

Employ ULV Framework



Lone Parents in the Upper Lee Valley

November 2005

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In the Upper Lee Valley there are about 360,000 women of which about 230,000 are of working age. 170,000 are economically active leaving up to 50,000 working age women who are economically inactive (meaning not actively seeking or wanting a job) (ONS Census 2001).

Of this number over 17,000 are made up of lone parents who are not working, the vast majority (14,500) of which are economically inactive females. There are a total of 11,000 female lone parents who work full or part time, and a further 2000 that are unemployed (ibid). Across the UK female lone parents were more likely than any other economically inactive group to say that they did want to work (42%) (GLA 2003).

The majority of female lone parents fall between the ages of 25-54 and most claim Income Support benefits for over 3 years. Very few claim benefits for less than one year or any other benefit type (nomis 2004). Employment is less likely however for lone parents with young children (under 5) and up to 50% of female lone parents engage in part-time work (GLA 2003). The employment rate for lone parents with children under five is significantly high compared to other groups.

In more general terms, young females (16-19), BME and disabled females face particular difficulty in accessing employment compared to other groups, and are under-represented in higher-level occupations (management and professional) and over-represented in lower level occupations, and BME women also earn considerably less than the overall average rate (GLA 2003).

Lone parents generally have a significantly lower level of educational attainment, in particular with female lone parents and those with young children (GLA 2003).

The main barriers to employment for lone parents have been identified by the DWP as the lack of availability and affordability of childcare, the fear of moving off benefits and taking employment, and concerns about ability to earn enough money to cover expenses like housing and council tax (GLA 2003). These ignore more sensitive (or less 'visible') issues such as the need for life-skills such as time-keeping and personal organisation, confidence and personal capacity building.

Priority Target Groups

This analysis clearly indicates that there are a large number of female lone parents who do work, are willing to work, and who potentially can work. This is an assumption based on the idea that if 36% of female lone parents are able to work in the ULV, then the barriers that exist for the other 64% may be preventing them from working especially considering that over 6% are unemployed and looking for work.

At the end of 2004 there were over 18,000 female lone parents claiming Income Support (nomis, 2004). This may indicate a slight increase in the number of female lone parents and a good coverage of benefit claims in terms of the numbers of female lone parents identified by the census. There are clearly those that fall outside this group such as the refugee, asylum seekers and migrant labourers (as shown by statistics for those groups in general). The project will need to take these issues into consideration.

Unemployment rates are highest for lone parents with young children, and these should be targeted both to provide opportunity and also to avoid distancing from the labour market that may increase difficulties in returning.

BME female lone parents employment rates are generally lower than for other groups, and this is compounded by generally lower economic activity rates in particular for all Asian and African women. Particular emphasis on these groups is needed.

Disabled women are also similarly disadvantaged in the labour market and consideration to this group is needed.

A peripheral issue is that employers may not be aware of the needs of lone parents and of the means to implement flexibility in work schedules. It would be appropriate to engage employers in this light to improve employment opportunities for lone parents.

Key Training Needs

A comprehensive compilation of life-skills courses will be necessary to deal with the highly variable set of circumstances of lone parents. Personalisation of advice and training should be initiated at the beginning of the process in order to best deal with the individual and flexibility in scheduling of skills training to suit childcare responsibilities is vital.

The following list is taken from the Job Centre Plus life-skills course outline and are a good indication of potentially important courses for lone parents.

- Attitude - Life skills/Learning Culture
- Financial awareness, money handling, paying bills
- Work Ethic
- Grooming/Personal appearance, interpersonal skills
- Motivation - Job appropriate/worthwhile
- Redressing low aspirations
- Recruitment systems/processes
- IT awareness (not occupational skills) essentials - keyboard, navigation, e-mail, Internet
- Visits to employers
- Occupational expectations (realism)
- Telephone skills
- Customer care
- Life skills - turning up, time keeping, getting to work/travel support mechanisms, lunch, concentration, stamina, routine
- Working with colleagues (jobcentreplus.gov.uk)

Specific assistance with understanding the labour market, employment, and tax and benefits in place to help address lone parent's needs in returning to the labour market needs to be highlighted. Working Tax credits are provided specifically for childcare needs. Engagement with local childcare providers will also be important in delivering this project in order to create further opportunity for these community services.

Given that educational attainment has a recognised effect on employability, the lower level of basic and key skills of lone parents needs to be considered. Specific issues

for non-English speaking and disabled lone parents need to be addressed, including ESOL training and practical assistance in working with disability.

It is important to note that social networks are important in affecting attitudes toward work (ODPM 2004), and increasing the contact of lone parents with individuals in various careers may be helpful in improving attitudes toward employment. Mentoring and engagement with role models and already employed lone parents are factors that may encourage lone parents to engage in the labour market.

Re-entry of previously employed lone parents will require a different approach and may include updating of existing skills (such as ITC and so on). Sector specific training and life skilling is important for these groups (such as those required for the health sector such as good communication skills, and for administration good organisation and prioritisation skills).

Improvements of life-skills will assist lone parents to access higher-level jobs (rather than the usual elementary jobs) by building their capacity to manage their own lives more effectively.

Key Employment Areas

Engagement with employers is vital to identify appropriate employment opportunities, which includes part-time, job shares and flexible hours of work. Areas of work that may be relevant are in administrative and elementary jobs that tend to offer more flexibility as a profession.

Self-employment is an area of employment that would allow lone parents to work flexibly and to their own schedules. Opportunities for self-employment based on particular interests of lone parents need to be explored, and advice and training given where the possibility for self-employment arises.

All sectors in the ULV have vacancies available and the area of engagement will depend on the needs, ability and confidence levels of the individuals concerned.

Areas for Outreach

Concentrations of worklessness are correlated with a higher presence of single people (ODPM 2004) and therefore may be a good indicator of the presence of lone parents. Priority is needed in focussing on these areas of multiple deprivations.

The problem faced by lone parents is experienced equally throughout the ULV area.

Key Locations for Employment

Given the high number of vacancies in the ULV area, jobs should be found locally wherever possible, and in particular at key sites of employment such as Walthamstow Centre, Tottenham Hale, Wood Green and so on. Other key areas in the region such as Stansted, Stratford, Kings Cross and the City should also be prioritised.

Existing Initiatives

New Deal for Lone Parents

The New Deal for Lone Parents provides assistance for people moving from welfare into employment. A specialist advisor helps them put together a personal action plan for returning to employment or education. Participation in the New Deal is voluntary and any lone parents claiming Income Support with a child under 16 can apply to take part.

The specialist advisor can give co-ordinated information on local childcare, employment and educational opportunities and will help you work out the financial implications of returning to work or study.

The advisor can also arrange and pay for training to improve job prospects or update skills, and pay for childcare (with a registered provider) required during training. Childcare and travel costs can be paid for lone parents attending job interviews. Working Tax Credit claims can be fast-tracked (www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk)

Sources:

GLA, 2003 'Women and the Labour Market', GLA London

ONS Census 2001 and DWP Benefits Claimants (Nov 2004)

ODPM, 2004 'Jobs and Enterprise in Deprived Areas', SEU, London

www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk