

Andrew's Story

Andrew* lives in Cornwall and goes to one of the big day centres. His centre is in one of the harder areas to get a job in a county where the economy is considered 75% or less of the European average. Andrew likes gardening but has a serious health support need and so needs pretty much constant support or at least someone close by at all times.

A couple of years ago The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities launched a new programme – In Business – looking at self-employment as one route in to work for people with learning disabilities. The Foundation was working with a number of people with a learning disability who were interested in exploring this option.

Andrew heard about In Business and asked his support worker to get in touch. Andrew was particularly annoyed at the removal of the incentive pay, where people got given a pound or two each week to attend the day centre. He wanted to replace this income and more.

What Happened

Andrew was invited to a business planning workshop run by In Business Rapid Enterprise development, or RED, where people with a learning disability and those that support them were invited to develop a business plan over two days and to learn many of the skills needed to take things forward. As a result of the workshop, Andrew had a basic business plan and had learned that, like most people, he needed support with the business in general; support with his particular sector – in his case growing coleus plants; and help with the personal side, such as benefits, housing etc.

Problems and How we Tackled Them

In Business has been able to develop a business support group, find a business mentor, a horticulturalist and, in partnership with the local authority, an employment support worker. The mentor is part of a mainstream mentoring service and so has needed some support in working with people with a learning disability. The first issue was that mentors usually work one to one, so it was important that they were comfortable with the use of support workers. They struggled with this at first but got the idea when we explained that this is not so different from a deaf person having an interpreter with them during a meeting. Business mentor Richard*

now supports Andrew with all the business issues: forms, tax office and the like. He also helps a bit with the money.

Outcomes and Impact

Andrew has now set up Mr H's Plants. He sells at local nurseries, farmers markets and has a barrow at the end of the drive. We are very excited to see what he earns this summer.

Luckily, Peter*, who works for social services, also runs a landscaping business so has been great with help on running a gardening business. Because the County receives maximum support from the government it has been easy to get help with all the employment and benefits side of things. We have also been able to get a small start up grant for Andrew.

Next Steps

At our last business support group meeting, it was great to see such a supportive and committed bunch who have agreed to focus on this year's growing season, to test new markets and develop some new product ranges.

We have also asked the local authority to look into Andrew getting an individual budget so he can employ his own support in future as his business hopefully grows.

*Names have been changed.