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Given the increasingly awful unemployment figures, it's difficult to find anything to celebrate about the country's job market. Young people are notoriously being hit the hardest, raising fears of a 'lost generation', but disabled people are also suffering. 65% of people with learning disabilities would like to work, according to figures from the British Association of Supported Employment, but just 6.4% are currently in paid employment – a figure that is dropping.

All the more reason to celebrate success when it happens, and in Trafford, Greater Manchester, there are some great examples of how a supported employment project run by United Response can get people with learning disabilities into work, helping them thrive as individuals and contribute to their employers. The service has just entered its seventh year, and has helped hundreds of individuals.

Last week the Manchester Evening News celebrated those achievements in a full page story. One of the people featured was Luanne Horton, 21, who approached us last year in the hopes of finding work. Luanne has Down's Syndrome and struggles with reading and writing, so she received help from job coach Maria Williams to put together a CV. Luanne felt she was best suited to practical work and so, inspired by Luanne's love of fashion, went job hunting together in shopping areas close to her home in Sale.

JLF hairdressers in Sale Moor agreed to take her on as an assistant and Luanne is now responsible for greeting customers and making drinks, sorting hair products, and cleaning the salon. Jess France, owner of the hairdressers, says Luanne is an asset to the business: "She's very reliable and she has really come out of her shell since she's been here."

Ali Bishop, who has been the driving force behind Trafford Supported Employment since its inception, points out that not only does the service help individuals and businesses but actually saves the taxpayer money as it helps people "take the first steps towards financial independence. They might be people like Luanne who, may not be able to come off benefits entirely, but when she is working she is not accessing things like day care services – it's about being less reliant on the state."

The Manchester Evening News agreed in a resoundingly positive leader column backing the scheme. "The scheme offers people with learning difficulties extensive support, including help from a dedicated job coach. Could that be replicated for others finding it hard to get work? It would, of course, cost money. But can we afford not to try? With the scheme in Trafford we have a successful model. Perhaps it's time to widen its reach."

But here's the kicker. Far from investing more in supported employment during a time of rising joblessness, many existing supported employment services are under financial threat or have already been the victim of cuts. Up and down the country, fewer people with learning disabilities are getting a fair opportunity to find work and the increased independence that comes with it. And yet we know that up front investment in the right support really does save money in the long run.

The Government, in its 2010 Vision For Adult Social Care, explicitly states that "Preventing people's needs from escalating will help to reduce the costs of intensive care packages. Employment is also an important part of helping people to stay independent for as long as possible." That's why it needs to work closely with local authorities who, unlike Trafford, are not investing in supported employment. As the Manchester Evening News says, "can we afford not to try?"

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