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GP EMPLOYMENT ADVISER PILOT LAUNCHES IN MERSEYSIDE

GP surgeries in Merseyside are participating in a new pilot project which for the first time enables an employment adviser to be placed within doctors' surgeries to help patients get back into work, education or training.

Six surgeries in Merseyside are supporting the pilot, provided by employment charity Tomorrow's People. The surgeries involved are Mather Avenue Medical Centre, the Vauxhall Health Centre, Aintree Group Practice and Everton Road Health Centre in Liverpool and Seaforth Village Practice in Sefton; and St Hilary Brow Group Practice on the Wirral. Tomorrow's People is also working in partnership with North, Central and South Liverpool Primary Care Trusts.

Patients who are out of work for health reasons, but who would like independent, one-to-one confidential advice about getting into work can now make an appointment with the Tomorrow's People employment adviser through their surgery. Although the service can be accessed by anyone with health issues, it is hoped it will particularly help people in receipt of sickness related benefits regain their confidence and get back into work.

The pilot is based on Tomorrow's People's background of success running similar projects across 74 GPs' surgeries, hospitals and health centres in various areas of the UK, including London, Devon, Bristol, Tyneside, and Glasgow. The Merseyside pilot is part funded through the Greater Merseyside Learning and Skills Council Nextstep initiative – 'Advice on Learning and Work.'

Chris Jones, Tomorrow's People's Operations Manager for Merseyside said: "Tomorrow's People would like to extend this voluntary service, particularly in Merseyside, but continue to search for funding opportunities both locally and nationwide. We have requests from a further 713 GPs to participate in our service, but require financial support to enable us to expand the scheme.

"The Government recently showed its support for this type of project, announcing plans to pilot employment adviser support within GPs' surgeries. Whilst we support this proposal, our own experience from offering a similar service for the last five years shows that patients prefer to visit an independent expert on site without fears of the stigma that can be attached to attending a job centre or a more formal service that they may find threatening.

"A key strength of our own service is the independence of our advisers from Government. If clients feel they are being scrutinised or judged they will not seek help. On top of this, our independence also means we are able to devote more time to each patient, which is vital with a client group like this who have considerable barriers to overcome before they can return to work."



The first Tomorrow's People project began in a surgery in Kentish Town, North West London where for the last four years it has had a Tomorrow's People adviser based on site at a busy GPs' surgery. So far nearly 200 patients have seen the adviser in London, and of those who have completed the programme, 87% have returned to employment or are back in education or training. On average, 82% are still in work 12 months on. The scheme in London has saved the practice at least five GP consultations per patient, already saving the surgery thousands of pounds.

Helen Dawson, Tomorrow's People employment adviser for Merseyside explains: "Helping people who have been on long-term sickness back into work is a long-term process. What is crucial is that we have the time to talk about any barriers to work and we will spend on average 45-60 minutes with a patient per meeting.

"We start with confidence building and then move on to retraining if necessary and provide support with CV writing, computer skills and interview techniques. We stay in touch with the clients even after they are in work or training, giving advice and liaising between the client and their employer."

The Tomorrow's People employment advisers work as integrated members of the primary health care team and patients can be referred by the GP, health visitor, nurse or counsellor or can self refer. All Merseyside Tomorrow's People employment advisers are NVO qualified in advice and guidance. In addition, Tomorrow's People on Merseyside has the Matrix Quality Standard awarded by the Guidance Accreditation Board, the national accountable body for the delivery of advice and guidance to adults.

Tomorrow's People, which has a 21-year track record of helping people out of long term unemployment, provides a number of additional programmes across Merseyside including schemes for excluded young people and support for ex-offenders. In addition to GPs' surgeries, outreach venues where Tomorrow's People provides one-to-one support include libraries, sports centres, Jobcentres and community centres.

Any GPs who would like to get in touch and find out more about the scheme, or people requiring employment advice, please contact Tomorrow's People by telephoning 0151 255 1400 or write to Tomorrow's People, First Floor, Marybone Community Association, Addison Street, Liverpool L3 2EW

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Notes to Editors:

- Tomorrow's People is a national charity that has helped change the lives of over 400,000 people across the UK who had been resigned to long-term unemployment and welfare dependency, since it was established in 1984. It engages with the people who are the hardest to reach by giving them one to one support in their own community, helping them find the right job and to keep it long term. On average, 76% of people helped by Tomorrow's People are still in employment 12 months on.

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