It’s all about employability”.

Tony Reilly finished by saying he would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who took part in Ireland’s first Job Shadow Day especially employers and job seekers with disabilities. He also acknowledged the continued support that MESA enjoys from current employers.

For further details on MESA’s service and Job Shadow, visit www.mesa4.com
Challenges for the Future

- Maintaining and further developing good working relationships with all employers
- Securing employment opportunities.
- Secure FÁS’s Quality Standard Award – Excellence Through People
- Raising awareness of Supported Employment among all stakeholders
- Attracting referrals
- Securing ongoing funding
- Ensuring a quality service through ongoing review and feedback
- Lobbying for an effective employer incentive package to encourage the employment of people with disabilities
- Continue to build on the success of the Job Shadow Day
- Identifying and promoting good practice in the delivery of Supported Employment.
- Endeavour to provide MESA staff with the best development opportunities required for delivering a quality service
Board of Directors

Mr. Adrian Stewart Chairperson
Area Manager (National Learning Network Tullamore)

Mr. Tony Corry Secretary
Acting Chief Executive Officer (APT)

Mr. Joseph Reilly
Manager Day Services (HSE Midland Area)

Mr. Liam O’Callaghan
General Manager (Community Care HSE)

Ms. Susan Ryan
Manager, Citizens Information Centre

Mr. Fergal Boland
Finance Manager (APT)

Mr. Daniel Monaghan
Regional Manager (Sisters of Charity of Jesus & Mary)

Staff Members

Unit 53, 1st Floor, Bridge Centre, Tullamore, Co. Offaly

Tony Reilly Project Co-ordinator
Caroline Lynch Employment Officer
Aoife Buggy Employment Officer
Niamh Kelly Administration/Support
Deirdre Guckian Administration/Support

C/o Athlone Community Training Workshop,
Lyster Street, Athlone, Co. Westmeath
Rosemarie O’Brien Employment Officer
Joan Halpin-Hall Employment Officer

C/o Friary House, Friars Mill Road, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath
Wanda Shaw Employment Officer
Daniel O’Reilly Employment Officer

C/o Mountmellick Development Association, Irishtown,
Mountmellick, Co. Laois
Jacqueline Berney Employment Officer

C/o Dawn Learning Centre, Grafton Court, Longford
Brenda Tallon Employment Officer

Pilot Programme
Helen Casey Employment Officer
Edel Harte Employment Officer
Midland Employment Support Agency Ltd.
Delivering supported employment in Laois, Offaly, Longford and Westmeath

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