

# SYNJOB Thematic Group Report Information Delivery Models

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### Conclusive Summary

## **Information Delivery Thematic Group : Aims and Objectives**

The Information thematic group is one of number set up by the SYNJOB Transnational Partnership. The group recognises the crucial role good information plays in the individual support, recruitment and employment process. It also recognises that information is only one element in delivering more effective employment support services to disabled people and employers. However the thematic group members have concentrated on the following aim –

### **Main Thematic Group Aim**

To gain a better understanding and knowledge of the issues and barriers facing disabled people, employers and support professionals / operators in accessing the information they need. This aim is supported by a number of key working objectives, namely -

#### **Objective 1**

- to explore the barriers that prevent the stated audiences from obtaining better targeted and accessible information

#### **Objective 2**

- to investigate specific initiatives that exhibit an innovative or different approach to overcoming these barriers

#### **Objective 3**

- to identify good practice elements in these initiatives that are transferable between organisations and the situations within different member states

#### **Objective 4**

- to complement and inform the other thematic group activity undertaken by the SYNJOB Transnational Partnership

# **1 The Crucial Role of Good Information and Delivery**

## **1.1 Information and the Employment Process**

We live in the information age, a commercial, educational and leisure environment where information is readily available and increasingly easy to access. There is not a significant area of human endeavour which remains untouched by the on-going revolution in information technology and delivery. Consequently (as part of the selection process for thematic working), the member organisations of the SYNJOB Partnership were interested in the role of information, and how good information creation, management, promotion and delivery could positively influence the employment process for people with disabilities.

So what role can better and more targeted information play? More and better information on its own cannot change the current employment situation for many disabled people. However, it has a significant and complementary role in a number of key areas, namely -

### **Attitudes to Disability**

- challenging negative attitudes in society as a whole about disabled people
- influencing employers attitudes to the recruitment, development and retention of disabled people
- promoting the employment potential of disabled people
- raising awareness of disability issues in the workplace

### **Empowering People with Disabilities**

- raising the employment aspirations and expectations of people with disabilities, their families and carers
- raising awareness and knowledge of employment advice and support services
- increasing access to and usage of support services
- promoting employment as a realistic and achievable option

### **Informing Support Professionals / Operators**

- promoting exchange and sharing of resources between operators
- assisting the professional development of operators
- promoting best practice models and shared quality standards in the delivery of services
- assisting the continuous improvement of services
- raising awareness and knowledge of complimentary services
- promoting a positive and professional image for the service sector to disabled people and employers

### **Influencing Future Policy and Service Development**

- informing on national and regional policy development and implementation
- informing on support service provision, development and implementation

## 1.2 The Employment Equation – Meeting different Information Needs

Obviously, there are three players in the employment equation, all with different but inter-related information needs. An analysis and understanding of these needs is important in developing a coherent and cohesive system of information delivery.

### People with Disabilities

For many people with disabilities, the pathway into employment (or even retaining employment) is a complex and difficult process. There are many factors which a disabled person must take into account when considering employment, including –

- the availability and nature of job vacancies
- the skills and abilities required
- the recruitment process itself e.g. the interview
- the location of and transportation to work
- the culture of the employer organisation and its management and staff
- the suitability of the work environment
- the level of payment and impact of the job on social benefits
- the nature and level of support available in the workplace
- the availability of training and development support in the job

This list is not conclusive, but indicates a complicated decision making process which requires a range of different types of information. The acknowledged complexity of this decision making process places difficult responsibilities on information providers e.g. support operators.

### Employers

Employers have an altogether different agenda. Recruitment is a core business activity, defining and replenishing the human resource in any given organisation. Employee training and personal development is also a related core activity, impacting on the longer term success of the business. There is also the culture of the organisation and the nature and design of the work environment, which further define recruitment and staff development activity. When employing a disabled person or retaining a current disabled person, the employer also has specific information needs, including –

- information on the job applicant
- the recruitment process e.g. interview needs
- the availability of workplace support
- the availability of financial support
- the suitability of the workplace e.g. in terms of access
- the impact of specific disabilities in the workplace
- awareness of other employees
- availability of training and development support

Essentially, the employer needs information to help assess the suitability of the applicant (as with taking on any new employee) and what their needs will be over the future period of employment, and, how this will impact on the organisation.

## **Support Professionals / Operators**

Employment support professionals or operators occupy a pivotal position, working with both disabled people and employers. These operators address the information needs of these two diverse groups, whilst also providing professional information to each other. This is an enormously complex responsibility, often undertaken with quite limited resources and support. This is compounded by the diverse service structures in which many operators work. Their information needs include –

- an accurate knowledge of a specific and / or range of disabilities
- information on disabled clients and their employment needs
- information on the services (and their availability) delivered by their own organisation (sometimes quite difficult in a large organisation)
- information on services delivered by other organisations
- information on other key operators and what they do
- information on funding
- information on the local labour market
- information on specific employers and their recruitment needs

Again this list is not comprehensive, but confirms the central role of operators in matching the needs of both disabled people seeking employment and employers.

### **1.3 Problems experienced in getting Good Quality, Needs Based Information**

What each of these key players share are problems in getting good, relevant and accessible information. Many of the problems are similar in nature and emanate from the very complex and diverse nature of the support structure ( a feature common to most of the Community member states). For each of the key information user groups, the barriers can be quantified as follows -

#### **People with Disabilities**

- the complex nature of the support system makes it difficult to identify the right organisation who can provide assistance
- the large number of different organisations with different responsibilities makes it hard to assess the specific services provided by each organisation
- in many cases disabled people are not involved in the design, management and delivery of information services i.e. they do not meet the needs of users
- there is a lack of co-operation between agencies who often have little knowledge of what other services provide
- information needs to be regularly updated, easy to understand and in accessible formats i.e. to a recognised national standard
- service operators delivering information need to be adequately trained
- information needs to be delivered in a complete form and in adequate time for people to use it
- information providers need to be more proactive, promoting their service to potential users
- information itself is not enough, it must be backed up by adequate counselling and advice

#### **Employers**

- the complex nature of the support system makes it difficult to identify the right organisation who can provide assistance

- there is often no straightforward way of accessing information with employers finding themselves passed from one organisation to another for advice
- there appears to be little evidence of co-operation between agencies and poor shared knowledge of what other agencies can provide
- approaches to employers from support agencies seem uncoordinated
- information is often incomplete and fragmented
- information provided is often unclear and poorly produced / presented
- support agencies are not proactive in promoting their services
- there is difficulty in identifying 'job ready' candidates for vacancies
- employers are often unaware of their responsibilities and obligations in terms of current disability and employment legislation i.e. what they are unaware of they ignore

### **Support Professionals / Operators**

- there is a lack of shared knowledge about what different support services and organisations do and provide
- there is often a perceived lack of trust between different organisations who are competing with each other for limited funds and resources
- a lack of funding and resources prevents organisations delivering information at the level and quality they would desire
- target led outcomes from funding bodies often conflict with the value base of the organisation, compromising delivery
- uncoordinated and often unprofessional approaches to marketing, particularly to employers
- there is a lack of expertise in design of information materials, marketing and promotion
- there is a lack of resources and training to utilise new methods of delivery e.g. IT applications and the Internet

In summary to Section 1, there are many problems to overcome and no single solution to solve them. Many of the perceived problems point to –

- improved inter-agency partnership working
- new approaches to working with / developing partnerships with employers
- using new technology applications more effectively
- increased user involvement in the design, development and delivery of information services

As the work of this particular thematic group progressed, these themes presented themselves on an increasingly regular basis as the key areas of activity where genuine improvement in information provision and delivery could be effected.

## **2 Group Methodology: Identifying a Shared Information Landscape**

### **2.1 Researching the SYNJOB Partners' National Contexts**

Across the European Economic Community, people with disabilities face levels of exclusion from the labour market significantly in excess of average national and regional unemployment rates. For example in the UK, a person with a disability is 2.5 times more likely to be unemployed than a non-disabled counterpart. Within specific geographical areas e.g. of urban deprivation or within specific types of disability e.g. learning disability or mental health problems, the unemployment rate experienced can be significantly higher again. The most significant reason for this remains employers continuing reluctance to recruit disabled people – a feature of virtually every national labour market within the Community. This reluctance can also be attributed to a number of common factors (largely covered in Section 1), including –

- on-going prejudice and discrimination
- lack of knowledge about specific disabilities and their impact in the workplace
- lack of awareness about the needs and potential of people with disabilities
- lack of knowledge about support available to assist with recruitment and employment
- ineffective national employment legislation which protects the rights of people with disabilities

The combination of these and other factors place the recruitment of people with disabilities fairly low on the priority list of many commercial enterprises across the community. Disability and employment legislation in the member states of the Community has not alleviated this situation. Legislative approaches undertaken have varied between set employment quotas e.g. France and Italy through to more anti-discriminatory based approaches e.g. the UK. What is evident is that governments have largely failed to give effective support and encouragement to the employment aspirations of people with disabilities.

The support services available to assist disabled to find and maintain employment have similarly suffered because of ineffective legislation, and the low level of priority placed by many governments on this area of work. ESF funded activity has in many cases supplemented under resourced national programmes as governments and regional authorities have struggled to provide and maintain adequate services. As one area of disability and employment activity, information provision has been poorly planned at a strategic level and consequently ineffectively delivered at a regional and local level.

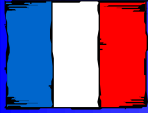
To further define and refine our activity, the members of this SYNJOB Thematic Group undertook an analysis of information delivery activity in their national / regional situations. The analysis looked at a number of key areas including –

- range and coverage of information services
- promotion and level of awareness of services
- accessibility of information and services
- financial support for information services
- gaps in and barriers to delivering good information
- user involvement in service design and delivery
- partnership working between service providers
- working with employers
- an assessment of provision and future needs

The major themes of this analysis can be summarised in the table below –



<b>Belgium (Charleroi) – SYNJOB Partner, AWIPH</b>	
Range & Coverage of Information Services	Mix of statutory and non-governmental / non-profit agencies. Regional autonomy with co-ordinating agency (AWIPH). Associations covering specific disabilities deliver information which is relevant to that disability. Other major services are Carrefours Formation and Forem which deal with employment and training related matters.
Promotion & Level of Awareness of Services	Regional network of offices supported by the AWIPH and also block funding to disabled associations. Regional offices also promote to disabled people and employers. Set time available on state and private TV stations for information and promotional slots about disability.
Accessibility of Information Services	Location of 7 offices throughout the Walloon region gives geographical accessibility. The facilities of the central administration are completely accessible. Accessible documents are produced in braille and Internet site has optimised version for people with visual impairments. Promotional materials are accessible where possible e.g. video / film material with subtitles for people with hearing impairments.
Financial Support for Information Services	Regional government supports the AWIPH umbrella organisation and this organisation has a dedicated communication section and associated budget.
Gaps in and Barriers to Good Information Delivery	Poor information for and promotion to employers. Poor co-operation between agencies. Better training for operators in terms of marketing and salesmanship. More 'prospecting' activities aimed at employers are required which will raise employer awareness of disability issues in the workplace.
User Involvement in Design and Delivery	Some co-operation with associations of disabled people, mainly through the AWIPH and the Ministry of Welfare. The level of this activity could be substantially improved. There is representation from disabled people in various advisory groups to the regional Walloon government.
Partnership Working between Service Providers	Constant and effective partnerships are not in place between information providers. These partnerships are necessary.
Working with Employers	A TV / Media campaign has been aimed employers but this has not been backed up by activity and involvement from support operators. More integrated promotional and marketing activity is required which involves operators working directly with employers.
Assessment of Provision & Future Needs	The main weakness is contact with employers. More marketing activity aimed at employers is required. This should be delivered by support operators in a more professional and business like manner. More effective co-operation between organisations (public and private) is required. Other best practice approaches from member states should also be applied which meet specific Belgian / regional needs.



<b>France (Lyon) – SYNJOB Partner, L'ADAPT &amp; CREA Rhône Alpes</b>	
Range & Coverage of Information Services	A range of organisations with different functions and responsibilities including ADIPSH, ANPE (Agence Nationale pour l'Emploi), OHE and the Mission Locale service. An example of specific function is OHE which targets the disabled workforce, employers and related organisations whereas the Mission Locale works on a local level, targeting disabled people under the age of 26. These agencies link in and provide information on other major services provided by COTOREP and AGEFIPH etc.
Promotion & Level of Awareness of Services	Each organisation providing information can direct people to other organisations through a combination of individual counselling and advice, supported by specific information documents e.g. the ADIPSH produces a range of information packs targeted at different sectors including service users, employers, carers etc. There is information available to meet the needs of every constituent group in the employment process.
Accessibility of Information Services	A variety of delivery methods are used including point of contact personalised advice, telephone helpline, newsletters and publications, promotional service focused material, through electronic media and website etc.
Financial Support for Information Services	A variety of funding sources support information provision including the national and regional Employment Services, AGEFIPH, FSE and some sponsorship from national enterprises e.g. the electricity and gas industries. There is no specific funding allocated to the Mission Locales.
Gaps in and Barriers to Good Information Delivery	Information available is in many cases not disability specific. The dissemination of information is not cost effective. There is not enough time or sufficient human resources to deliver information effectively. Inter-agency collaboration is poor and there is also not enough free or subsidised media coverage. In terms of the Mission Locales, there is a lack of financial support.
User Involvement in Design and Delivery	Users of information services are contacted in relation to the monitoring and evaluation of services e.g. ANPE, but this is not consistent across all the services. There is consultation in the content and development of information packs e.g. by ADIPSH.
Partnership Working between Service Providers	There are many informal partnerships between organisations providing information. However, the level of co-operation could be improved and initiatives like the Employment week assist with the development of better partnership working.
Working with Employers	There is a need for better targeting of employers, so that their needs are served more efficiently. There is partnership between ANPE, ADIPSH and OHE in this area of activity, gaining information on specific problems experienced by employers in employing disabled people.
Assessment of Provision & Future Needs	Better co-ordination and liaison between information providers is required. The role of each organisation needs to be clarified more clearly. In the case of the Mission Locales, they receive insufficient information on employment related services and this causes a gap in the delivery of their own services. This could be addressed by better partnership working.



<b>Germany (Hattingen) – SYNJOB Partner, BWH</b>	
Range & Coverage of Information Services	Mix of local government organisations, welfare benefits organisations and national Labour Office.
Promotion & Level of Awareness of Services	All services are public or governmental with good general awareness with the public. No direct or regular Media access is used to promote services.
Accessibility of Information Services	Generally accessible and situated in town centres / public buildings. Little use of IT or Website mechanisms in information delivery.
Financial Support for Information Services	All services funded through public purse. Insufficient sharing of resources leads to wastage.
Gaps in and Barriers to Good Information Delivery	Poor co-operation between agencies. Little contact with employers. No direct linkages between disabled people and employers.
User Involvement in Design and Delivery	No consultation mechanisms are known.
Partnership Working between Service Providers	Co-operation levels are generally poor, with only selected examples at a local community level.
Working with Employers	No directed activity by the main information agencies towards employers.
Assessment of Provision & Future Needs	Information provided by different agencies is identical . Duplication and waste of resources exists. Too much information is redundant with best practice ignored in publication and presentation



<b>Italy (Albano, Roma) – SYNJOB Partner, Spazio Lavoro</b>	
Range & Coverage of Information Services	District Departments and Regional Agencies for Employment, which fall under the control of the Ministry of Labour. Other information through Trade Unions e.g. CGIL and at a more local level, non-profit organisations e.g. co-operatives and associations of disabled people.
Promotion & Level of Awareness of Services	The important employment support agencies (mainly public bodies) are well known through various written media and TV. Recent TV coverage has highlighted disabled people in employment and also the social economy. It is more difficult to publicise smaller local organisations and associations of disabled people. The rise of telematic activity gives great opportunities to promote services.
Accessibility of Information Services	Public agencies have offices at regional and local level, which in the larger cities are often difficult to travel to or gain access to because of design restrictions. The local services available through disabled associations and co-operatives are often more accessible. The use of IT will again assist with making services more accessible. In essence there is plenty of information but it is not always accessible to the right people.
Financial Support for Information Services	There is little information available on the funding of information services. What is evident that there is waste and considerable duplication.
Gaps in and Barriers to Good Information Delivery	There is a large quantity of good quality information available, but as stated it is not necessarily available to or directed to the right people. Employers, educators, disabled persons and operators access information with difficulty. Some of this is down to poor collaboration and co-ordination between agencies, poor promotion, poor training of operators which in turn hinders the disabled person, rather than helping them.
User Involvement in Design and Delivery	In trade unions, disabled associations and social enterprises, disabled people are directly involved in the development and operation of services. Unfortunately this is not the case in the management of public agencies.
Partnership Working between Service Providers	Partnership and collaboration between the information agencies is definitely a strong element in making services more effective and person centred. Spazio Lavoro's own project is based on this bringing together a network of local partners to raise awareness with employers about legislation and the employment potential of disabled people. This initiative has a programme of different promotional approaches including working in schools.
Working with Employers	More effective working with employers is absolutely necessary to raise awareness about legislation and also to promote job ready people with the necessary skills for the local labour market.
Assessment of Provision & Future Needs	The priority is working with employers to support the recruitment of disabled people into businesses using a variety of different routes. There are a number of initiatives and specific tools being used in this work including direct awareness raising activity with employers and entrepreneurs, specialist publications such as Vita Indipendente and events, operator training and work with public departments and schools.



<b>Italy (Mestre, Veneto) – SYNJOB Partner, AGFOL</b>	
Range & Coverage of Information Services	A mix of public agencies e.g. Ministry of Labour employment exchanges and regional unit for Veneto, Informa-Handicap, a public / private collaboration of voluntary organisations, local Health Authority (ULSS's) who operate supported employment units called Sil's, specialist disability organisations like UILDM and also Trade Unions. The services cover the Veneto region reasonably evenly, but there is no organised information service which promotes tangible job opportunities for disabled people.
Promotion & Level of Awareness of Services	Promotion of services is insufficient which in turn reduces the level of usage by disabled people. There is little awareness of opportunities and many potential users do not know what services are available.
Accessibility of Information Services	Not enough attention is paid to developing media and premises which are accessible to special types of disability e.g. sensorial and physical. Generally the information available is sufficient in quantity, except in the area of work opportunities which keep disabled people in touch with the local labour market.
Financial Support for Information Services	All services are free of charge, generally funded by public bodies or associations of disabled people. There is no systematic planning of services and this sometimes results in inconsistent allocation of resources.
Gaps in and Barriers to Good Information Delivery	The main limitation is the ineffective role played by the public employment services. Information for operators also requires improvement and on the whole, the promotion of available services is ineffective.
User Involvement in Design and Delivery	There is generally insufficient user involvement in the design and management of information. Only in some cases like the aforementioned UILDM and Informa-Handicap do users take part in the management, design and delivery process.
Partnership Working between Service Providers	The Informa-Handicap centres are linked with each other electronically using their own databases of information. There is also co-operation and exchange through a work placement services co-ordination body.
Working with Employers	There are no information services for employers, with the exception being the work placement services who service contact with and information for employers.
Assessment of Provision & Future Needs	The service system providing information on the placing of disabled people in jobs is poor and lacks purpose and co-ordination. Information is also not always accessible to prospective users. UILDM and Informa-Handicap are highlights of better information service delivery. Positive moves for the future are in development with a re-organisation of the employment service and new initiatives being funded by the regional authority of Veneto.



<b>United Kingdom</b> (Edinburgh) – SYNJOB Partner, Intowork	
Range & Coverage of Information Services	Complex mix of national government services, local government authorities, local enterprise companies and voluntary organisations. No formal co-ordination but lead roles rest with national agencies e.g. Employment Service, Benefits Agency and major voluntary organisations e.g. RNIB, RNID etc. Coverage of information is reasonably good but the large number of different organisations makes it difficult for disabled people, employers and support operators to get the right information.
Promotion & Level of Awareness of Services	Promotion of information and general services requires improvement as it is currently fragmented. As a result, awareness of specific service is often poor and take up of services could be improved. Over the wider country, the coverage of services is patchy, particularly in rural and highland areas. Similarly exchange of information to service operators, carers, parents and schools is also fragmented. There is no shortage of information, it is more a problem of co-ordination, access and better promotion.
Accessibility of Information Services	Access to information requires improvement in terms of more accessible formats, better quality of preparation and presentation i.e. the emphasis on quality rather than quantity. The avoidance of duplication by some voluntary providers and a pooling of resources would be a benefit.
Financial Support for Information Services	There are a variety of funding agencies including the Employment Service, local enterprise companies, local authorities, and national government. More money and resources would be beneficial but this must go with better partnership and co-ordination between agencies.
Gaps in and Barriers to Good Information Delivery	The main gaps are promotion, presentation, co-ordination of services, accessibility of information for specific disabilities and linking all this to better counselling and advice.
User Involvement in Design and Delivery	There has been little user involvement in the design, delivery and management of information services. There are new developments afoot through the Scottish Accessible Information Project (SAIF). This will encourage more effective consultation between providers and users.
Partnership Working between Service Providers	Co-ordination and partnership working between agencies has been poor. Intowork's own project has tried to address through support of networks and the development of shared resources.
Working with Employers	The employer audience has not been served properly in the past. A radical change in legislation from 1996 onwards has encouraged the development of more employer focused information products and the support of employer networks which raise awareness of disability issues and promote the employability of disabled people.
Assessment of Provision & Future Needs	The concentration is now on better quality, more accessible and better promoted information. There is a fair degree of duplication and better co-ordination and joint working between services is required. There is also a need for more user involvement. All these improvements should provide better value services within what will always be limited available resources.

## **2.2 Central Themes**

Given the national and local analysis undertaken by the various partners, a number of central themes are apparent and this provided a focus for further work. These central themes are –

- 1) Examining mechanisms and best practice for co-operation between information providers and services.**
- 2) The Sensitisation Process – how services can be more effectively promoted to potential users i.e. people with disabilities and employers.**
- 3) The Physical Process of Sharing Information – concentrating on the potential and benefits of using IT e.g. shared databases of information on services, labour market and employer information and providing information through new mediums such as the Internet.**

These themes have formed the basis for examining a number of initiatives in the partner countries and regions, which exhibit new approaches to common problems and incorporate examples of best practice which are transferable between organisations and member states. The case studies on these initiatives are now detailed in Section 3.

## **3 Case Studies: Best Practice Solutions to Common Problems**

### **3.1 Setting the Scene**

Each of the national case studies featured has a number of common features –

- proactive behaviour and activity on the part of support agencies
- examples of working in partnership
- the integration of IT applications into information delivery
- working more intensively with employers

Most organisations within the SYNJOB partnership work in a national / regional support structure which is (as already noted) complex and diverse. Disability by its own complex nature dictates that employment support provision cannot (in most cases) be effectively delivered by a single organisation. The national Employment Services or Departments of Labour in member states usually provide the major elements of support to both people with disabilities and employers. However, the voluntary or third sectors have a crucial role both as front line service providers and as complementary resources which cover a range of activities not within the remit of national or regional agencies. With this in mind, the majority of case studies featured here emanate from this third sector, where new and more innovative approaches are more easily implemented, outwith the more restrictive confines of a national or statutory agency. However this is not to say that these approaches cannot be transferred onto a grander scale, which in turn might make national agencies more proactive and in touch with the real needs of their target audiences and labour markets.

## Case Study 1: Italy (Roma)

### An 'Agency of Opportunities' – Proactive Information Delivery and Awareness Raising

#### Background

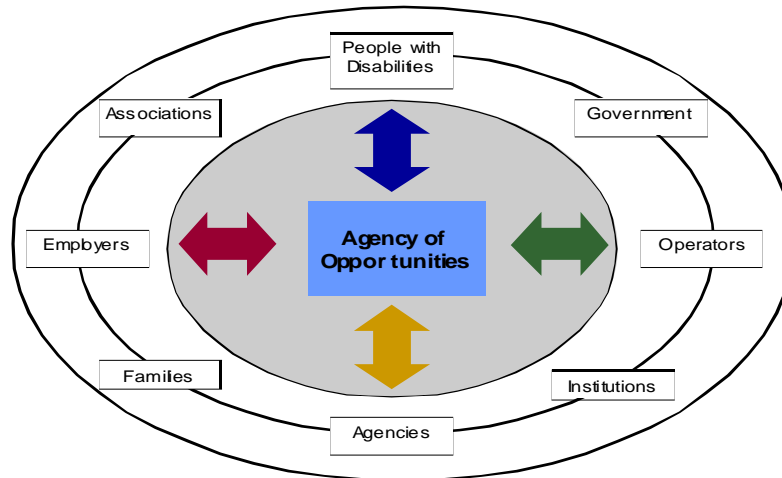
The Co-operativa Spazio Lavoro has provided information for many years to disabled people, carers and families, professional operators and institutions. The bulk of this information has concentrated on the legislative rights and opportunities for disabled people. Through these activities, Spazio Lavoro has identified a number of specific needs in their operational area of Albano Laziale, just south of Rome. These needs are –

- a common need on the part of individuals, agencies and private enterprises for better information
- a need for more personalised information which positively enables disabled people
- avoiding current duplication of information which wastes resources
- improving information quality and delivery through partnership with other agencies
- improving delivery through use of IT

#### The Concept

The Agency of Opportunities concept revolves around specific information and awareness raising activity to improve access to the labour market for disabled people.

Graphic – The Agency of Opportunities



The agency undertakes the following activities –

- supporting a network of local agencies and institutions, employers, and disabled associations
- encouraging and supporting the participation of local authorities and the public through a targeted programme of information products, meetings, seminars and conferences
- the publication and distribution of 'Vita Independente' News (Independent Life)
- sending 'Vita Independente' on-line through a targeted 'newsgroup'
- maintaining an 'Agency of Opportunities' website

The Vita Independente product is of particular interest in that it informs on a variety of related disability topics – employment, legislation, access, assistance etc. and complements the other activities. The on-line facility for Vita Independente encourages dialogue on and understanding of disability issues, as does the main website. All in all, the Agency of Opportunities provides a focal point for information and broader discussion on disability issues, bringing together disabled people, organisations (public and voluntary) and employers.

### **Special Features and Best Practice**

A special feature of the Agency's activities is the extensive use of IT in its activities. Although the Agency uses all the normal means of communication (telephone, fax and mail), the use of IT and the Internet technology opens up extensive opportunities, whilst also being considerably cheaper. The extensive use of e-mail and work with specific newsgroups brings a number of benefits –

- it makes sending and exchanging information more effective
- it simplifies communication between agencies and partners
- it allows for the electronic distribution of news and information e.g. 'Vita Independente' on-line
- it supports a permanent information and discussion forum

Essentially the IT and Internet capability developed by the Agency has enriched its information and research capability, whilst providing a vehicle through which e.g. the website, best practice can be promoted to a much wider audience. The other advantage is that through various instruments e.g. the use of textfiles, information can be made accessible to people with different disabilities e.g. sensory impairments.

Another best practice feature of the Agency is its extensive user involvement. Young disabled people undertake training with the agency. While they train they learn to research, prepare and distribute information e.g. through extensive use of IT and Internet applications. As they are involved in the content of material, this increases its value and helps inform other people, agencies and employers about the true needs and capabilities of people with disabilities. This training and experience enables them to gain skills and transfer to employment in new and growing areas of work, which involve the use of IT and Web technologies.

### **Summary**

The Agency of Opportunities is a bold initiative which seeks to provide a focal point for information and awareness raising on disability and employment issues. It draws together all the key players in the local area and labour market, focusing resources with a view to affecting significant change in attitudes to disability. This networking and partnership activity is allied to a productive use of new technology, harnessing this as a means to deliver better and more targeted information. The extensive user involvement and opportunity to gain new and relevant skills enhances its general worth not only as an information resource, but as a catalyst for moving people into new types of employment.

## Case Study 2: Belgium

### Developing an Integrated Regional Information Strategy – The Carrefour Formation

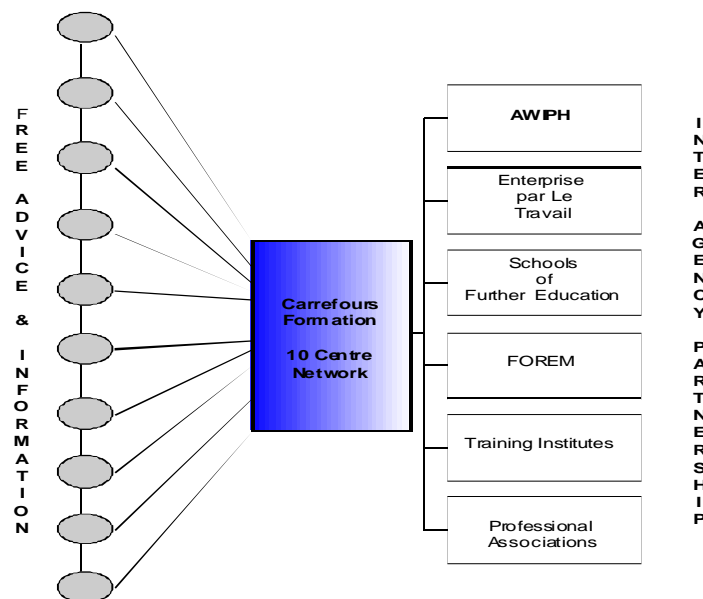
#### Background

The development of the Carrefour Formation initiative was initiated by the Ministry of Training and Employment for the Walloon Region. Up until this initiative, the responsibility for provision of training and employment information had come under the remit of six different training operators, namely –

- AWIPH – an disability agency disability with responsibility for assisting people with disabilities to access training and employment opportunities
- associations called 'Enterprises de Formation par Le Travail' (training through work companies)
- Schools of Further Education (for adults)
- FOREM, the main public organisation dealing with training and placement in the Walloon Region
- training institute for medium and small sized companies
- associations aiming at social and professional training and employment

The Carrefour Formation partnership initiative brought together these different agencies, to provide a single door advice and information service, drawing on the expertise and resources of these contributing agencies.

#### The Concept



There are ten Carrefours Formation centres throughout the Walloon Region. Their mission is to inform and counsel people looking for information on training and employment. The service is fully integrated (for disabled and non-disabled people), and people using the Carrefour can obtain two different types of service. These are –

- Access to information resources and space where the individual can find information about employment professions, qualifications and training. The visitor can use the service free of charge and access a wide range of documentation and multimedia material with supporting access equipment.
- Advice and support delivered by an individual counsellor, so that options can be selected / chosen which best meets the individual's needs. The role of the counsellor is to fully review the person's situation and all the options available to get that person on a pathway to integrated employment, to define individual aspirations and goals, and to choose a relevant training or support operator.

If the person wishes, he /she can then ask the counsellor to transmit a request for assistance to the chosen operator and set up suitable arrangements.

### **Special Features and Best Practice**

The Carrefours Formation initiative is a good example of organisations working in partnership to deliver a more targeted and effective service to users. The drawing together of six different information and training operators into a partnership has created a single point service (operating in ten locations) which should hopefully guarantee complete, objective and accessible information for people seeking training and employment. For people with disabilities, this structure allows them to access ordinary training and, if necessary, about more specialised opportunities. Information on training opportunities are also available on the Internet and this can be accessed through facilities within the Carrefour service or directly by home users (in accessible formats).

The other great advantage is co-operation between different operators, building more effective links between different training actions, which in turn influences future strategic policy and the on-going development of service provision.

### **Summary**

The Carrefour Formation initiative is a good example of a regional authority taking a synergistic approach to the provision of training and employment information. The linking of six agencies to contribute to and manage a 'single door' public service is both sensible and imaginative. It draws together different specialisms and expertise under the 'one roof', with obvious benefits to users, both disabled and non-disabled. The integration of users is also important as disabled people are no longer excluded from 'mainstream' opportunities or channelled into a 'disabled pathway', confined to disability focused training initiatives and employment services.

## Case Study 3: France

### National Employment Week – A National & Local Initiative targeted at Employers

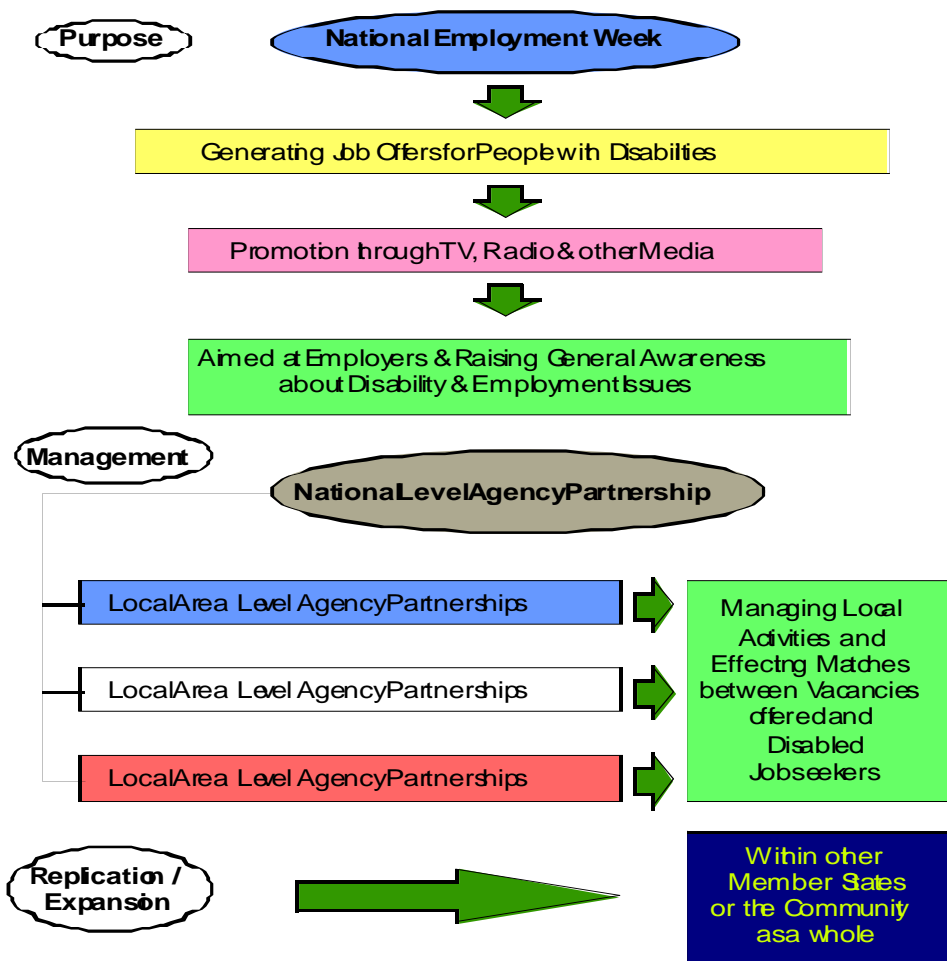
#### Background

The National Employment Week initiative has its origins in the 1987 Employment Legislation which set an employment quota for people with disabilities within enterprises employing 20 or more people. Current levels of employment of disabled people within this category of enterprises is running at approximately 4%. Consequently there was an identified need to undertake a range of activities which would help increase the percentage of disabled people employed within enterprises covered by the legislation i.e. moving it closer to the 6% target quota.

With this in mind the National Employment Week initiative was developed (first run in 1997) with the aim of generating –

- job offers from employers which would be filled by people with disabilities seeking employment
- raising awareness of disability and employment issues with employers and the general public

#### The Concept



The Employment Week is managed by a national level partnership of agencies and associations which use a range of guaranteed media outlets including TV, radio and selected media to promote the initiative and its aims. This is further strengthened at a local level by a range of regional or area partnerships. These local level partnerships manage their own budgets and the important task of matching individual jobseekers to the employer vacancies generated. As a follow on from this, the local agencies then put in place the practical support which is required to make the job placement successful in the longer term.

Funding for the Employment Week initiative comes from national government (and in 1999 European level funding was used) and also private sector sponsorship generated at both a national and local level. At national and local levels, steering committees manage the initiative. A typical size local area budget for the week e.g. Lyon / Rhone Alpes is 200,000 Fr. Francs.

### **Special Features and Best Practice**

The National Employment Week initiative is an innovative approach to encouraging positive action on the part of employers i.e. generating vacancies, and on a broader level, educating the general public about discrimination against people with disabilities in the labour market. With guaranteed media coverage, the message of Employment Week is further reinforced.

On an organisational level, the Employment Week initiative has posed difficult management questions for the various agencies involved at both national and local level. These problems have been overcome through the development of effective national and local level management partnerships. In the form of steering committees, these partnerships effectively control –

- national and local budgets
- the generation of further public and private sector sponsorship
- media and promotional activity
- local marketing activity undertaken by member agencies
- contact with employers, identification and allocation of vacancies
- matching candidates (through member agencies) with vacancies
- arranging (through member agencies) suitable ongoing support in the workplace

The management of these activities (exclusively related to Employment Week) has assisted with the development of partnership working in other areas of activity. A further positive outcome has been a general improvement in management and marketing skills throughout the local partnership member organisations as a result of participating in Employment Week.

### **Summary**

1999 has seen a real consolidation of Employment Week and the effect it has locally and nationally. With European level funding available, there has been a general broadening of its scope and a recognition of its worth as a way of generating jobs and changing attitudes. However, there is still room for improvement, particularly in the management of the final matching process i.e. getting the right candidate for the job and providing appropriate support once the successful match is made. The concept of Employment Week has also generated interest from other member states e.g. Belgium, Italy, and it may be that this particular initiative may have potential for replication or application throughout the wider community. As a means of raising the profile of the disadvantage experienced by disabled people in the labour market, it is certainly an initiative worthy of further interest and development.

## Case Study 4: Italy (Veneto)

### SynJob NET – A Targeted Approach on the Internet

#### Background

In the Veneto region, there is a significant shortage of good quality information on the availability of work placements and support for people with disabilities. Though there are various sources of information dealing with the work placement issue, there are difficulties with the quality and accuracy of the information provided i.e. it does not meet the needs of disabled people, operators and employers. The present problem areas can be further defined –

- the limited content of current information on local assistance and the way that information is presented e.g. information is often presented from a social perspective and is inappropriate say for an employer audience
- complex legislative information needs to be presented in a more accessible and easy to understand way, enabling operators and employers to properly implement initiatives and activities at an operational level
- there are a vast number of uncoordinated information sources which makes the process of getting information a time consuming and costly exercise for the user

It is therefore quite obvious that a central, co-ordinated and regularly updated information resource is a pressing requirement.

#### The Concept

Based on analysis of the current problems, the concept for SynJob Net is to develop a system for gathering, coding and distributing information on the work placement issue. A qualitative approach is required to improve the current system in terms of –

*Applying Systematic Methods* - equipping the system with information currently not readily available e.g. on legislative provisions, service provision, training resources, current pilot projects, statistical information, and agencies bringing together people with disabilities and employers

*Clarity* – making information more readily comprehensible and consistent, in formats which meet users' needs

*Updating Processes*– structuring effective and efficient ways of updating information and improving reliability

*Accessibility* – improving ease of access and making information more transparent to different user groups i.e. disabled people, operators and employers

*Efficiency* – managing the information process to give best value for the resources employed

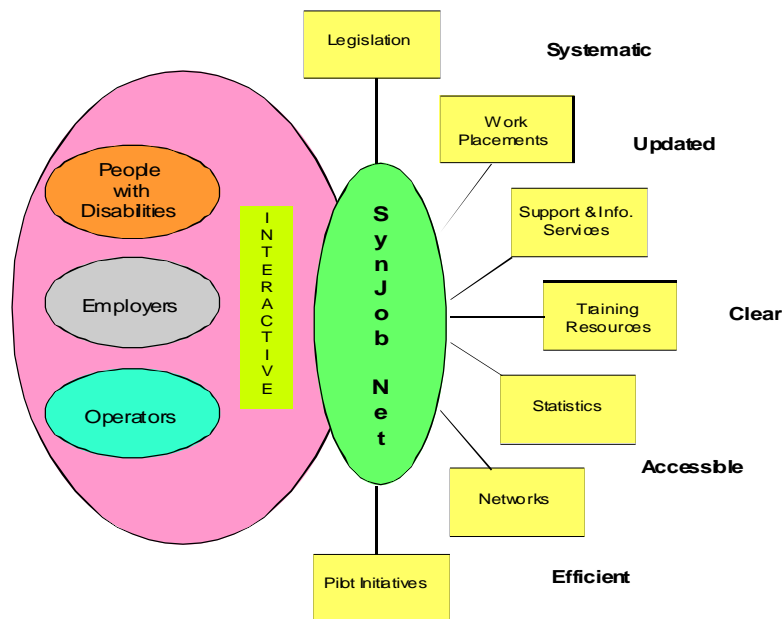
Achieving these objectives involves three key areas of activity –

- 1 Mapping of the sources of information available, coupled with an analysis of needs and problems

- 2 Production of new information and the upgrading of existing information
- 3 Setting up an effective system for the distribution of information – through IT and communication technologies

The combined web site is the vehicle through which the new, revised and updated information from these processes is then displayed and distributed. The site construction can be graphically described / represented.

Graphic – SynJob Net Website



### Special Features and Best Practice

A special feature of the SynJob Net development is the interactive nature of the information resource. Access to the site is free of charge and a facility exists to allow users to interact with specific providers and help improve the content and presentation of information in accordance with emerging needs. This facility in turn can be extended to include specific discussion groups, supporting input of valuable information and opinion on a variety of issues. As a best practice initiative, it attempts to create a new manageable system and way of working from a disorganised amorphous mass of information which was poorly managed and presented. Developing the new resource and information management system also creates new partnerships which can develop shared standards for information preparation, presentation and delivery.

### Summary

The SynJob Net initiative involves a radical overhaul of current disability and employment information provision in the Veneto region. It is an attempt to develop a modern and accessible system which not only meets the needs of different users, but utilises new technologies and partnership between agencies to achieve it. It is also an initiative which seeks to professionalise the approach of the social and support sector to meet the needs of employers and the local labour market. In this way it recognises the important role that the social sector plays in representing people with disabilities, and by increasing the quality and effectiveness of information, the perceived value of employing disabled people will be enhanced.

## Case Study 5: United Kingdom (Scotland)

### A Local Labour Market Approach – Co-ordinating Activity aimed at Employers

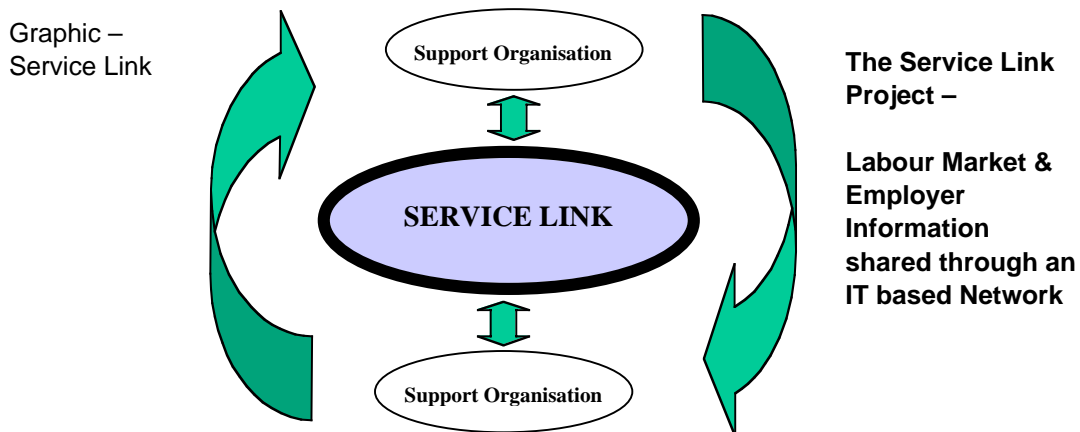
#### Background

The Service Link project operates in the Edinburgh and Lothians area of Central Scotland. The project is run on behalf of an association / network of disability and employment service organisations called the Employability Forum. There are over forty organisations operating in this geographical area who have some interest in placing disabled people into training and employment. Consequently marketing and promotional activity aimed at employers needs to be more co-ordinated and targeted to be effective. The Service Link project supports this by allowing organisations to share their knowledge and expertise with other professional operators, and link in to a central database of labour market information. This in turn promotes a more professional service and image to employers.

#### The Concept

Support organisations and professional operators already communicate labour market and employer information informally. The Service Link service concept seeks to strengthen, formalise, support and co-ordinate this information flow more effectively by building on these existing informal communication routes. It aims to –

- share information about employers and employer contact between member organisations
- bring together organisations developing employment opportunities, avoiding duplication of effort and assist the creation of common professional standards
- provide access to the maximum number of employment opportunities by ensuring member organisations receive information about vacancies, employers and other labour market intelligence
- maximise the circulation of vacancy information to member organisations by providing a professional vacancy circulation service to employers



The service, which is delivered an IT based communication network, meets the expressed needs of both employers and professional operators. Employers are looking for a more professional and targeted approach from service organisations. They have expressed the view that approaches from operators are often poorly co-ordinated and competitive. Similarly, operators have expressed a desire for more co-ordinated and professional approaches to employers. The

information available to them through Service Link supports this and provides relevant information about employer organisations, including –

- contact details
- a resume of business activities
- previous recruitment details of people with disabilities
- contacts with other support agencies
- job description and current vacancy information

This relevant information supports a more professional approach from operators and encourages co-operation between agencies.

### **Special Features and Best Practice**

The Service Link initiative is part of a process of changing the way of working with employers for both support organisations and their professional operators. In the past, much of this 'job prospecting' activity has been speculative and uncoordinated. This has promoted a negative reaction from many employers, which in turn has probably prevented more disabled people getting jobs. The project also seeks to address the competitive aspect which has previously existed between many support organisations. These organisations have been in competition with each other for limited tracts of funding and resources. Consequently there has been a strongly perceived reluctance to share this type of employer and labour market information with a direct competitor i.e. a bit like Coca Cola sharing its marketing information with Pepsi. However, these preconceptions are slowly being overcome and there is a growing willingness to work together more effectively.

In terms of best practice, the project is managed by member organisations and they have full control of the service through an elected management committee. Similarly, an appointed agent (a Forum member organisation) houses and manages the service on behalf of the other member organisations. This management linkage is serviced by a detailed agreement which details the management relationship and the service and quality standards expected. Similarly a user constitution and operational guidelines ensures that each user organisation is fully conversant with the rules of using the system and its information.

A final innovative element is the use of an IT based network through which the information is shared. This supports quick transfer of information, and training and equipment support is given to smaller organisations who may not (initially) have the capacity to use the service effectively.

### **Summary**

Given the complex nature of service provision in the UK, Service Link is somewhat unique in that it targets the working relationship with employers. Employers have constantly complained about the number of requests made for training, work experience and employment. They are not against these requests being made, rather the way in which the approaches are made and managed. Support organisations and operators also recognise this problem. They compete against other training and employment agencies working with non-disabled unemployed people. Whether they like it or not they have to 'sell' their service and clients to employers in the most effective way. Service Link is therefore a valuable tool which will help them to do this more successfully. For employers too there are benefits in that they can circulate vacancies through the network to a wider audience of disabled people seeking employment, helping them meet their obligations under the current UK disability legislation.

## **4 Summary and Conclusions: Drawing on Innovation and Best Practice**

Within the context of our three central themes, as described in 2.2, the information delivery thematic group can summarise its conclusions and identify the following elements of best practice.

### **4.1 Examining mechanisms and best practice for co-operation between information providers and services**

The current disability service structures in many member states precludes the delivery of effective services and good quality information to both disabled people and employers. The diverse and complex nature of these structures identifies a strong need for increased and better co-operation between agencies and support organisations. An equally important factor is the increasingly difficult process of identifying and allocating sufficient resources for employment support and information activities. Increased co-operation between support agencies would go some considerable way towards using those available resources more effectively. A number of the highlighted cases studies e.g. Carrefour Formation (Belgium) and the Employability Forum (UK, Scotland) exhibit formalised partnerships and networks dedicated to information delivery. The structures and purpose of these partnerships may be different, but they exhibit a number of common features and benefits. In many ways they resemble partnerships which already exist in the business world, a synergistic approach taken by a group of (often competing) organisations to develop a product or deliver a service more effectively to the marketplace. The end product is a better service for customers. In essence, a partnership or network of organisations geared towards delivering information more effectively is no different to this, or many other forms of business partnership.

A number of best practice elements for such a partnership can therefore be defined as follows –

- there must be a shared recognition between partners of the benefits of partnership
- there must be clear aims and objectives for the joint activities of / or project managed by the partnership i.e. a business plan
- ideally the activities of the partnership should complement and build on those conducted by each member organisation
- there must be clear agreement and recognition of each partner's role and responsibilities within the partnership
- there must be a clearly defined budget or to support the partnership and its activities
- there must be a clear recognition and understanding of each partner's contribution in terms of personnel and resources
- there must be a management and decision making structure for the partnership e.g. an elected management board or committee
- a member organisation of the partnership may be appointed to take a lead management or operational role if required
- there must be formal and agreed operational guidelines in place i.e. every member knows what they can and cannot do
- there must be procedures to deal with disagreement and matters of discipline
- the partnership should have a promotional and marketing strategy e.g. for both users and funders
- there must be agreed methods, mediums and languages of communication
- the management board should communicate effectively with member organisations

- where practicable, activities can be further sub-divided into working groups which build on specific organisational and individual expertise
- where feasible and practicable, partnerships should work across different sectors (public, private, voluntary, non-profit etc.) to increase effectiveness
- external expertise should be accessed and used by the partnership where practicable and appropriate

This list is neither complete or definitive, but indicate a 'picking list' of best practice elements which good partnerships exhibit in the management and delivery of their activities. To many organisations working in the social sector (where most disability focused organisations operate), this type of partnership concept is new (especially for smaller voluntary or disability specific organisations). Indeed it can also be said that setting up and managing partnerships is a very difficult and often frustrating process. However, if the right elements are in place (whatever the activity), the process can also be very rewarding – for partners and customers as well.

The notion of partnership working is therefore eminently applicable to information development and delivery activity. This is especially the case with new methods of delivery e.g. through the Internet, which offer great advantages allied to technological and management difficulties. As in the private sector, support organisations will increasingly find themselves working together to realise the benefits for their disabled clients.

#### **4.2 The Sensitisation Process – how services can be more effectively promoted to potential users i.e. people with disabilities and employers**

Support and information services for people with disabilities have been firmly entrenched in the social sector, and have been perceived by employers as peripheral to their main business activities. Whilst many companies (especially large enterprises) have been positively disposed to recruiting disabled people or even providing support to 'socially motivated' organisations, a proportion of this has been motivated by 'tokenism', internal public relations objectives or minimal recognition of legislative obligations.

People with disabilities seeking employment have often suffered as a result of employers' poor perceptions of and awareness of disability. Similarly, many employers have been unwilling to use services which promote a potentially problematic solution to their recruitment needs. In many cases this prejudicial attitude to 'employing a problem' has been further compounded by a lack of confidence in the capabilities and competence of the support or placement organisation.

Looking at the flip side of the coin, people with disabilities have had difficulty in taking up available employment support services. The complicated support structure is well documented in this report and is a major factor in decreasing overall movement into employment and effective access to and usage of services.

As we have already the positive benefits of partnership working, more proactive and targeted promotion of services to potential users (both disabled people and employers) is essential. Again referring to the case studies in this report, we can see that Spazio Lavoro's Agency of Opportunities and the National Employment Week in France are examples of both partnership and effective promotion. The Agency of Opportunities addresses a multiple audience and tries to bring disabled people, agencies, associations and employers together in a defined local labour market through the creation of a focal resource on disability and employment. It also creates a focal disability and employment resource which is accessible to disabled people through a variety of different media. Conversely, The French National Employment Week with its supporting

regional initiatives, attempts to raise the profile of disability and create a market on the part of employers i.e. for employing people with disabilities. It is a short, focused and well promoted campaign which is all about raising awareness and highlighting the employment capabilities of disabled people. Its high profile promotion through TV and various media gives the initiative itself a profile that cannot be ignored. Again it exhibits high levels of co-operation between agencies who attempt to promote a 'benefits to business' message to employers.

In summing up the best practice elements of promoting information on disability and employment services, we should include the following –

- disability and employment services must retain their social focus, but apply business methods to the way they promote their products and services i.e. a business to business approach
- good information is a medium through which a market for employing people with disabilities can be created and nurtured (on the part of employers)
- support operators are selling a 'product' to employers in terms of their clients and support services i.e. positive information can be promoted more effectively through 'good salesmanship'
- good information is all about creating good linkages and agencies must develop these in their operational area
- information on services for disabled people should be available through a focal and recognisable source (preferably supported by a network of key organisations) in a variety of accessible media
- information providers should develop common / shared standards of information presentation and delivery
- information should be collected, presented and updated professionally by agencies
- information providers must adopt a proactive approach to their target audiences

The basic elements of proactive behaviour to target audiences and partnership working are again key themes in effective promotion. Information preparation and dissemination costs money and eats up resources. For many support organisations, working proactively with other partners is the only way to achieve the impact they desire.

#### **4.3 The Physical Process of Sharing Information – concentrating on the potential and benefits of using IT e.g. shared databases on services, labour market and employer information, and providing information through new mediums such as the Internet**

Methods of communication and conducting business are changing rapidly. Disability support and information services working in the field of employment are effectively linked into the world of government, business and commerce – their main aim is to place disabled people into jobs with commercial companies and public agencies. A consequence of this is that support and information providers must move with and become competent in these new technologies and practices.

The case studies included this report on the SynJob Net (Italy) and Service Link (UK, Scotland) initiatives are examples of building IT based capacity within the support sector. SynJob Net is about using new technology i.e. the Internet to promote information on services to a wide audience and build in the necessary information and creation and management systems to keep the website resource up to date. Service Link is about providing a labour market information resource, delivered through IT, that supports more effective and targeted marketing activity aimed at employers. It supports a business to business approach. Both initiatives also exhibit strong

elements of partnership working in that while building up a new information resource, they build capacity, expertise and knowledge in a number of different organisations i.e. there are shared benefits.

This assimilation of IT skills and delivery capacity is essential if 'social sector' organisations are to keep abreast of 'the times'. This type of activity is not really building for the future as these methods of global and network communication are already extensively used by business and individuals. There is an argument that expending resources in this area is counter productive in that many disabled people will not have the resources to invest in the necessary hardware. This may presently be the case for many people but technology is advancing at such a rate e.g. interactive TV, E-commerce, IT aids and adaptations etc., that this argument will cease to be a factor. For example, in the UK, the government recently announced an initiative which will enable the most disadvantaged people in society to 'rent' computer equipment at very competitive / low rates. The ethos behind this is that no group within society can afford to be left behind in the technological revolution i.e. to do this would compound the existing disadvantage.

The key elements of best practice we can adopt are as much about managing a process of massive change i.e. the 'electronic information revolution' as opposed to purely producing more information in new and more accessible formats. Support organisations as information providers must –

- initially recognise the need for and benefits of adopting new ways of working and how IT can support this
- realise IT is a tool which will complement the activities of organisations and operators
- recognise that adopting these new methods and technologies brings a degree of 'pain and difficulty' to the organisation
- be clear about the activities and areas of the organisation into which these new methods will be placed and what specific benefits this will bring
- make sure the implementation is properly resourced and that adequate and planned training activity is undertaken

This list is superficial and far from being comprehensive. Indeed the subject of managing and implementing organisational change through IT is an extensive science in its own right. Suffice it to say that socially oriented organisations working with people with disabilities must build this capacity into their activities either individually, or working in partnership with other organisations.

The benefits this process of change will bring to any organisation and its clients are extensive. Indeed the types of awareness raising activity and pure information delivery which this opens up are limitless. If more comprehensive information on services is made available to disabled people, and employers attitudes to disability are influenced in a positive manner, then the process will have been successful.

## **Conclusive Summary**

In conclusion, we can say that good information provision, management and delivery is a core building block in getting more people with disabilities into open long term employment. By drawing on innovation and existing good practice, service organisations and their operators can –

- **change attitudes and perceptions**
- **create a market with employers**
- **deliver more effective services**
- **build partnerships and shared resources**
- **promote user involvement**
- **inform and influence policy**