Thomas Pocklington Trust's Employment Project

Independent evaluation report by NCVO Charities Evaluation Services

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Executive summary

Thomas Pocklington Trust's employment project

The employment project is a new service being piloted by Thomas Pocklington Trust (TPT) in London that began in August 2015. The project has an overall aim of enabling people with sight loss in London to fully participate in the workplace. It offers free support to people with sight loss and to employers. The project has been self-funded by TPT.

By the end of May 2016, 88 people with sight loss had engaged with the project. During this period, 32 of these received individual support and 57 clients attended 22 workshops. Eleven employers were involved, mainly through receiving support and training, and through employer-supported volunteering.

Looking ahead, TPT's support for people with sight loss in London is planned to continue. TPT plans to work with Visionary, which supports local sight loss organisations around the country, to strengthen its work with employers and to support other organisations to develop their own employment projects.

The evaluation

This independent evaluation was delivered by NCVO Charities Evaluation Services (CES) from January to July 2016. CES carried out qualitative interviews with a sample of eight clients, three employers and three members of staff, as well as a focus group with a further six clients. CES also used monitoring data collected by the TPT team for the purposes of this evaluation, which was mainly quantitative.

Outcomes

Looking at our data from a small sample of stakeholders, there is evidence of mixed levels of progress in the planned outcome areas, as well as evidence of some positive unexpected outcomes, for example greater awareness of how to support visually impaired staff internally at TPT. It appears that in the case of some of the planned outcomes that were not achieved, this may because, as the project developed over the pilot year, they were not the main focus of the support. Some other planned outcomes that were not achieved may require more time to emerge.

Considering our data from our sample of 14 clients, there is evidence that people with sight loss have improved their employability as a result of the project, particularly around **improved job search ability and aspirations**, as well as improving **self-confidence and motivation** to continue their job search. Many clients that we spoke with felt that they had improved their ability to manage their VI in the workplace, in particular that they had improved their **knowledge of their employment rights**. There was evidence that many clients in our sample had **increased their recruitment-related activities**, for example applying for more jobs than they would or could have otherwise. Data from TPT shows that twelve clients who received support went on to secure new roles, and some in our sample described the support as **contributing to their gaining employment.**

From our sample of three employers, there was evidence of improved understanding of visual impairment (VI), particularly around **increased knowledge of available support** and **improved understanding of how to support people with a VI**. All three employers said that they felt that they had **increased their awareness of** VI and that they had a **greater understanding of the challenges faced by VI people**. Many employees engaged with the project through giving their time to, for example, help at a workshop, suggested an **increased number of professional engaging in work-related activity with VI people**. Of the three employers we spoke to, one employer said they were considering changing their practices to be more inclusive but none said that they had taken on more people with sight loss as a result of the project as yet.

Learning

Clients told us that the following aspects of the support had increased the project's value to them:
- that support is tailored for them;
- the supportive and proactive staff team;
- the quality of the advice;
- that it is open to people of all ages;
- and that it brings together people with sight loss and employers.

Clients wanted to see the project develop in the following areas:
- Work placement opportunities
- More communication about (specific) job opportunities
- More focus on changing employers' attitudes
- More follow up from employers after workshops

Clients also told us about various persistent needs and challenges they found around employment and VI. Around support for people with sight loss, they felt that appropriate employment support was not always available to them, particularly around learning to use assistive technology or equipment. Clients also found various challenges around employers' attitudes, understanding and behaviours, in particular around misconceptions of people with sight loss as 'incapable', and a lack of understanding around how to best support VI people in the workplace.

Summary of recommendations

For how the TPT project can be improved:
- Focus more on engagement with employers
- Offer more 'tangible' work-related opportunities
- Consider increasing capacity for individual support
- Increase communications with clients
- Review and streamline monitoring and evaluation
- Offer IT training and support
- Partner with other types of organisation
- Be clear about eligibility
- Consider peer-led support.

For other sight loss organisations providing employment support:
- Spend time on scoping and project design
- Provide tailored support – one size doesn't fit all
- Allow time for relationships to develop and change to happen
- Provide flexible support to employers, as well as clients
- Recruit staff with a range of experience and perspectives
- Show employers what is in it for them.

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1 Introduction

1.1 About the employment project

Thomas Pocklington Trust's (TPT) employment project has the overall aim of enabling people with sight loss in London to fully participate in the workplace. It seeks to achieve this through providing support both for people with sight loss and for employers, delivered mainly through individual support and events. Originally set up as a one year pilot, the project began delivering support in August 2015.

Following an initial scoping period, the project was designed to fill what was perceived to be a gap in services in London for people with sight loss:

- of any working age;
- who are near employment-ready; or
- who want support to retain work;

The project would focus on linking with employers rather than providing general skills-based workshops.

More detail on the project's background and rationale can be found in Appendix 1.

1.2 About the evaluation

TPT commissioned NCVO Charities Evaluation Services (CES) to evaluate the employment project pilot. The evaluation took place from January to July 2016, with data being collected during March to May.

The questions that the evaluation sought to address are outlined below.

1.2.1 Questions about outcomes

- What difference has the employment project made for people with sight loss?
- What difference has the employment project made for employers?
- Has the employment project helped to meet the needs of people with sight loss?
- Has the employment project helped to meet the needs of employers?
- What are the most valued elements of the employment project?
- How could the employment project be improved?
- What are the unexpected outcomes from the programme?

- Has the programme made a different to how Pocklington itself employs people with sight loss?

1.2.2 Questions about process

- Is the type and format of support provided useful? Would other types and formats of support be useful?
- What adds value to the project?
- Do stakeholders feel the project adds value to what else is available to support employment?
- Do stakeholders feel the project could be transferred to other settings? Or is there something unique about its current setting that makes it work better/worse?

1.2.3 Purpose of the evaluation

TPT intends to use the evaluation for two key purposes:

1. **To review and improve the current project:** The evaluation will explore the difference the current project has made, what has been working well and what could be improved. Although the one year pilot is coming to an end, TPT intends to continue to provide support to people with sight loss, so there is scope to implement recommendations around this aspect of the project.

2. **To develop good practice guidelines:** TPT will use the evaluation findings and recommendations to inform other sight loss charities about learning from the project, with a view to developing good practice guidelines collaboratively on supporting people with sight loss around employment. This work will be taken forward by Visionary, a membership organisation for local sight loss charities and part of a strategic alliance with TPT. Staff from the employment project have been seconded to Visionary and will lead this follow-on work.

1.3   Evaluation methods

Our evaluation has taken a mixed methods approach, combining both qualitative data collected by CES and the mainly quantitative data collected by TPT as part of their monitoring.

1.3.1 Monitoring and evaluation framework

At the beginning of the project, TPT created a monitoring and evaluation framework for the project. We have made use of this framework to help shape our evaluation, in particular the specific aims and outcomes it identified for people with sight loss and employers, while also remaining open to identifying unexpected outcomes that were not in the original framework. The specific aims and outcomes defined in the monitoring and evaluation framework can be found in Appendix 2.

1.3.2 Data collected independently by CES

Interviews with clients

We carried out telephone interviews with eight people with sight loss who were current or former clients of the employment project. This was out of a total of 88 clients who had engaged with the project by the end of May 2016. The interviews ranged from 20 to 55 minutes in length.

This group were selected because they had all received a relatively high level of support from the project; all of them had received or were receiving regular support and had both attended workshops and received one-to-one support. All of them were using more than one method of communication with the project staff, including email, phone and face-to-face contact.

Younger age groups were over-represented in our interview sample: 50% were aged 25-34, compared to 26% in that age group across the wider client population. Three interviewees were female and five were male. They represented a reasonably diverse group of ethnicities: three were from Black/African/Caribbean/Black British backgrounds; two were from White British backgrounds; one was Asian/Asian British; and one ethnicity was unknown. All but two interviewees had had a visual impairment (VI) since birth. Half were blind and half were partially sighted.

All interviewees had some level of work experience (paid or voluntary) and all but one had previously been in paid employment. All but one had been educated to degree level or higher. Significantly, seven of them had worked with a VI in previous employment and one in a volunteer capacity. This suggests that they might have already developed strategies to manage their VI in the workplace context.

Focus group with clients

We held a focus group with six people with sight loss who had engaged with the project. This was held at the TPT offices in central London in April 2016, although no TPT staff were present during the session. The focus group lasted 90 minutes, including a break.

The six participants had in general engaged less with the project than the phone interviewees, with four receiving occasional support and two receiving regular support. Only two participants had used the one-to-one support; the others had all just attended workshops.

Demographically, this group was broadly representative of the wider group of visually impaired people who had engaged with the project; there were slightly more men than women, the majority of participants were in the 45-54 age category, and they came from a range of ethnic backgrounds. Most participants had had a VI since birth and were partially sighted, rather than blind.

Half of the group had been out of paid employment for less than three months when they first engaged with the project, for others it had been five to nine years. However, they had all worked with a VI.

Phone interviews with employers

We interviewed three employers who had engaged with the project. We had hoped to interview up to five of the 11 employers who had been involved with the project in some way, but it proved difficult to secure these interviews. This was partly because of staff turnover and partly due to a lack of time or willingness to engage with the evaluation, despite repeated invitation. This echoes some of the issues that the TPT team and clients had faced in securing ongoing engagement with employers involved in the project (see section 7.2 for more detail on challenges).

This small sample size limits our understanding of the experiences of employers engaged in the project and means that our data collected from employers is more likely to be biased.

The three employers we interviewed were all larger employers, with the smallest having 250-1000 employees and the largest having 50,000+ employees, however this was broadly representative of the size of employers who had most commonly engaged with the project. They had

different roles and came from different sectors (finance, law, healthcare); two were from the private sector and one was from the public sector.

Interviews with TPT staff

We held in-depth interviews with the Project Manager and the Project Coordinator. These were face-to-face interviews that lasted approximately two hours each. In addition we held a 30-minute phone interview with the Director of London Services who has overseen the project and who was also involved in its inception.

1.3.3 Monitoring data from TPT

We made use of project monitoring data to supplement our independently collected data. In general this data was more quantitative and related to the project's outputs.

This report draws on the following data collected by TPT:

Quantitative data

- Record of clients' job interviews
- Record of clients' work secured
- Record of sessions with clients
- Workshop attendance record
- List of workshops
- Initial assessments using RNIB employment toolkit

Qualitative data

- Ad hoc feedback from events
- Case notes for four clients whom we interviewed

This qualitative data from TPT was used to cross-reference the client and TPT's description of their engagement, and to build our understanding of the support provided by the project. However our findings around client satisfaction and client outcomes are drawn from the data collected independently by CES.

1.4   Language used

In this report we use the term 'visually impaired (VI) people' and 'people with sight loss' interchangeably to describe the clients and potential clients of the project. We use these terms to include people who are not registered as sight impaired or severely sight impaired, or would not be eligible to register, but still have sight loss that cannot be corrected with glasses.

2 Support for people with sight loss

2.1 Individual support

One of the two main areas of support provided for people with sight loss was individual support. This was intended to be a highly flexible service that was tailored to meet individual needs and was primarily delivered by the Project Coordinator, with the Project Manager taking on some cases, taking into account their experience and their relationships with the clients.

2.1.1 What was delivered

Individual support was provided over the phone, by email or face-to-face depending on each client's preference. By the end of May 2016, 32 clients had received individual support. The available data to February 2016 shows the average (median) number of individual support sessions delivered to each client was two. Most people had received support on a relatively small number of occasions: three clients had had a large number of sessions (15, 14 and 9 sessions respectively) but the remaining clients had all had five sessions or less. Support sessions lasted an average (mean) of 30 minutes. Most of the support was provided by email (51%) and over the phone (41%), with the remaining sessions delivered face-to-face (8%).

The most common topic of support was paid work, with over half of all sessions covering this area. Discussions on this topic focused on recruitment-related activities, for example support with applications or CVs, or TPT suggesting potential roles to which the client could apply.

Other topics, raised by only a relatively small number, included: retaining work; self-employment; volunteering; work placements or internships; work-related or life skills; or VI related issues.

TPT staff told us that, while the Project Coordinator had largely been at capacity, with a caseload of around 10 or 11 people at any one time, the demand had been manageable. TPT had talked about the individual support service at workshops, in emails and via individual calls to all clients. However, during the focus group, some participants said that they were not aware it was available. It is possible that communicating the individual support service needs further consideration and that there may be further demand for individual support.

2.1.2 Client satisfaction

Most of the clients we spoke to were very satisfied with the individual support they received and found it useful to them. In particular, they valued that the support was highly individualised, or 'tailored for me'. They appreciated getting personal feedback, for example on job applications or their interview technique, which might not be offered by potential employers themselves.

> *I've been in touch with [TPT staff member] and he's very helpful. He helps me with applications, CVs and interview prep. It's completely on the needs that I have; I can ask him for specific help.*

Several clients praised the staff as being very proactive in their support, responsive to their needs, and knowledgeable about their subject matter. Some clients also highlighted that they appreciated the honesty of the TPT staff's advice, and how this helped them to develop practical and realistic actions:

> *It was particularly good. [The TPT staff member] wasn't pretending to have a miracle cure, but it was helpful and I went away with lots of action points.*

One client we spoke to said they would appreciate having a quicker response to their email support requests if possible, for example getting feedback on cover letters and application forms within a day.

2.2 Workshops

The other key element of support for clients were workshop events, each of which focused on building a different aspect of employability knowledge and/or skills. These workshops were open to all interested VI people of working age.

2.2.1 What was delivered

At the time of writing, 22 workshops had been delivered across London from August 2015 to March 2016. In general, workshops lasted two to three hours and were held during the day. They ranged widely in their subject matter, location and facilitator type. A summary of the workshops delivered is provided in the table below, ordered from highest to lowest attendance.

Workshops delivered

No. of people	Location	Title	Facilitator type
26	Kingston	Employment Networking Event for VI People	Peer
19	Bloomsbury	British Gas HR Employment Event	Private
13	Holborn	Mishcon de Reya Employment Law	Private
12	Euston	Standard Chartered Social Media Career Boost	Private
11	Balham	How to get the most out of recruitment agencies	Private
8	Balham	Walk in Wardrobe for Work	Voluntary
7	Balham	Moorfields HR: NHS recruitment	Statutory
6	Tottenham	Employment and Life Skills Consultation Day	Voluntary
5	Balham	Makeup for interview and the workplace	Private
5	Balham	CV for a change of career	Voluntary
4	Southbank	Standard Chartered Employment Support	Private
4	Balham	Developing your freelance work	Voluntary
3	Balham	Interview technique	Voluntary
3	Balham	Blind Perspective and Career Coaching	Peer
3	Balham	Confidence talking VI to employers	Voluntary
3	Shepherd's Bush	House of Fraser Personal Shopping for Work	Private
2	Waltham Forest	CV for a change of career	Voluntary
2	Waltham Forest	Employment Drop In	Voluntary
2	Balham	Social Media	Voluntary
1	Shepherd's Bush	Application forms	Voluntary
1	Waltham Forest	Building resilience	Voluntary
0	Balham	Employment Drop In	Voluntary
TOTAL ATTENDANCES: 140			

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In general, workshops held in central locations were better attended; this echoes feedback from clients who said they preferred easier-to-reach venues. Realising this, the TPT staff team adapted their approach as the project went on; as of May 2016 they decided to only hold events in zone one and two, rather than trying to reach out to different areas of London.

Workshops with a private sector facilitator were generally better attended than those facilitated by someone from the voluntary sector (most commonly a member of the TPT team). Drawing on our client interviews and focus group data, one explanation for this is that people value more highly the opportunity to meet directly with potential employers, for example:

> *It was a good opportunity to go to an event that had so many HR staff from the company; the ratio was one to one. That was good because at some point during the day we were able to have one-to-one conversations.*

A total of 57 clients had attended workshops from August 2015 to March 2016. The table below gives a breakdown of how many people had attended different numbers of sessions.

Overall number of events attended by each client

Overall no. of events attended	No. of people
1 event	25
2 events	13
3 events	5
4 events	7
5 events	2
6 events	2
7 events	2
8 events	0
9 events	1
TOTAL	**57**

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The mean average number of workshops attended was 2.5; 14 people attended more than three events while two-thirds of participants had attended only one or two workshops. Clients were free to come to as many or as few workshops as they wanted to, and several interviewees indicated that they appreciated being able to 'pick and choose' the workshops they attended in this way.

2.2.2 Client satisfaction

The evidence gathered from clients we spoke to, along with the ad hoc feedback received by the project team, indicates that in general participants found the workshops interesting, useful and enjoyable. Several clients commented on the positive and inclusive facilitation, as well as the usefulness of the topics and activities.

> *When they send out upcoming seminars, the ones that I've picked to go on, [those workshops] never felt it was a waste of time. I've always come away thinking I've learned something.*

In terms of practicalities, people preferred it when central London venues were used and when travel in rush hour was not required, to make getting to the events as easy as possible. They felt that some potential attendees would be put off by the significant journeys sometimes required. Several clients suggested that events could be repeated in different locations in the city, to help as many people as possible to attend. However, given the lower attendance at locally-based events, it may be preferable to continue to hold events as centrally as possible and provide sighted guidance from the nearest station. One client commented that sometimes events did not always run to time. TPT staff have explained to us that this was because sometimes people requiring sighted guidance arrived late to pick-up points

Considering communication around the events, the TPT team had tried out a number of approaches and felt that two weeks' notice was the optimum amount of notice for a workshop. However, several of the clients we spoke to said that would like to have more notice of upcoming workshops. They also thought that this might alleviate the need to cancel events at the last minute due to low take-up. After the session, participants appreciated getting the notes sent to them so they could read over them again.

Some clients felt there were only so many skill-based workshops they felt it was useful to attend, particularly if they already had a lot of the employability skills being covered. While they understood that the project had to cater to a range of needs, they thought that people who were closer to work wouldn't find repeated skills-based workshop useful:

> *I think with those sorts of events, once you've been to one you've been to them all; there's only so much they can tell you. For example, CV workshops, once you've been to one or two, there's no point going to 10… If they have something new or of interest for me, or with a potential employer, I would consider going.*

Instead, these clients were keen to have more events at which they could connect with potential employers, and which would be accompanied by, or related to, job opportunities. One client was particularly frustrated with the lack of tangible opportunities that had come from events with employers:

> *I feel that TPT should be talking to employers and doing best to arrange job interviews, rather than having one-day affairs, where it's just a glorified picnic. More meaningful, constructive, leading to something… You get your hopes up and they're totally dashed. Something like that can send you into depression. Everyone wants to take pictures but that's it.*

Because the project is aimed at people with sight loss who are close to employment and are already equipped with employability skills, this is perhaps where TPT could add the most value for them.

One employer offered retail work placements to clients, but TPT explained that 'no one we mentioned [the placements] to wanted to take it up either because of the sector or the geographical area not being relevant'. They felt that this highlighted the challenge of meeting the highly-varied aspirations of a relatively small number of clients.

3 Support for employers

TPT consulted with companies with whom they already had good relationships on what support they would like to receive and how. This 'insider' approach led them to develop a style of communicating to business that stressed the business benefits for engaging with this area of work. The TPT team feel this better encouraged businesses to engage with them, and ultimately to achieve some good outcomes.

> *It's not to say we don't think the moral side is important! We have to communicate what they want to hear. I think that's one of the reasons we've had positive engagement – we've tried to speak their language.*

Having shown employers the benefits for them, the TPT team wanted to work with employers to try to 'break down barriers', rather than take a 'campaigning' or outsider approach. This led them to develop and deliver bespoke support for 12 employers, which broadly falls into two categories: training and support, and employer-supported volunteering. This support is described in more detail below.

3.1 Training and support for employers

TPT offered training and individual support for employers around improving their knowledge of VI and their practice of supporting VI people. Most commonly, this was in the form of visual awareness training, but they also covered other aspects of support, such as reviewing recruitment processes. Sometimes visual awareness training was delivered prior to the employer facilitating a workshop for VI people, as part of the preparation.

There was also often an element of informal awareness-raising and support that came as part of developing the relationship with the employer. This usually involved meeting face-to-face with the employer following the initial contact, explaining the issues VI people can face around employment, discussing preconceptions and demonstrating assistive technologies.

3.2 Employer-supported volunteering: facilitating workshops for people with sight loss

With the growth of employer-supported volunteering, TPT has found itself being increasingly approached by employers looking for volunteering opportunities for its staff. The programme of workshops facilitated by employees was in part a response to this, as TPT saw it as an opportunity to allow employers and people with sight loss to meet and share skills and experience. It was also described by TPT staff as 'a great way in' to developing relationships with corporates.

As part of the programme of workshops for people with sight loss, eight out of 22 events were facilitated by a private or statutory employer. These events covered topics such as social media, employment law or dressing for the workplace, and were in general better attended that those facilitated by TPT alone.

At these workshops, employees volunteered their time to share their expertise with VI people on the given topic, and employees also had the chance to learn about the experiences of VI people. Data from TPT indicates that 61 people from eight businesses volunteered as part of the programme from September 2015 to March 2016, together giving a total of 370 hours of volunteer time. The average (mean) amount of time given per volunteer was 5.4 hours.

3.3   Employer satisfaction

Although we were only able to speak to three employers of a possible 12, the employers we spoke to were generally very satisfied with their experience of the project.

In particular, the employers were happy with the approach taken by the project team, and valued their support in building awareness of VI. One employer was particularly enthusiastic:

> *The best [charity I've worked with]. They are very flexible in terms of approach; I really valued their working collaboratively. When working with other charities it was very much working their way and no other way. So it was quite refreshing for a charity to come to the table and say how would you like to work with us and how can we support you.*

However two of the employers said that they would have preferred it if staff were more available to them, particularly around responding to their enquiries more quickly, although they were aware of the constraints on TPT's resources for this.

4 Internal roles and processes

4.1 The project team

The project has been primarily delivered by a Project Manager and a Project Coordinator, with administrative support from an intern at some points. Broadly speaking, the Project Manager has led on the relationships with employers, while the Project Coordinator has led on the individual support for clients, but they have worked closely as a team supporting each other as needed. The project has also been overseen by the Director of London Services, although she has been less involved than may have been initially expected, because of the abilities and experience of the core project team.

Feedback from both the team and from clients has indicated that the TPT team itself has been one of the greatest assets of the project. All three members of staff that we spoke to felt that the team's combination of skills and experience was important. For example:

> I think the key bit for me has been the team, they've worked really well together. [The Project Coordinator] has first-hand experience of sight loss, and lots of work experience. [The Project Manager] has the employment knowledge, and knows about people's entitlements. The combination of the two is the key to it.

They felt that this broad skillset meant that they were able to offer higher quality and more specific support than they might have been able to offer otherwise:

> There might be a client that I'm working with and I go and ask [the Project Manager] for her advice on it. And I know that one time a guy that she'd done some work with was going for a job at [an organisation I know] and so I could go and get some tips for him.

Furthermore, because one member of the team is sighted and the other visually impaired, they felt that this benefited the project in practical terms and also by bringing additional insight:

Having the balance of being sighted and not, brings different perspectives. I can talk from the sighted person's perspective… and then similarly being able to have [the Project Coordinator] who has that personal experience of VI that he can bring to the table. From a logistical point of view, I've been able to offer sighted guidance to people. Maybe if we'd had a whole team of VI people maybe we couldn't have been able to offer that, or maybe we would have found another way round.

Beyond this, having a VI member of the team was in itself perceived as being a tool to move towards the project's outcomes, for example in providing a role model for visually impaired people or around improving the attitudes of employers:

When we talk to employers about you know, how VI people are valuable and can do just as many things a lot of the time as anyone else, I think it's really powerful having [the Project Coordinator] there.

Alongside the specific attributes of the team, the team described themselves as having 'the same approach' in terms of putting visually impaired people 'at the centre,' meaning that they had been able to foster an open, positive and supportive working relationships.

4.2 Assessing the suitability of clients

The project is open to anyone who has a VI they feel affects their employment opportunities. Clients are not required to be registered as sight impaired or severely sight impaired with their local authority.

To assess clients' suitability for in-depth individual support, the team use the RNIB employment assessment toolkit (see Appendix 3 for more details), to check that they fall into the 'near work ready' target group and to identify key barriers to address through the support. Although the team initially felt the tool was overly long, they have come to see it as useful in providing baseline information, and RNIB have been supporting them to use it effectively.

When the eligibility of potential clients was being considered, one issue that occasionally cropped up was whether there should be a required threshold for the level of sight loss. The project literature stated that clients would be eligible if they 'consider your sight loss to be a barrier to employment.' However, this concept could be differently interpreted. Occasionally, the project has had referrals from the job centre for people whose sight loss is not severe, for example where one eye is monocular. This has only applied to a few clients; however, this issue may have to be addressed in the future if the service were to grow in size.

4.3   Collecting monitoring data

The only requirement for monitoring the project was the completion of a TPT-wide 'scorecard' focused on the organisation's outputs. As there had been some accessibility issues with this document, and because the employment project team did not feel it captured the information they needed, they also used a variety of 'simple tools,' such as spreadsheets, to capture monitoring data on the project. However, neither of the core members of the team felt satisfied with these processes either, feeling that the tools were cumbersome, overly time-consuming and did not meet their needs:

> *Sometimes admin has come second to providing support… there's a bit of duplication going on and it takes quite a bit of time. I don't think it's the most accessible way to do it either, so yeah I've found that frustrating.*

The team explained that they would have preferred to use a single database system to capture information on clients, both for the purposes of delivering support and collecting monitoring data. However, progress had been slow on this as this would be an organisation-wide change, and there is still discussion on the best data storage solution for the whole of TPT.

More widely, the team suggested that perhaps they had sometimes collected too much information, or had too many separate documents, which, as well as being time-consuming, had made the data less accessible to people with a VI:

> *I take for granted that I can take in a lot of information in one go just by looking at the screen. And because I can do that, I put in a lot of information. And going through that same system with [the Project Coordinator] he would say well why do you need this information, why are we putting it in that format, why is that there… For him that extra column makes quite a difference… I would advise that anyone who is setting up a new monitoring system works with someone who is a) likely to be using it themselves and b) can feed back on some of the accessibility issues that might apply.*

In future, it could be useful to link data collection more closely to the monitoring and evaluation framework which was created at the beginning of the project, to better ensure that only useful data is collected.

4.4 Involving clients in shaping the project

Initially the TPT team wanted to create an advisory group for the project, made up of visually impaired clients. However, they struggled to get any take up for this, with some clients saying they did not have the time and others not responding. Instead, the project team have sought to gather the views of clients via individual support conversations and group discussions at workshops.

4.5 Working with other organisations

Throughout the project, TPT has worked with other organisations, both to receive referrals, for example from the job centre, or to signpost its clients on to, for example the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS).

In our interviews, TPT staff said that they would like to develop relationships with more organisations, so as to be able to strengthen the outcomes of the service.

To increase the reach of the project, there was a desire to engage more with people providing 'frontline' VI services, such as rehabilitation officers, particularly from the statutory sector.

To improve the project's ability to provide advocacy support, there was a desire to develop relationships with trade unions. Because TPT are not a trade union, they do not have any legal rights to accompany clients to meeting with their employer, as happened in the case of one client. The TPT team have previously tried to engage with trade unions without success, apparently due to a lack of time and resources in trade unions. This suggests that there is a need to build understanding within trade unions of the needs of VI people, and similarly for more VI people to support trade unions.

5 Outcomes

In this section, we explore the difference that the project appears to have made for people with sight loss, for employers and for TPT itself, based on the data available. This section uses the data collected independently by CES unless otherwise stated. CES collected data from a sample of 14 clients (eight via individual interviews and six via a focus group), interviews with three employers and interviews with three TPT members of staff.

5.1 For people with sight loss

5.1.1 Employability

In the project's original monitoring and evaluation framework (see Appendix 2 for more details) there were four expected outcomes around employability:

1. Increased engagement in education and training activity
2. Increased skills in performing work-related tasks
3. Increased confidence in key life skills (IT, AT, mobility)
4. Increased engagement in work-related activities

While there is evidence from the interviews and focus group that progress has been made around skills in performing work-related tasks and engagement in work-related tasks (outcomes two and four), we found no evidence for increased engagement in education and training, or key life skills (outcomes one and three). This is likely to be because the project has developed over time, with the focus of the work becoming clearer over its pilot year; for example, TPT staff suggested that support on IT skills could be one way to improve the project in the future.

There were also aspects of employability for which we found much evidence, but which were not originally included in the framework. For example, improved knowledge of how to apply for jobs, improved motivation and self-confidence, and broader career horizons. We explore all of these employability outcomes below.

Much of the progress made on work-related tasks was around **greater awareness of how to present yourself well to potential employers**, whether this was in terms of networking, tweaking a CV or improving interview technique. Several clients told us that they felt their **job search activities had improved in quality** as a result of the specific feedback from TPT staff, although many clients also said that they felt they already had a lot of these job application skills:

> *I think I've learned a bit more about how to write a covering letters or do applications but I knew quite a lot already – it's complemented that.*

Many of the 14 clients we spoke to told us that the support had helped to **broaden their career horizons,** for example by better appreciating the transferability of their skills and through TPT staff suggesting new job areas for them to consider:

> *It has benefited me because I'm learning what's out there. Without the support I don't think I would be aware of what I could apply for or what jobs are out there. I didn't know where to look for them [before the support], I didn't know about other avenues.*

For many people these broadened horizons were the result of **new insights into the jobs market and their skills** gained through feedback from TPT staff:

> *For me it provides a springboard when I have a sticking point, someone that is aware of difficulties but has employment knowledge. They can evaluate possible options that I'm looking at, like a sounding board on disability, and support in my career.*

Related to this, many clients described how the support, in particular the coaching from the TPT staff, **had increased their motivation** to continue with their job search in challenging times:

> *I think there had been a couple of times when I've felt quite disheartened and disillusioned and gone to [the project] and been buoyed up again. It's given me a renewed sense of purpose.*

Some clients also felt that being involved in the project, and in particular feeling championed and supported by the TPT staff, had helped to **improve their self-confidence** around their employment and job search activities.

5.1.2 Managing VI in the workplace

There were three expected outcomes in the original framework around ability to manage visual impairment in the context of the workplace:

1. Increased confidence in disclosing and discussing visual impairment with employers
2. Increased awareness of in-work support available (Access to Work, reasonable adjustments, trade unions, mentors)
3. Increased knowledge of employment rights

Perhaps because the majority of the 14 clients we spoke to were not currently in work, the most common outcome around managing VI in the workplace was around **increased knowledge of employment rights** (Outcome 3). This outcome was strengthened in particular via a workshop on employment rights facilitated by a law firm partner. Through understanding their employment rights, this had enabled some clients to have **increased confidence in disclosing and discussing visual impairment with employers** (Outcome 1) and **increased awareness of in-work support available** (Outcome 2), particularly around the concept of 'reasonable adjustments', although there was less evidence for these outcomes compared to Outcome 1.

> *They gave us lots of info [at the workshop] which did help in interviews because now if I talk to an employer about barriers and about visual impairment, I can talk more confidently about their responsibilities.*

One client in our sample was different from the others in that he had been receiving support from TPT that had helped to enable him to **retain employment**. Although this was not an outcome mentioned explicitly in the framework, his experience relates to managing a VI in the context of the workplace. Having secured a job in the retail sector, his employers had not allowed him to use his adaptive equipment, and he was called to a disciplinary meeting soon after starting in the role. He had been able to apply his improved knowledge of his employment rights:

> *[TPT staff] said I have rights. [My employer] has to provide equipment … They told me who to contact and what to do.*

This client had so far retained his job, which he partly attributed to the advice and support given to him by the project.

In addition to this, data from TPT indicates that, of the 16 clients who had secured new roles (paid or otherwise) over the course of the project, seven had accessed in-work support from the Project Coordinator. This suggests that the project may be contributing to enabling other VI people to retain work although based on the information available, we cannot say this with any certainty.

5.1.3 Employment rates

In the original monitoring and evaluation framework, the expected outcomes around employment rates were:

1. Increased awareness of the financial benefits of employment
2. Increased participation in recruitment-related activities
3. Increased number of VI people entering paid employment

While we did not find any evidence for increased awareness of the financial benefits of employment (Outcome 1) from the 14 clients we spoke to, we did find significant evidence for increased participating in recruitment-related activities (Outcome 2), and some evidence that more VI people had entered paid employment (Outcome 3) as a result of the project.

Many clients told us that they **had increased their recruitment-related activities** as a result of being involved in the project, for example applying for jobs they would not or could not otherwise have done:

> *The NHS jobs website is not accessible for me. [TPT staff member] helped me navigate the website, [they] were helping me remotely, joining the website and telling me about the services on there.*

For any employment project, there will be a focus on the number of clients who secure work, although it can be difficult to attribute this to any one factor. Several clients described the support as **contributing to their securing employment**, but described the process as complex and multi-factorial:

> *My current role was a recommendation from people I know … Talking to [TPT staff] helped me to have plenty of material for the interview. It's hard to say whether or not the session helped in any way.*

However it is worth noting that there was one client from the 14 we spoke to who directly attributed his securing 'a couple of paid positions' to the support given.

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From data provided to us by TPT, 16 clients have secured new roles since the project began 10 months previously, with 12 of these being paid roles, two being paid apprenticeships and two being voluntary roles. Of these 16 clients who secured new roles, 12 had received support from the Project Coordinator prior to securing their new role. In total, 32 people had received individual support from the project up to May 2016, suggesting a success rate of 37.5%where support was given before they secured new roles.

Furthermore, the employment team at TPT are themselves recruiting for an internship role that will be advertised specifically to clients, although open to anyone who wishes to apply. Therefore this is likely to enable another client to gain a work placement in the near future.

5.1.4 Unexpected outcomes

In addition to the expected outcomes of the project, some unexpected outcomes emerged from the data:

- Improved ability to develop self-employment
- Improved networks – both between clients, and between clients and employers
- Increased referrals to other specialist support services, for example, Advice, Consolation and Arbitration Services (ACAS).

One client also described a negative outcome of the project. Learning more about recruitment processes for them had 'confirmed my fears about how interviews are done and how people perceive you.' While most clients felt that TPT staff balanced the need for honesty with a highly supportive approach, this may be something to consider when developing any future employment projects.

5.2 For employers

This section draws on the interview data collected by CES with three employers, out of a total of 11 who had engaged with the project, unless otherwise stated. As discussed in the methodology section, because the sample size was small, this is likely to have biased the data, and our findings cannot be expected to reflect the experiences of the employer group as a whole. Furthermore, because we had difficulties in engaging other employers in the interviews, it is possible that our sample may be biased towards those employers who were most enthusiastic about the project.

In the original monitoring and evaluation framework, the specific aims for employers were around improving understanding of VI and increasing the employment of VI people. While some progress has been made towards both of these aims, outcomes have been strongest around building understanding of VI. This could be expected as a change needed as a first step towards the second outcomes of increased employment. The progress made in each of these areas is explored in more detail below.

5.2.1 Understanding of VI

In the original monitoring and evaluation framework, the intended outcomes under this specific aim were:

1. Increased confidence in recruiting and managing VI people
2. Increased number of professionals engaging in work-related activity with VI people
3. Increased awareness of VI among employers.

Among the three employers we spoke to, progress has been strongest in outcomes two and three, although there was some evidence to suggest that employers were more confident in recruiting and managing VI people (outcome 1), particularly around having **increased knowledge of available support**, for example, Access to Work. One employer felt that their staff had learned about 'sensitivity and practical skills' around supporting existing VI staff, suggesting that they had an **improved understanding of how to support VI colleagues.**

Regarding outcome two, there were 67 employee volunteers who supported project activities, primarily the workshops, suggesting an **increased number of professionals engaging in work-related activity with VI people.** In terms of the longevity of this engagement, we understand that these volunteering opportunities were one-offs; however, one employer said that their involvement with the project had 'inspired them to do more,' for example working with other disability charities.

All three of the employers we spoke to felt that they had **increased their awareness of VI,** in particular 'arming themselves with knowledge' about what it means to be VI through practical activities such as sighted guiding. The facilitation of interaction between employers and people with sight loss was viewed by employers as giving them **'greater understanding of the challenges faced by VI people.'**

Related to this, there was some evidence provided by TPT staff that as a result of the project, employees may be **more likely to offer support to VI people in other contexts**, an unexpected outcome. For example, anecdotal evidence suggests that staff in a retail setting felt they could give better customer service to VI customers as a result of engaging with the project. Following workshops staff would also sometimes offer to give sighted guidance to take the VI participants back to the nearest station.

5.2.2 Employment of VI people

The originally intended outcomes related to this aim were:

1. Increased number of VI staff in employer organisations
2. Increased accessibility of recruitment processes
3. Increased number of employers taking in VI people in work placements
4. Increased interest in the project from employers.

Some progress has been made on outcome four to the extent that the three employers we spoke to were **keen to continue to engage with TPT**; one also described there being demand from staff for more events. However, we cannot conclude that this was the case for the wider group of employers, particularly in light of the fact that it was difficult to secure interviews with them for the purposes of this evaluation.

One employer told us that they are **'looking to change recruitment processes** because of the training' to make them more accessible. This suggests some very limited progress may have been made around outcome two, which is as might be expected at this pilot stage.

Regarding outcomes one and three, although 12 VI clients of the project have found paid employment, we were not able to find any evidence in any of the CES or TPT data that the employers that TPT has worked with are now employing more VI staff. Neither was there evidence that employers were taking on more VI people via work placements, except for one employer who had offered retail work placements, none of which had been taken up. TPT staff explained to us that these placements were not taken up because the role and/or location were not of interest to any of their clients, highlighting that there are many factors which influence whether or not a job opportunity is taken up, which may be beyond the influence of the project.

While the project has taken a 'two-pronged' approach working with both people with sight loss and employers, from the data available to us it seems the two are yet to be linked in the sense of placing VI people in organisations, or making an introduction that becomes an opportunity. However, some clients have made applications to employer organisations after meeting them at workshop, with one securing an interview.

It may be that this is something that could be achieved over a longer time period; many of the employers started from a place of little awareness of VI, many not even aware if they had any VI staff already. Getting permission and buy-in to make changes to organisational processes often takes time.

5.3   For Thomas Pocklington Trust

Although changing TPT internally was not specifically stated as an aim of the project, TPT project staff felt that the project had influenced the organisation in a number of ways.

5.3.1 Internal outcomes for TPT

Staff felt that delivering the project had made them reflect on their own internal practices, with the following outcomes:

- Greater awareness of what support needs to be in place to support VI staff
- Improved access to advice for employers, in the form of the employment team.

It was also noted that TPT now employs 'more VI staff than ever before.' However, we do not have enough information to be able to say to what extent that might or might not be related to the employment project, as recruitment sits with the TPT HR team.

There are also plans to employ a VI intern for Visionary from the employment project. The possibility of supporting other local sight loss organisations to create their own VI internship schemes is also being considered.

5.3.2 Internal outcomes for the employment project

The pilot project has resulted in the following positive changes:

- More accessible job application processes. For example, TPT now asks for CVs and 500 word statement rather than using application forms

- Improved recruitment practices, for example, more proactively encouraging disabled people to apply for roles by giving examples of what 'reasonable adjustment' could look like.
- Staff feel more determined to employ VI people.
- Better relationships with partners, which staff hope may lead to opportunities for clients in the future.

6 Learning

This pilot project has been the first employment project that TPT has delivered and much has been learned over its initial months about how best to support visually impaired people into employment and how to develop this work.

In this section, we outline some of the key areas of learning that emerged from the data we collected, helping to illustrate what aspects of the current project were effective and why, as well as giving ideas for how to develop this work and strengthen its outcomes and impact. The content and structure of this learning has been informed by the evaluation questions posed at the beginning of this piece of work. We hope that this will be useful to inform the improvement of the current work, but also contribute to the evidence base for others seeking to provide support to visually impaired people around employment.

6.1 What adds value to the project for clients?

From our interviews and focus group with visually impaired people, five key themes emerged around what clients particularly valued about the support from the project:

- tailored support
- supportive and proactive team
- the quality of the advice
- open to people of all ages
- bringing employers and people with sight loss together.

Each of these five themes is described in more detail below.

6.1.1 Tailored support

When discussing what they most valued about the employment project, clients most commonly mentioned that the flexibility of the support meant it could better meet their wide-ranging needs.

Firstly, they appreciated the flexibility around the type of support they received and how often; clients liked that they could pick and choose what support would be useful to them:

> *I like the fact it's quite flexible. There's no rigid structure to it; you can get what you want. Whether it's just events or support with applications, it's basically up to you.*

Secondly, particularly regarding the individual support, clients really appreciated that all of the advice and support they received was directed towards addressing their specific challenges:

> *With [the Project Coordinator], I've had interviews and not been successful [and] he's trying to find trends in my feedback. He's really working to helping the individual's needs.*

For some clients, this tailoring of support also meant that they were able to receive support in a way that made them feel more comfortable, for example because they could choose the format of support or because support was delivered in a way that took into account their accessibility needs:

> *I couldn't always remember the way there. I phoned and [the Project Manager] would come and meet me or wait at the station … Little things make a difference.*

6.1.2 Supportive and proactive staff team

Many of the clients we spoke to specifically mentioned that they valued how committed the TPT staff team were in supporting their clients. This included their approachability and friendliness:

> *They are always on hand and positive, always making suggestions, and there's never been any barrier haven't been able to overcome.*

Clients also praised their proactivity, often talking about how they felt they had gone 'above and beyond' to help meet their individuals needs or to provide them support with last minute applications:

> *They're always proactive finding different workshops for me … really researching on what's required and what clients need.*

Some clients also talked about their attitude to providing support as being open and responsive, with the support being a two-way dialogue:

> *They're offering help but also listening and taking on board what I'm saying and thinking. They're being encouraging, not dictating.*

6.1.3 The quality of the advice

Several clients mentioned that they valued how knowledgeable the TPT staff team were around specific aspects of employment, for example advising them on roles to consider or on different ways to approach their career development. Some clients described the quality of the advice as enabling them to think about their career in new ways:

> *It was common sense in a lot of ways but she obviously understood the particular problem I had. … It was surprisingly helpful for unlocking the brain a bit.*

6.1.4 Open to people of all ages

As discussed above, the TPT project was specifically set up with a view to fill a gap in support for visually impaired people who were not necessarily under 25 years or at the beginning of their career. Several clients also picked up on this, valuing that they could access this type of support later in their lives or careers:

> *A big factor that appealed [about the TPT project] was that they weren't selecting on age. There was quite a range there, and a range of experiences. … I'm on the books of other charities [and] they help with one-to-one stuff, but they didn't have that much for me any more in terms of events – they're often aimed at fresh graduates or young people.*

6.1.5 Bringing employers and people with sight loss together

Some clients mentioned that the way the project brought together employers and people with sight loss was quite unusual. Clients valued the opportunity to 'get in front of' potential employers and learn more about what they wanted, but also recognised that it was an important learning process for employers too:

> *The workshop was a two way thing – employers could find out about VI people too. It's a really good idea.*

6.2   What needs or challenges persist?

It was not in the scope of the evaluation to carry out an assessment of further needs, however over the course of the research stakeholders highlighted to us various ongoing issues or challenges in the wider area of employment and sight loss. These are the views and opinions of our small sample of clients and of TPT staff, however they may be useful to inform the development of the TPT project and/or future support for people with sight loss around employment. Many of these issues go beyond the scope of current project, however, presuming these barriers persist, there may be a need for the project to consider how or if they can act on them.

6.2.1 Barriers for people with sight loss

In the course of interviews, clients and TPT staff described a range of major ongoing barriers for people with sight loss around employment. These are listed below under each theme.

Appropriate employment support not always available

- Lack of support for VI people who are further in their career and the need to look at transferrable skills.
- Lack of support if people want to do something 'out of the box' and take an unconventional career path.
- Lack of appropriate support from mainstream employment support, for example, job centres.
- Inaccessibility of mainstream employment support.
- Lack of specialist support for VI people around employment; local sight loss organisations tend to focus more on services for older people.
- Lack of support for people with sight loss who are near work-ready.
- Lack of work placement schemes/opportunities.

Lack of support around using assistive technology/equipment

- Lack of experience with assistive technology, especially for those who lose their sight later in life.
- Lack of provision to help people to learn to use assistive technology.
- Limited access to IT resources.
- Lack of equipment: Access to Work do not fund all equipment requests.

Unable to apply for all types of roles

- Unable to have a driving licence.

- Lack of relevant experience, and unable to access this.
- Put forward by recruitment agencies for inappropriate roles.

Discriminated against in recruitment procedures

- Dismissed by recruitment agencies 'out of hand'.
- Need to be 'better than all the other candidates' to 'compensate' for their VI.
- Need to accept they are 'not going to be given any positive discrimination from anybody'.

Lack of job application and interview skills

- People with sight loss are not supported to 'show the best of themselves'.
- People get 'daunted by person specs'.

Unsure of how to discuss their needs with an employer or potential employer

- Unsure of how to talk to employers about reasonable adjustments.
- Not always willing to ask for help from an employer when it is needed.

Inaccessibility of recruitment processes

- Slower process of searching, researching and applying for jobs.
- Difficulties in searching for vacancies.

Lack of self-confidence

- The need to persist with job hunting and not be 'disheartened.'

Lack of awareness of the employment support available

- Harder to reach people with sight loss who are not already engaged with support services.

6.2.2 Issues around employers' attitudes, knowledge and behaviours

Clients and TPT staff raised the following as major issues with employers' practice around recruiting, employing and supporting people with sight loss. Points are listed below under each theme.

Misconception of VI people as incapable

- Reluctance to take on the 'risk' of employing a VI person – 'they will always find a reason to say no'.

- Preconception that people with sight loss cannot do things for themselves.
- Only paying 'lip service' to equal opportunities.
- Lack of experience and fear.
- Do not know how many VI staff there are in their company.

Unsupportive of VI colleagues' needs

- Bullying of VI colleagues is tolerated at work.
- VI employees are not always given the correct equipment, for example, magnifiers.
- Companies do not familiarise themselves with the adjustments requested by VI employees, so are unprepared.

Lack of knowledge about what support is available

- Smaller companies in particular may be put off as they think they will need to purchase expensive specialist equipment.
- Lack of awareness of Access to Work support.

Discrimination in recruitment practices

- Recruitment companies take the 'easy option,' not putting forward good VI candidates.
- Disingenuous feedback when unsuccessful at interview – 'they fob you off'.

Support wanes over time

- Companies may engage with a one-off event but find it difficult to maintain enthusiasm over the longer term.
- Staff turnover is a constant risk to the relationship between TPT and the employer.

Lack of awareness about their responsibilities

- Companies may not know or not want to know about their responsibilities around making reasonable adjustments.

Not open to improving their practice

- Some companies feel that being offered support is an accusation of bad practice.

6.3   How do clients want to see the project develop?

In our discussions with clients, they provided us with a number of suggestions as to what they would like to see from the project in future:

- **Work placements**: Many clients said that they would like to see more 'tangible offers' from the employers who engage with the project, such as trainee schemes and work placements. Some mentioned that they felt these had to be medium-term, that is, longer than six months, to make them worthwhile for both the VI person and the employer.
- **Communicate more about (specific) job opportunities**: Some clients wanted TPT to send them more information about potentially suitable job roles, to help them in their job search, for example, a fortnightly bulletin about jobs in the sight loss sector.
- **More focus on changing employers' attitudes:** Some clients pointed out that there was already quite a lot of support for people with sight loss around available employment opportunities; they felt there should be more emphasis on the bigger barrier of employers' prejudice, for example through training for managers and HR staff.
- **More follow up from employers:** Some clients felt despondent when they did not hear back from prospective employers they had met at the workshops; they suggested that TPT help to facilitate ongoing communication.

6.4 What potential is there to transfer the project to other settings?

TPT and Visionary are interested in supporting local sight loss organisations in other parts of the country to deliver similar employment support. Therefore, while the findings of this evaluation only apply to the TPT London project, we were interested to find out staff and client opinions on whether this type of support could, or should, be transferred to other settings.

In general, the people we spoke to did feel that the project should be replicated elsewhere, because 'the issues are the same everywhere,' in terms of the types of challenges that visually impaired people encounter in finding and retaining work. There was a feeling that there was a need for similar local, tailored support around the country, especially as most local organisations had historically focused on supporting older people, in those age groups in which sight loss is most common.

However, there was also a recognition that the London context is different. TPT staff in particular observed that there were both more people and more job opportunities in London, giving access to a wider group of potential clients.

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It is hard to say whether being in London has meant that the project has been able to engage more employers. Although there are more large employers based in London, this may not mean that a project based in London is able to engage more employers than elsewhere.

However, it seems likely that the larger pool of potential clients could have made the approach of focusing on near employment-ready people more viable. In a regional context with fewer working-age people with sight loss, and where there might not be other employment support services available, it may be more difficult to cater specifically for only one group.

7 Recommendations

These recommendations have been developed from the findings outlined in this report. It is intended that they should be useful both for the purposes of improving the current project and for developing good practice guidelines for other organisations. The recommendations are presented under the stakeholder group to whom they apply.

For how the TPT project can be improved

7.1 Focus more on engagement with employers

Many of the significant barriers to employment for VI people lie in employer attitudes. People told us that attitudes are also particularly poor in many recruitment agencies.

TPT should:

- increase engagement with employers, developing new and existing relationships, in order to change attitudes and build confidence around employing VI staff
- continue to be flexible in the type of support given to employers and have regular dialogue with them, so that TPT staff can quickly respond to their needs
- explore more engagement with recruitment agencies.

7.2 Offer more 'tangible' work-related opportunities

Because many clients are near work-ready, getting into a workplace is one of the final barriers they need to overcome.

TPT should:

- develop further opportunities for clients to access additional work-related opportunities via the project, for example creating a range of placement schemes, internships or career days that are likely to meet the needs of clients
- continue to foster its relationships with employers, looking to develop such schemes in partnership with them, as well as continuing to set up internal placements for clients.

7.3 Consider increasing capacity for individual support

Effective work around increasing employability for people with sight loss relies on intensive and tailored support provided by skilled members of staff, who can only support a relatively small number of people. In addition, some issues are only appropriate for a one-to-one setting, for example, retaining work. Our data indicates that more people may be interested in receiving individual support.

- TPT should consider the need for greater staff capacity in order to maintain the level of positive outcomes and meet any additional demand.

7.4 Increase communications with clients

Clients reported that they would like more notice of workshops; not all of them were aware of all of the services on offer (particularly individual support). Including information about work opportunities in repeat emails could mean that they are more likely to be more thoroughly read.

TPT should:

- consider communicating more frequently with clients where capacity allows
- explore different forms of information.

7.5 Review and streamline monitoring and evaluation

Data collection needs to be streamlined, ensuring that only useful data is collected.

TPT should:

- revise the monitoring and evaluation framework so that it better reflects the outputs and outcomes that the project is now delivering
- increase the amount of data being collected on the project's outcomes, and make this data collection more systematic rather than ad hoc to reduce the risk of bias
- put in place clear processes and responsibilities to ensure that data is used to continually improve the project
- integrate processes for capturing and storing data with any move within TPT as a whole to move to an organisation-wide database, ensuring that VI staff advise on how best to make these processes inclusive and easy to use.

7.6 Offer IT training and support

IT skills are often important to securing and maintaining employment, but the project has not as yet been able to help clients make significant progress in this area.

- TPT should consider how it could support clients to have access to IT equipment and training, or partner with another organisation to assist such access.

7.7 Partner with other types of organisation

Working together with different types of organisations could help the project to reach more people and to strengthen its outcomes.

- TPT should consider engaging with organisations from which they could receive referrals and to which they could refer for specialist support, for example, trade unions, rehabilitation services, non-VI related employment support and other VI charities.

7.8 Be clear about eligibility

As the service grows, TPT should ensure that support is being provided to those most in need.

- TPT should consider clarifying the exact level of sight loss that is required to be eligible for support.

7.9 Consider peer-led support

The data indicates that people valued being able to speak with people with first-hand experience of managing a VI in the workplace.

- The evaluation supports TPT's re-consideration of the idea of providing peer-led support or a mentoring service for people with sight loss as part of the project as the project develops beyond its pilot year.

For other sight loss organisations providing employment support

7.10 Spend time on scoping and project design

Our findings indicate that the time that TPT spent researching and scoping their employment project helped it to achieve stronger outcomes, particularly in terms of filling a 'gap' in services available in London. TPT had a full-time member of staff working on this scoping and design process for three months. (Appendix 3 provides details of helpful research and resources used by TPT.)

Other organisations wishing to set up employment projects for people with sight loss should:

- spend time understanding what other support is available locally, learning from other projects (such as TPT's employment project) and scoping local need and demographics, so as to design projects that will be effective locally
- where it is possible, consult people with sight loss, as the intended beneficiaries.

7.11 Provide tailored support – one size doesn't fit all

Learning from the TPT project indicates that people with sight loss have a wide variety of needs around employment. Even within the 'near work-ready' group that TPT targeted, a wide range of types of support was requested. Other organisations doing similar work may choose to also target VI people at a specific stage of the 'journey' of employment. However, in some cases this may be impracticable because of the more limited number of potential clients.

- Where it is impracticable to target VI people at a specific stage of the 'journey' of employment, regionally-based organisations should consider the benefits of offering a highly-tailored service. For example, this could mean providing very flexible individual support, in order to meet a wide range of needs.

7.12 Allow time for relationships to develop and change to happen

Although the small sample of clients and employers we spoke to reported some positive outcomes from the TPT project during its pilot year, these were largely outcomes that might be expected in the short term. Some of the intended outcomes, particularly around changing people's employment status or an organisation's culture, may take several years. Our findings indicate that in particular it can take time to change practices in employer organisations.

- Other organisations should plan for a realistic, longer-term timeframe where possible, having earlier and medium-term milestones to monitor progress along the way.

7.13 Provide flexible support to employers, as well as clients

All of the three employers we spoke to who had engaged with the employment project appreciated that TPT had tailored the support to their needs and experiences. Our findings indicate that this had gone some way to keeping these three employers engaged, and indeed all in our small sample were keen to do more as a result.

- Other organisations should take a flexible approach to working with employers, keeping dialogue open in order to respond to their needs, and managing expectations early where this might not be possible.

7.14 Recruit staff with a range of experience and perspectives

The TPT staff team's effectiveness has been in part because between them they had expertise in both the sight loss and employment advice and support arenas. Additionally, one member of staff had a VI and one was fully sighted, giving a range of practical skills and perspectives, and providing role models. The team balanced a highly supportive, individualised approach with honesty and realism around what will be effective in helping people with sight loss find and retain employment.

- Other organisations should consider how to recruit a team that combines first-hand experience of sight loss and practical skills in employment advice and support. The team should aim for an approach that balances a high level of individual support with honesty and realism.

7.15 Show employers what is in it for them

Our findings suggest that one of the reasons that the TPT project has been able to engage employers effectively is because they highlighted the potential benefits for their company, for example in improved customer service or brand reputation.

Other organisations should:

- use an approach that seeks to understand the needs of employers and use their language
- use levers such as the rise of employer-supported volunteering to maximise the opportunities to engage with employers.

Appendix 1: Project background and rationale

How the project came about

There was a range of internal and external factors driving the creation of TPT's employment project in 2015.

Externally, unemployment rates for people with sight loss have remained persistently high in recent years. At the time of the project's inception, the most recent survey of people registered blind and partially sighted through the Network 1000 survey (2006) showed that only 33% of working age people were in employment or self-employment. Since the project began, new research conducted by RNIB through the My Voice survey conducted in 2015 revealed that employment rates of working age people registered blind or partially sighted seems to have actually decreased with only 27% now in employment or self-employment. Alongside these statistics, there are reports of gaps in employment support for VI people.

Externally, TPT had seen increasing interest from employers for volunteering opportunities, and were keen to capitalise on this opportunity to link people with sight loss with prospective employers.

Internally, TPT had taken on a VI intern whose particular support needs made them more aware of some of the challenges faced by VI people in the workplace. A TPT staff member explains:

> *It dawned on us the skills they needed, and [the need] for us to ensure that we had the right equipment she needed. Previously we had employed experienced VI staff. Taking on someone who hadn't worked was an eye opener for us, we realised we had to get all these processes right.*

As a result of these drivers, TPT decided to create a project that would take a 'two-pronged' approach, working with both people with sight loss and employers. In this way they hoped to address both the personal and the social barriers that people with sight loss face when seeking employment. Moreover, the project would fill what they perceived as a gap in support for people who were near employment-ready. A TPT staff member explains more about the rationale for this:

> *You can be the most work-ready person but because of the employer or their recruitment process you can miss out on opportunities. Having one without the other [support for VI people and support for employers] just wouldn't work.*

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Other employment support for people with sight loss in London

When the Project Manager was first recruited in May 2015, she spent her first three months exploring existing support and research around employment and sight loss, to try to ensure that the TPT project was evidence-based and would add to what was already on offer. TPT's research and policy teams were able to support her in this process, as well as putting her in touch with other delivery organisations.

Besides the TPT project, there are five other key employment programmes for people with sight loss in London. They are:

- **Royal London Society for the Blind:** employment support for 18 to 25 year olds. The four month employability programme consists of workshops on CVs, confidence, interview skills, assistive technology and basic skills as well as one to one support and a two week work placement with an employer.
- **Action for Blind People:** a network of employment coordinators across the UK who offer employment advice. Support is delivered largely through workshops and job clubs on topics around CVs, applications, disclosing VI and interviews. Also have a national helpline on employment set up for those who don't live near office locations and employers who need advice.
- **Blind in Business:** supports VI students and graduates into employment. They provide daytime and evening workshops to support both students and their support networks (such as family), as well as individual support. They also work with employers and offer mentoring through their visually impaired alumni.
- **Sight for Surrey:** pre-employment training which covers confidence and self-esteem, CV writing and career appraisals, how to make applications and job search, ICT solutions and mock interviews. The course usually takes place over four consecutive full length days and gives participants the opportunity to meet positive role models with lived experience of working whilst having a vision impairment.
- **Middlesex Association for the Blind:** run a six week part time job club training course in Hanwell: 'A Clear Vision to Employment'. Topics include CV writing, application forms, career advice, telephone techniques, confidence building and ongoing support. Working in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions.

Appendix 2: The project's outcomes framework

This outcomes framework was taken from the wider monitoring and evaluation framework set up at the beginning of the project. The outcomes contained within it have been used as the expected outcomes against which the evaluation has assessed the change created by the project.

Specific aim one: To increase the employability of working age VI people in London

Outcomes

1. Increased engagement in work-related activity by VI people in London
2. Increased confidence in key life skills (IT, AT, mobility)
3. Increased skills in performing work-related tasks
4. Increased engagement in education and training activity

Specific aim two: To improve the ability of VI people in London to manage visual impairment in the context of the workplace

Outcomes

1. Increased confidence in disclosing and discussing visual impairment with employers
2. Increased awareness of in-work support available (Access to Work, reasonable adjustments, trade unions, mentors)
3. Increased knowledge of employment rights

Specific aim three: To increase employment rates of VI people in London

Outcomes

1. Increased participation in recruitment-related activities (job searches, job applications, recruitment agencies, work fairs)
2. Increased awareness of the financial benefits of employment (in work benefits, UC)
3. Increased number of VI people entering paid employment

Specific aim four: To increase the quality of employment for VI people in London

Outcomes

1. Increased retention of work through the process of sight loss

2. Increased number of VI people signing off unemployment benefits for paid work
3. Increased number of VI people requiring no welfare support
4. Increased sustainability of employment

Specific aim five: To increase understanding amongst employers of the potential benefits of hiring VI staff

Outcomes

1. Increased confidence in staff recruiting and managing VI people
2. Increased number of professionals engaging in work-related activity with VI people
3. Increased awareness of VI amongst employers

Specific aim six: To increase the number of VI staff recruited by employers

Outcomes

1. Increased number of VI staff within employer organisations
2. Increased accessibility of recruitment processes
3. Increased number of employers taking on VI people in work placements (paid or unpaid)
4. Increased interest in the employment project from employers

Appendix 3: Background research and resources used by the TPT project

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