

Social Networks and Employability

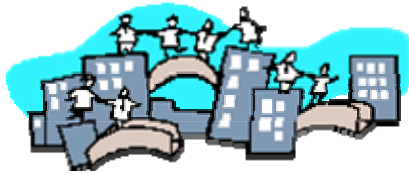
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Executive Summary

Background

The current economic situation in Glasgow is one with substantial growth in service sector employment and vacancies at a high (Arnott 2006; Scottish Enterprise Glasgow 2005). However, a significant number of the population remains marginalized from the labour market. Existing policies to tackle this marginalisation have attempted to remedy problems at the levels of individual skills and capacities (labour *supply* side) and stimulation of jobs growth (labour *demand* side). Successful though these approaches have been, there still remains a persistent core of the working age population who seem no nearer to finding sustained employment in the city economy.

Preliminary research by the Full Employment Areas initiative (FEA) suggested that client's social networks could be an additional factor contributing to labour market proximity and likelihood of attaining sustained employment, particularly when the networks are confined to small geographical areas characterised by high levels of worklessness. This research explored these networks through qualitative methods and aimed to build upon and contribute new knowledge of processes underpinning client's participation in employment. The overall aim was to offer employability agencies better understanding of how to support and advise clients in a holistic manner.

Methods

The study comprised three phases utilising qualitative research methods and existing quantitative sources of data. Phase 1 comprised fieldwork with community animators in three areas in which they work and analyses of existing quantitative and qualitative data collected routinely by FEA staff. Phase 2 comprised face-to-face interviews with clients to collect and explore client centred issues in finding employment or readiness for employment. Phase 3 comprised data- analysis and the development of recommendations for employability service delivery.

Key Findings

- Participants' social networks were typically high in bonding capital (strong ties with people like themselves) with an absence of bridging and linking capital (weak ties with heterogeneous people and organisations that can help them define and achieve goals). Interviewees' contacts were mainly family, friends and acquaintances that lived locally, people they have known for an extended period of time and who shared many of the same life experiences and opportunities. Thus local networks had limited value accessing new opportunities. Non-local contacts, where they existed, were predominantly extended family. When younger participants refer to role models in employment, it was often in a limited range of low-status forms of employment. Consequently moving away from their local area was perceived to be necessary for 'moving up'.
- The networks did, however, positively contribute to local capacity and the development of personal resources. Identifying these strengths can provide a starting point for agencies and effective working with this population.
- The networks were not devoid of work or the motivation to find work. Poorly paid work underpinned many social capital transactions within people's networks and included help with finances, subsistence, children and other care responsibilities. Kin and family support can factor in *both* sustaining and limiting participants' aspirations. Network roles provide sources of self-esteem particularly when paid-work did not provide this. Where formal work is defined as lacking value, primary network based roles can become more important for self-esteem than employment. Feelings of well-being are more likely where employment meets or fits in with network based roles and sense of personal worth (e.g. being a good parent). Local, temporary, flexible work was a key source of income for females with children and other caring responsibilities.
- The increase in certification of skills and more formalised routes into employment meant participants' networks no longer provided access to opportunities they once

did. Access to work based on reputation or 'word of mouth' is primarily for low level, flexible labour market work. Participants evidenced both unfamiliarity and discomfort with formalised recruitment practices.

- Repeated experiences of rejection in interviews could lead to perceptions that one's 'face doesn't fit' particular sections of the labour market. These experiences could contribute to a personalising of failure and to participants 'playing safe' with occupational or training opportunities.
- The 'push' factor of a poor school experience can mean labour market entry was primarily motivated through seeking independence without clear direction or purpose. Negative school experiences could also dilute more ambitious aspirations that parents, family and teachers could have for pupils.
- There was a perceived absence of a link between training, education and opportunities for paid work, particularly when remuneration for training is low. Unsatisfying experiences of work and training negatively impacted on participants' well-being and aspirations- keenly evidenced amongst those for whom employment has been marked by repeated experiences of temporary, casualised work at the lower end of the manual or service sector labour market.
- Every participant cited time as an important aspect of their interactions with employability agencies. They distinguish between the quality of time they are given by outreach workers and their experience of time as forced in their interactions with other agencies.
- Community animators can become crucial contacts in remedying network based limitations. They can come to embody compensatory social capital for clients. Their proximity to local networks and their recognition of clients' problems itself underpins their bonding capital; their access and knowledge of different agencies

bridging capital; and their own developing network contacts within the employability field as linking capital.

Implications

The findings point to the development of policies relating to three inter related areas that influence employability: the *labour market* and nature of opportunity; the skills attitudes and attributes of *individuals* disconnected from the labour market; and for those agencies working with this group, a need to recognise the combined effects of negative experiences of work and compensatory experiences of *network based roles*.

1. Implications for our understanding of labour market opportunity

- The flexibilisation of the labour market has produced a raft of insecure forms of work that can produce injurious experiences of employment for those without highly valued skills. In this data, previous labour market experiences often proved deleterious to individuals' aspirations when combined with their poor labour market capital (skills, qualifications).
- When paid work does not provide recognised sources of meaning, esteem and value, roles within the 'core economy' of family and social networks can become more important than sustaining formal paid work.
- Family and neighbourhood obligations can be both barrier and facilitator to employment. Barriers can include harder measures such as the dependence of co-habiting extended family members on the tenancy afforded by a sibling's housing benefit. On the other hand, the housing provision and financial support provided by a parent can sustain and facilitate employment aspirations. Understanding these obligations and potential workers' roles within their social networks can inform strategies aimed at sustainable employment.
- The provision of formal work opportunities is a necessary but not sufficient component to incorporating those who have experienced persistent or repeated experiences of worklessness into sustainable employment. The recruitment of potential employees from the pool of the persistently workless population is an ongoing *process*: identifying and working with deficits in work readiness is

situated along a continuum that includes in-work support and opportunities for personal and professional development. This process should involve agencies and employers in partnership with clients.

- Currently it is assumed that the soft-skills or behaviours required for customer facing or service sector employment are instilled or learned in school or other domains (e.g. the family) prior to the workplace. Poor experiences of school coupled with an extended involvement in arenas out with the workplace may have prevented these skills from being adopted.
- There is a need to recognise how negative experiences of employment can erode individuals' confidence in the belief that work is beneficial to well being.

2. Implications for agencies working with those disconnected from the labour market

- Identifying 'hard' outcomes may take much longer than with other sections of the workless population who are closer to employment. A desire to see quick outcomes may produce numerous 'false starts' and contribute to a deterioration in relations between clients and agencies. Factors that make a cycling between periods of work and worklessness more likely.
- Being client-centred and personalising services is necessary for this group of the workless population. Evidence suggests that 'personalisation' involves focussing and building on clients' past work experiences, aspirations (or absence) and the longevity of their current circumstances, roles and sources of esteem outside formal employment. Doing this will produce more grounded and sustainable trajectories into the labour market.
- The relative absence of positive examples and role models is a perceptual barrier to understanding the link between certain actions (training etc) and outcomes (sustainable labour market roles).
- Addressing deficits within the social networks (i.e. limited access to bridging social capital) can represent an important intermediate step to employability for those furthest from the labour market.
- A successful element of the Full Employment Areas Initiative was that their

community animators could provide forms of bridging and linking social capital to communities often high in bonding capital but suffering deficits in these other forms. The similarity of the animators to clients, in background and experiences, meant that this was provided in a manner that easily intersected with existing resources, values and attitudes in the areas.

- Flexibility in welfare benefits for those looking to sustain (re)entry to the labour market is necessary to underpin the rational economic calculation of undertaking low-paid and often flexible work. Entering the labour market may not be a singular event, but one characterised by a period of cycling between forms of work, work training and worklessness. The complexity and labour of having to re-apply for welfare benefits on each work appointment can dissuade individuals from entering the job market in the first place.

3. Wider and societal level influences implications

- The findings presented here suggest the necessity for a critical appraisal of the place of paid work in regeneration. Whereas paid work can offer benefits for individuals and communities through the provision of money, increased well-being and access to bridging capital, this is not a universal given. Individuals' experience, resources and the nature and quality of available work mediate potential benefits of paid employment.
- Additionally, the evidence here suggests that those without paid-work can dispense useful roles in their communities that create value not currently measured. An overt focus on the economic benefits of paid work to the city can undermine benefits that roles in the 'core economy' (the transactions of family and neighbourhood) provide at a smaller scale. This can also shape the perception of 'skills poverty' in areas of high economic inactivity.

1. A Review of Recent Literature

Context

The current economic situation in Glasgow provides a historically unique challenge. It is, on the one hand, a time of opportunity with substantial growth in service sector employment and vacancies at a high (Arnott 2006). However there is still a significant and sizable number of the population for whom existing strategies for employability are failing to meaningfully and substantially connect to the labour market. The resulting high social and personal cost of lives spent on benefits, with their corollaries in lowered health and well-being at the population level, raises questions about the relationship between economic growth and social justice (Turok 2006).

A range of processes are in play that urge agencies charged with tackling marginalisation from the labour market to adapt to a new set of circumstances. In terms of labour demand, Glasgow is performing well in the creation of new opportunities and is showing progress in making the transition from an economy based on manufacturing to a 21st century economy based on services (Glasgow City Council 2007).

As well as growth in the city's middle class (Arnott 2006) and the growth in services that they use, achievable and secure employment opportunities continue to be created through private investment. This is not only in the city centre through the current boom in retail and the International Financial Services District. In the peripheral council housing schemes of Easterhouse and Pollok, urban renewal has also been accompanied by large scale provision of primarily working class employment opportunities in retail through the Glasgow Fort and Silverburn shopping centres.¹

The long-term renewal of Glasgow's social housing stock allied to the growth in commercial and private property building should also produce opportunity in the construction industry for particular demographic groups disconnected from the labour–

¹ The Silverburn development is unique for Glasgow in that a significant proportion of the jobs created are guaranteed to the local population. This followed the example set by the Tesco Job Guarantee Programme in Leeds (Watson et al, 2001).

market.

Labour markets and demand side factors

Up until relatively recently, the availability of jobs, so-called demand-side factors have been seen as a major contributing factor to the high levels of worklessness in Glasgow (Webster 2000). The communities in Glasgow with pockets of persistently high levels of worklessness are the same communities that suffered heavily during the economic restructuring of the 1970 and 80s and the decline in the area's manufacturing employment base. However, the problems facing the jobless in these communities are, while not unrelated, substantially different today from a generation or so ago. Rather than unemployment being seen as a response to a crisis and adaptation to changed circumstances (Warr and Jackson 1985; Jahoda 1982), worklessness is likely to be experienced either as long-term, life-long unemployment or a 'cycling' between periods of employment, (re) training and benefits (Ritchie et al 2005; Page 2006; Furlong and Cartmel 2004).

Policy responses and interventions aimed at assisting those marginalised from the labour market therefore have to contend with a different set of issues. Demand-side issues of the availability of work are more likely to be questions based around why individuals in certain geographical locations within the city are disadvantaged in accessing local opportunities rather than questions around the availability of the opportunities themselves.

Understanding these experiences of exclusion has two main components; a rationalistic component exploring the costs and benefits of taking up employment; and a values, attitudes and capacity approach, connected to the ability and desire of individuals to access and hold down employment opportunities available. However, rather than being a simple dichotomy between the availability of work (demand-side) and individual skills and attributes (supply-side), the interaction of both *over time* needs to be considered if labour market participation is to be more fully understood (Danson, 2005; Bourdieu, 2000; Bourdieu 1999). The influence labour-market and employability interventions

have on structuring the experiences and aspirations at individual and community level need to be explored to find sustainable ways of tackling worklessness.

In his critique of New Labour's flagship New Deal programme, Webster (2000) claimed that '*an attempt is being made to place the largest number of people into jobs in exactly in the places where jobs are scarcest*' (p118). His 'places' were the former industrial cities and coal-fields of the UK set against areas of economic growth and employment opportunity predominantly in the South East of England. It is true that these former places remain areas with high numbers of individuals without work, however understanding why individuals in these areas are not accessing work has become not about availability *per se* but as much about the mismatch within the *local* distribution of opportunity.

Indeed, Turok (2006) has identified a 'New Conventional Wisdom' that recognises cities such as Glasgow and its hinterland as current engines of growth and sites of job creation. Here demand-side factors relate to the location of opportunities within the city and whether current infrastructure, public transport and housing strategy allow level access to these opportunities (Turok and Edge 1999; Preston and McLafferty 1999; Arnott 1998). This can have different influences across labour-market segments with location of higher skilled jobs (where motivation to travel to work is greater for potential workers) being less influenced by employee location than low skilled jobs where travel costs represent a greater proportion of potential earnings.²

The character of opportunity created in the current labour market also structures experiences of work and non-work. Furlong and Cartmel (2004) present the case that in a *flexible* labour market, those without high-end technical skills are unlikely to be beneficiaries of the new economy. More specifically, for those without the necessary skills or qualities demanded by the new economy, opportunities are characterised by part-time work, short-term contracts and the trend towards outsourcing recruitment, resulting in employers taking less responsibility for apprenticeships and on-going career

² One factor that can contribute to what Martin (2000) refers to as occupational and spatial segregation.

development- features that shape an insecure experience of work.

Furlong and Cartmel claim the rationalisation process of whether to take work in a casualised labour-market is fundamentally different from a market characterised by secure, well-paid career opportunities with associated personal and peer group esteem. Moreover, the issue of how to integrate people into the labour market is also recast: the policy challenge is not of how to allow individuals to 'break into' employment from a position of worklessness but how to maintain an unbroken, secure and personally satisfying career trajectory in casualised conditions.

In 2006, a green paper from the Department of Work and Pensions addressed the demand-side of the equation by stating; *'the problem is not lack of jobs, indeed employment rates are lowest in the major cities, where there is at least one job per person. However, many residents do not take up these jobs even though they live within easy travelling distance of thousands of vacancies'* (DWP 2006, p18). Understanding why people remain out of sustained employment in areas of high job availability calls for approaches that can both grasp and illustrate the human motivations and interpretations shaping interactions with the labour-market.

Economic explanations of worklessness that suggest it is easier and better paying to stay on benefits rather than move into employment are undermined by research that illuminates the numerous job search strategies employed by individuals in receipt of benefits. The identification of five client groups in the New Deal program (Webster 2000) show that reasons for sustained labour market insecurity vary between individuals, whilst individuals themselves will experience multiple barriers that are not remediable to interventions aimed at singular barriers.

Additionally, multiple barriers may also change in nature when experienced in aggregate within communities with a distinctive and particular labour-market history or relationship with the labour market of the wider region. This legacy can be compounded by previous and on-going regeneration efforts (be it failures in housing and planning or the failure of 'sunrise' industries to replace declining heavy industry and manufacturing). Other

objectively measurable factors, such as the absence of transport links with the wider city region, can further contribute to the localisation of individual and peer group experiences and understanding. This is not to exclude individual level characteristics such as experience of education and training, employment and unemployment or health issues.

Individuals, social networks and supply-side factors

McQuaid (2006) has taken a comprehensive view of the factors that contribute to exclusion from the labour market for individuals in an attempt to assay the contribution of each. The ‘vectors’ he identifies from the literature are listed below.

- **Individual factors**

- *Employability, skills and attributes* (work readiness and preparedness)
- *Demographic characteristics* (e.g. age and ethnicity which can determine available opportunities particularly through discrimination of certain groups or residents of certain areas)
- *Health and wellbeing* (that affects ability to work and motivation and appropriateness of finding paid employment)
- *Job-seeking skills* (with informal job-seeking skills (word of mouth) seen to be disadvantageous in high-skill labour markets)
- *Adaptability and Mobility* (openness to change, retraining and re-skilling or broadening perception of available opportunities or their location)

- **Personal circumstances**

- *Household circumstances* (having children or other caring responsibilities)
- *Work culture* (including wider social influences and aspirations in social network and support and orientation for work from family and peer group)
- *Access to resources* (including transport, mobility issues, and access to financial and social capital)

- **External factors**

- *Labour market factors* (demand-side factors)

- *Enabling support factors* (services that can match information about job vacancies with individual measures to ease this process)

Not only do these vectors overlap and interlace in a manner which denies their complexity when listed as singular variables, some are complex entities in and of themselves requiring greater understanding of how they either fail or are successful in linking opportunities to job-seekers. For example, the vector *access to resources* encompasses elements as qualitatively different as transport and ‘*personal and family support networks and formal and informal community support networks, especially those relevant to job seeking*’ (p412). One component of social capital (a community level as much as an individual level attribute), trust, is implicit in the ‘credibility among employers and job seekers’ of the enabling support services. Whilst *Labour market factors* adds additional characteristics that are equally difficult to quantify and account for including ‘*recruitment factors which may lead to frictional mismatch (including employer’s informal recruitment and selection procedure and general selection preferences...)*’ (p412).

The subtlety of how successful job seeker strategies operate in tight labour markets is further illustrated by McQuaid’s findings that Higher educational qualification can decrease the likelihood of finding work. The research concludes ‘*more work is needed in understanding the subtleties of labour market interactions, particularly as they change alongside the structure of local economies.*’ Coulton (2003) has described a process by which networks become segmented through social processes and information flow in disadvantaged neighbourhoods to increases the distance individuals feel from labour-market opportunity. In an innovative move away from either demand-side stimulation or individual level capacity building and skills development Coulton recommends community development and community building as a key intervention to tackling persistent pockets of worklessness.

Indeed, over concentration on supply-side characteristics as found in New Deal has been criticised for producing ‘churn’ at the lower end of the labour market, rather than

sustained employment. Peck and Theodore (2000) identify this as stimulated not only by the poor quality of work available but also their being geared to the needs of employers rather than those excluded from the labour market. These approaches are '*unlikely to bring about sustainable increases in aggregate employability*' (p732) and it is the '*unemployed who must bear the burden of adjusting to the new realities of the labour market*' (p737).

Culture and social capital

Although the 'culture of poverty' thesis (Murray 1988) has now been discredited (Social Exclusion Unit 2004) and there is no consistent evidence of 'cultures of worklessness', there is evidence to suggest that culture and the location one occupies within particular networks can reduce access to resources that support employability (Aitkinson and Kintrea 2004). Less contact with working people, low aspirations and short-term perspectives can combine with harder indicators (time spent out of the labour market, low educational qualifications) to further mediate individuals' access to opportunities.

To this extent, the concept of *social capital* is invoked to suggest the measurability of such a range of factors and to allow conceptual parity with harder indicators such as qualifications and levels of available vacancies. Moreover, the term is useful for contextualising and historicizing what human capital explanations of marginalisation and inequality can often take as a given: that individuals' success or failure in the labour market can be attributed to their own immediate and inherent skills or talents. While studies make diverse use of the concept a recurring theme, and one that is relevant to the aims of network research, is that social capital is a metaphor for advantage.

In the social capital literature success in labour markets (or any particular domain) is enhanced by the people one knows. Bourdieu (1986) expands on this by illustrating how the efficacy or advantage engendered by the social capital possessed by an individual depends on two main features. First, is the size of the network of connections that an individual can call upon (Bourdieu 1986, p249). In these circumstances the volume and quality of social capital emerges from the totality of the relationships between people

rather than merely a common property of the group. Thus, in theory, network membership can contain individuals with diverse interests and motivations that when taken collectively has the potential to improve the life chances of those within it. In effect, people can draw upon (whether purposefully or by accident) the information and resources held by a wider and more heterogeneous range of contacts.

Bourdieu's second and related point is that key to understanding the relationship between any given social network and an individual within it is what and how information is communicated. Indeed, for social capital to operate successfully it requires that potential contacts within a social network recognize it as such: in effect, there has to be some form of shared understanding between members of the network- a sense of how '*culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and "making sense" of the world, in broadly similar ways*' (Hall, 1997).³

Bourdieu's concept of *cultural capital* is an extension of this line of thought and has been used to explore how life chances or opportunities can become polarised within distinct social networks and structural locations. Here, cultural capital has an *exchange value*- in this case, the labour market. While educational qualifications and certificates are the most conspicuous and objective measure of this form of capital, other marks of distinction such as dress, speech, gait and interaction styles (in employability language 'soft-skills') are seen to contribute towards an individual's capacity to 'barter' or negotiate in contemporary social and economic hierarchies.

This giving and taking of information, the building of relationships of obligation and trust and the recognition of needs and strengths is a key issue covered in our substantive chapters. In particular, how *through time*, networks characterised by social and geographic homogeneity or exclusion, can *come to* develop particular forms of social capital, that in their specificity have little value in accessing the rewards of the contemporary labour market.

³ Referred to by Bourdieu as 'mutual cognition and recognition.'

For example, network level social capital, particularly in the communities studies, is best captured through the category of *bonding capital* (Putnam 2000; Coleman 1990; Bourdieu 1999), a form that is often inward looking, has the tendency to reinforce exclusive identities and is characteristic of homogenous groups (the links between people like oneself). Here, for reasons that are often assumed rather than made explicit, the ties between contacts are regular and face to face. As such, there is likely to be a high level of value consensus and sharing of common experience.

This combination of the range of network contacts and what comes to be shared amongst network members is a key feature of Granovetter's (1974) study that identified the importance of 'weak ties' in facilitating employment progression and job change. Weak ties here are the links between people that are infrequent and often separated by geographical distances- the network is one marked by mobility and the possession of resources this implies.

Key points in Granovetter's study were how the majority of job information was acquired accidentally and that the most important people in providing information about good work opportunities were work or work-related contacts. Family or friends rarely figured in these transactions. Moreover, contacts tended to be people who were in different occupations. As will be seen, the probability of an individual making a job change being dependent on work contacts in different occupations is one that has significance for an understanding of other forms of social capital.

For example, in Granovetter's work we can see the importance of *bridging social capital* when circumstances are defined by its absence. By helping individuals to reach out to similar people in dissimilar situations it enables members to leverage a far wider range of resources than are available in the immediate social and geographical community (Halpern 2005; Woolcock 2001).

Similarly, *linking social capital* encompasses links into realms of influence that enable group-based interests to be represented and promoted politically or in wider cultural

agendas. This can mean assets such as a grasp of particular legitimated language forms and familiarity with the workings of power and influence that are important resources for enabling the development of linking capital (Bourdieu 1999) - features that are often scarce in areas of high unemployment. In these situations external funding and advocacy can be a crucial aspect for both employability and community development.

Indeed, MacDonald and Marsh (2001) recognise that the possession of certain forms of social and cultural capital is harder to acquire in communities of high unemployment. Family and social networks that are linked into employment opportunities and knowledge of recruitment processes for example, will assist in helping young people find work and also establish norms that certain forms of work are of value. Furlong and Cartmel (2003; 2004) also call for an understanding of the resources at the level of cultural, claiming that previous policy responses have failed to connect with the rationalisation processes of potential workers.

Family responsibilities can be a source of conflict with employers whilst criminal convictions, drug or alcohol problems can create barriers of expectation between employers and potential workers. McGregor and McConnachie (1995) are also critical of a norms based 'culture' interpretation of worklessness by suggesting it is a consequence of failures to unpack the complex relationships between poor experiences of education, low-income, parenting skills deficits and family experiences of unemployment.

However, issues of respect and esteem *can* shape relations with the labour market through leading to a choice to stay on benefits to earn more respect from peers (Halpern et al 2004). Indeed, the nature of formal labour-market opportunities allied to employer's attitudes to core employability groups (for example, ex-offenders; individuals with mental health problems; drug users; ethnic minorities) (FMR, 2006) can mean that a combination of benefits and informal work remain more attractive.

Whilst a rational calculus of costs/ benefits of labour-market entry will feature in individual approaches, interventions need to recognise it as one influence amongst a

range of many that also include peer group aspirations and the labour-market itself. Again, in this sense a social capital approach can contextualise and give meaning to the more individual, attribute led focus of human capital perspectives.

Policy responses

The 2005 Employability Framework for Scotland recognises the complexity and multifaceted nature of supply –side factors. They cite a number of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ factors including low or no qualifications, lack of employment experience, caring and parenting responsibilities, mental health, age (older workers having a distinct set of problems) and ethnicity (with non-White groups having an ‘employment rate gap’ of 19%, higher than in witnessed in England). The response was framed within the Executive strategy of *Closing the Opportunity Gap* allowing for recognition that as demand –side opportunities increase more might need to be done to help those seemingly locked-out of jobs growth. Barriers to employment are cited not as lack of available jobs, but as *‘the cost, availability or ease of access to services and benefits as well as the state of the local labour market’* (p4). Attitudinal and personal characteristics include recruitment practices of employers, of carers and support workers (including families who may have low expectations) and skills, attitudes and dispositions of workless individuals (including fear of losing benefits, low self-esteem, poor employment record, and lack of willingness to travel).

Crucially the document recognises that strategies need not only to help people into employment but address barriers to sustained employment reflecting the fact that worklessness ‘is not a static condition’. The recommendations, though, do not look beyond the individual and their capabilities and are couched within a strong focus on characteristics such as skills, attitudes and giving advice and support. However, the explicitly flexible nature of the recommendations and recognition that some will have more ‘starts’ than others, reflects the new understanding of employability in a tight – labour market.

Turok (2006) has called for interventions that include a reconceptualised understanding of the current elements of demand-side problems and that employers should recognise that their attitudes to employees who face a range of problems can further disadvantage those with issues surrounding '*health conditions, domestic restraints, childcare issues, debt, weak technical and soft skills, addictions, criminal record and little recent work experience*' (p5). In terms of programmes and interventions, the majority are aimed at increasing employability of individuals through skills and approaches to job searching.

The Full Employment Areas (FEA) initiative is a response to employability that recognises the human and community based elements of marginalisation from the labour market. Key to the service they provide is the work of their community animators. The animators operate in three small areas of concentrated worklessness in the city: Royston in the north, Wellhouse in the East and Pollok in the south west of the city. They offer a mentoring role to clients (those they come into contact with in the community and through door-knocking). Their presence in communities and the informal mode in which they operate provides an opportunity to link clients and their needs and aspirations with services and support offered through other agencies. Although employability is the guiding principle, animators operate in a manner that is client led. In the majority of cases numerous barriers need to be overcome before sustainable paid employment is a realistic possibility.⁴

This study utilises the networks and knowledge of the animators with the aim of gaining access to those views and experiences of the hardest to reach in the workless population in three of the areas with the highest rates of urban unemployment. The aim is to better illustrate the interplay between labour-markets, networks of esteem, respect, information, individual resources and barriers in the problem of employability with the aim of producing policy recommendations.

⁴ See Dean et al (2003) for a similar exploration of 'job readiness'.

2. Research Design and Methods

The study comprised three distinct but complementary phases utilising qualitative research methods and existing sources of data.

Phase 1

This phase of research aimed to access the three localities and the experiences of the people who live there. Every person in the patches was identified as a potential or actual FEA client.

Networks

Thirty two networks were mapped with the help of community animators and other members of the FEA team. These networks were represented as mind map type diagrams on paper: key individuals were first identified and logarithmic lines were drawn between them and their links (that community animators perceived to exist) with others. It was hypothesised that the extended links between key individuals and those relatively distant (on paper) could act as conduits for the flow of information regarding job, training and educational opportunities. These original paper networks varied in size and ranged from relatively small networks of four people up to networks comprised of twenty five.

Sampling

Two relevant networks in each area were then selected (total of 52 people). Sampling was directed according to client's proximity to the labour market. This proximity was defined according to objective measures such as benefit type and household status but was also informed by community animator's understanding of client circumstances. The aim was to include examples of networks far from the labour market (for example, populated with Incapacity Benefit clients) and networks relatively closer (Job Seeker's Allowance) in each of the three areas. Quantitative and qualitative information on each of these 52 clients was collected from the FEA database and was used to identify between 6- 10 key individuals for interview.

Qualitative data used to inform the sample included a period of field work shadowing

animators over approximately three weeks (one week in each area). Daily written field notes aimed to contextualize a feel for the area; how and where clients presented themselves to both the FEA and other services; animators' reflections on their own experiences; animator's understandings of their work and their clients' circumstances; and a general account of animators' engagements with both clients and existing services.

In addition, animator stories for these 52 clients, electronically recorded in the FEA database, were used to inform

- Extent and nature of animator's meetings with clients and potential clients.
- Client's experiences of schooling, education, training and employment.
- Barriers and facilitators to employment.
- Accounts of clients' relationships and meetings with friends, family, acquaintances and services.
- Forms of support provided by network members.

Existing quantitative data was also obtained through the FEA database. This included clients'

- age group
- date of first FEA contact
- date of latest FEA contact
- time between first and last contact
- number of recorded contacts
- original employment/ benefit status
- current employment/ benefit status
- number of recorded outcomes
- nature of outcomes

These different forms of data were used to build up a profile of each of the potential interviewees and to inform the construction of the interview schedule. Although the dynamic nature of the research meant that new knowledge was incorporated into subsequent interviews, initial expected areas of interest included:

- Evidence of common expectations and aspirations to work or non work within social networks.
- Experiences of work within the social network, identifying similarity and difference and how this can shape expectations at the individual and network level.
- Evidence and nature of support provided by network members for work (e.g childcare).
- Experience of contact with animators.
- Previously unrecognised areas of support need.
- How work aspirations and search intersects with areas of life such as peer group, housing, community, benefits, health and family.

Phase 2

Accessing the sample and completing the interviews was challenging and presented problems in two main areas.

Access problems

First, there was difficulty finding the appropriate time to interview people who had moved into work. Thus, the majority of our interviewees were unemployed, in part-time work or committed to full time care. Despite this, everyone but two interviewees has experienced paid employment. Moreover, many experiences of those without work echo with the recollections of those currently in paid employment. What is added by participants in *sustainable* work is that they evidence accounts of personal change and self- development that are positive and suggest routes towards a sustainable relation to both employment and to themselves (when referring to an unpleasant time in their lives, such as unemployment, interviewees often remark on how they have changed as individuals).

Second, it was not uncommon to leave FEA premises after an hour's wait without having completed an interview or to phone an hour or so before an arranged visit to someone's

home to find that the client is '*not up for it today*'.

Achieved Sample

With these challenges in mind, twenty two people were interviewed (11 males/ 11 females) between September 2006 and April 2007. Interviewees reside in Pollok (2), Wellhouse (9), and Royston (11), ages range from 17 to 52 years. Participants include those with experience of seeking work (Job Seekers Allowance); short and long term incapacity benefit (IB); individuals on lone parent allowance (all women); in training and higher education (community colleges); a migrant (also lone parent); long term incarceration; and currently in employment (supermarket/ cleaning; employability workers).

Interviews

The Interviews were semi-structured and allowed and encouraged clients to speak freely and at length using *their* concepts and language to explore client centred issue in finding and gaining employment in and through time. Interviews took place in community based FEA premises (16) and in client's homes (6). The duration of interviews lasted between 30 minutes and an hour and a half.

First, the general objective was to explore the nature and extent of interviewee's perceived social networks and to what extent networks contribute to interviewee's proximity to the labour market and the likelihood of attaining sustained employment. This involved asking interviewees about their relationships with people they come into contact with on a daily or less frequent basis and exploring what they do and learn, amongst other things, about employment, from the people around them.

Mapping interviewee's contacts on paper often generated sentiments and further discussion regarding the accessibility, durability, meaning or status of a contact/ relationship in the context of everyday life or in relation to a particular domain (for example, employment or childcare). This generated insights into the ways interviewees

perceive and comport themselves in their meetings with others; identify and access resources; and their ability to strategise and secure their livelihood.

Individual contacts varied amongst interviewees and included family, friends, neighbours and work colleagues but also extended to actual and potential employers as well as the various agencies that were paid to engage and provide interviewees with particular services.

Generally speaking, if interviews were arranged by phone, clients were more comfortable meeting in FEA premises. If an interview was arranged face-to-face with individuals after being introduced by an animator in their home or on the street, they were more likely to suggest or allow the interview to take place in their home.

Mapping

A simple but effective tool used in the interviews to provide both a visual aid memoire and as a stimulus to talk was to ask the client to write down on paper the people they come into contact with in the course of their daily/ weekly routines and any suggested linkages between them. The simple mentioning of a name sufficed for inclusion within the map in that it often promoted reflection later in the interview.

Confidentiality, Anonymity and Consent

All potential interviewees were made aware of the researchers' relationship to the Full Employment Areas Initiative and that the research was being carried out to improve the service and help understand better the process of finding work. Each respondent was reminded that their participation in the interviews was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the interview at any time.

Written permission was obtained to tape or digitally record the interviews: both the client and the interviewer signed and took copies of these consent forms. The interviews were transcribed in the shortest time frame possible. Respondents were offered the opportunity to check the transcripts for factual accuracy.

Analysis

The interviews were fully transcribed and imported to an electronic database for systematic analysis. In interpreting and analysing the data we added codes, memos and annotations to the written text from each verbatim transcript. When deciding which extracts of text to code analysis was guided by the importance attached to particular issues by interviewees.

Longevity of experience

Key issues that developed in the course of analysis were the importance in understanding individuals in and through time and how the longevity of particular experiences (for example, unemployment) may be intimately connected with the dynamics and experience of change.

Individuality and shared background

Although the interviews collected often highly personalised accounts it is also clear that these experiences are not atypical but characterised, and were influenced by, a shared experience. From this, particular attention was paid to developing an understanding of linkages and gaps between individuals, shared aspirations, perceptions and common sets of barriers and/or resources.

Using NVivo

The software package QSR NVivo was used as a tool to organise and manage the data. Using software to support qualitative data analysis provided ready access to both members of the research team and afforded a degree of transparency and robustness to the processes of interpretation. A project containing all documents and files was stored on a shared secure network. NVivo was used to code and retrieve text and also to examine features and relationships in and across interviewees' accounts.

The use of full verbatim transcripts that are extensively annotated helped keep analysis close to the text. The software also provided opportunities to check the reliability of coding between both researchers and helped to reduce potential threats to validity. Close

reading of each interview transcript and accompanying contextual and de-briefing notes was used to generate 'nodes'. Reliability was enhanced by ensuring that each researcher used the same node description consistently when coding the transcripts.

These 'nodes' were understood alongside research field notes, accounts of individual circumstances recorded in animator diaries, survey records and as statistics in the FEA database. Continuous dialogue with community animators and other employability agencies have also contributed to interpretation.

3. Aspirations

In this chapter we explore the aspirations recorded from participants in the interview data. Aspirations are characterised as changing over time and being shaped by experience of education and the labour market and also through shared experiences within social networks. By displaying the data relating to aspirations in a rough chronology, the processes that underscore the formation and shifting in aspirations as they relate to experiences both in the labour market and in social networks become obvious.

Entry into the labour market

In participants' accounts movement into the labour market from school revealed the influence of push factors stemming from a negative experience of education rather than a strong sense of what roles the labour market might provide and a desired place within it. Amongst those who had recently left school there was a clear desire to move into some form of formal paid employment.⁵ One young man's comment captured the spirit of this cohort:

'That's all I want to do is go out and work' (John, age 17, currently on Pathway to Work Programme).

However, the purpose of work was simply to provide financial independence and fulfil the desire to leave school. It was not unusual to find this energy without other purpose or direction. Indeed, 'getting a job' was often the sum of individual plans. The failure to connect meaningfully with school's based career advice was also apparent.

'It [school] was dead boring... Careers Scotland... I hardly went to them because they were dead boring'

(William, age 17, currently on Pathway to Work Programme).

'I chop and change my mind like no-one's business... I had nothing else basically to

⁵ Echoes with more wide ranging studies that have found no consistent evidence supporting antithetical values towards work amongst individuals living in areas of high unemployment/ worklessness (Social Exclusion Unit, 2004).

do... I didn't know what I wanted to do. I used to go to Careers people at school and all that and they didnae know what I wanted to do either'! [Both laughing]
(Jane, age 19, F/T employment).

John- *'When I left school I wanted to go to college... they [school] said I could go to college to be a chef if I wanted. I didn't want to... but said yes to get out of school because I hated it. The heady [head teacher] said I was not to do exams so I said to him "Well what's the point in me being here?" It was the Prelim time so what was the point of me being there practicing for them if I couldn't take my exams.'*

Interviewer- *'You went up to Queenslie to sign oan for it?'* [chef training].

John- *'Aye, and they were signing up for it and then I went up and came hame and that was it. I never went to school and they [College] never contacted me. I got a job round in the wee newsagents round there'* (John, age 17, Pathway to Work Programme).

One young woman alludes to the respite from school provided by the opportunity of voluntary work.

'She [younger sister] was meant to be at school but instead of being in school as she was bullied she came in with me. I went in and asked if she could come in with me one day and they said "aye". She then started to volunteer. Never went back to school, was just volunteering up there with me... Just about 14/ 15 [years old], we were only young!'
(Lorna, age 25, referred to her younger sister Gillian, age 19, both on Job Seekers Allowance).

In these examples, the influence of school is negative in shaping younger workers' aspirations. A passive withdrawal from education was the result of failing to find value in sitting exams when casual work opportunities appear to be available. In the example of the two sisters above, both desired to work with children or the elderly as a way of re-establishing their sense of well being after a meaningless, or at least detrimental,

experience of formal schooling. The future labour market disadvantage set in train by these kinds of experiences has led some authors to suggest the need for counselling amongst young people (McGregor and McConnachie, 1995, p587- 600).⁶

Negative experience of schooling could also dilute and downgrade the expectations and aspirations that parents, family and teachers may have had for young people. This is evidenced in one interviewee's decision to forego his parents', siblings' and teachers' expectations of entry into Further Education for the immediate satisfaction of a weekly wage spray painting cars with his older cousin.

'I was doing highers in school and everybody moaned at me when I left- school teachers, my mum and ma dad. They were like "What are you leaving school for?" My mum thought I was going to be some kind of scientist or something... she thought you're going to dae really well. But see that way I was getting really annoyed at school and ma big cousin, she used to work for a car repair centre and she was saying there is an opportunity going as a spray painter and I was like that "Right I'll take it, nae questions about it, I'll take it I just want out aw school"' (Sean, age 25, JSA).

Sean retrospectively describes the drudgery of the work and regret of this decision as *'the biggest mistake I've ever made in ma life... I know that noo, obviously.'*

Aspirations and qualifications

Leaving school early establishes an obvious constraint on individual choice in the labour market through lowering the educational qualifications they have access to. This constraint could often be recognised by respondents later in their transition to full adult independence, if not at the time of leaving school. The relationship between having qualifications and the opening of employment opportunity can come for some only through practical experience of the labour market.

'[If] I have no experience then obviously no one is going to acknowledge me. If I go to college and dae it for a year then at least I have something behind me to fall back on.'

⁶ We define 'young people' as school leavers and those aged between 16- 25.

Then I can go for interview with a bit of [unclear] because I can't just go for an interview and no know anything about it' (Jane, age 19, currently in F/T employment).

Having left school early could become a way of understanding their failure to find suitable employment. Despite this, there was a sense, for the younger age group at least, that labour market suitability is not wholly captured by this 'objective' measure of having qualifications. Commonly remarked upon was the similarity of choices and opportunities shared by peers *regardless* of educational attainment at school. This indicates an ambiguous understanding of the relationship between qualifications and employability that on the one hand recognises the importance of the former but also recognises the influence of other factors such as labour market opportunities available. We interpret this ambivalence as a stage in the process through which instrumentality of qualifications is being eroded, in part as justification for their previous actions (leaving school) and in part on the evidence of what people see around them.

'I done no bad at art, which I don't know how cos am rubbish at drawing now, English, home economics, maths I didn't really, that was a disappointment... I done science, the marks were average, I passed them with the skin of my teeth basically. I wish I could have done better. But a lot of people who left school and had passed all their exams and they are in the same boat as me, not doing what they want to do' (Jane, age 19, currently in F/T employment).

Aspirations and financial necessity

Both formal and informal work helped meet participants' desire to earn 'extra money' while still at school. Relieving the financial burden on the family household was amongst motivations as was the independence that came from having one's own income *'I used to work in McDonalds part time... then I worked in a sun bed shop in Glasgow [local], just part time because I was at school, basically just to get me extra money'* (Jane, age 19, currently in F/T employment).

'When I was working in the shop, the Newsagents... it got me money and I was walking

out with between £80- £120 per week in my hand, which was good. It was good for being 15. Like some weeks when I owed my ma money I would say that I might have £30 and I owed my ma £40 and he [Newsagent] would give me an extra £10 and I would pay it off next week' (John, age 17, currently on Pathways to Work Programme).

Indeed, as is revealed in John's case, simply earning a specific amount of money each week could be the extent of individual aspirations, having an idea of what kind of income would be satisfactory and seeking an opportunity that fulfilled this expectation. In the case of freelance, cash-in-hand work, any time left over after reaching this figure becomes time for leisure.

'See the sockets there [electric plug sockets]? You get £60 for they two sockets [fitting sockets]. He [friend] took 30 of them and got £700 odd from his work. That's four hours work, the guy's like that, "I don't have to come in for the rest of the week"' (John, age 17, Pathways to Work Programme).

Transitions into employment marked primarily by a desire or necessity to earn money could however evolve into a need for something "better" or more "worthwhile"- captured in one woman's reflection on how her current circumstances might relate to her future.

'It's money just now that I need to get by to pay for things that I want or whatever. It's no something that I want to do forever. I want tae be able to better myself sort of thing' (Jane, age 19, F/T employment).

Similarly, one man's aspirations come to be clearly differentiated from monetary rewards- what is important for him is a sense of autonomy, control and well being. In referring to the impact of a relatively well paid IT job on his mental health Sean describes his subsequent withdrawal from *all* available employment opportunities and his determination to make his future one he can live with.

'I've been trying to think to myself what do I really want to do with myself... I want a job

now were I can say I am happy wi' the job, am no just doing it for money. I want something that makes me happy, I want to be happy at my job... I've got to start aiming higher in life... I can do better fir myself... I always just took the easy option... I'm going to try and push myself that wee bit extra' (Sean, age 25, Job Seekers Allowance).

Sean's withdrawal from the labour market, a period of recuperation and reflection, was supported both by his parents' understanding of his circumstances and allowing a lengthened transition from dependence to independent status in their home. This represented a form of network support underpinned by the perceived value of "appropriate" work rather than work solely for a wage.

'They've actually been no too bad about it, they've kinda said "Fair enough if your no' happy at your job there's nae point in being there"'

Aspirations and place

For a few younger male interviewees (in this case both aged 17), there is a strong desire to get away from the area. Boredom is often the background upon which their aims and plans are contrasted. This illustrates that although background may not constrain ambition and aspiration, it may structure access to opportunity.

- Interviewer- *'What is it like to live here?'*
- Mark- *'Have a walk about the streets and you'll find oot.'*
- Interviewer- *'That's what I mean, what is it like, just walking about the streets?'*
- Mark- *'Boring... That's how we always end up in ma hoose. Basically, you do whit ye can do to get a laugh.'*
- James- *'Aye, its shite up there... There is nothing to do apart from sitting about in a hut playin a computer, play cards and that.'*

Moving on, of itself, is often seen as increasing an individual's chances of achievement and finding happiness in life. For young men in socially and economically deprived areas the army is a well established route out of the area: one where their employability is high. One young man's inability to join his friend and gain entry into the army

signalled to him the potential, however unrealistic, for transferring his current 'life guard training' to the beaches of Australia.

Interviewer- *'Where would you like to be in 5 years time?'*

James- *'I will be in the army.'*

Mark- *'I will be in Australia working on a beach as a life guard'*
[laughter].

From a different perspective, while it was clear that personal experiences may equip an individual for a specific career, particular occupational aspirations did not fit well with continued presence in the local community even when, or perhaps because, individuals have lived in the area for a number of years.

'She [daughter, Jane] says "Da... guess what I want to be? A polis"... A says, "We'll need to move out of Royston!" I've stayed here all my life and she's got me moving'
[laughter] (Moir, age 40-49, currently in P/T employment).

The intrinsic value of available work

Despite money and independence being a primary motivation for leaving school, soon the intrinsic qualities of the work itself begins to shape aspirations. One interviewee, with a clearer sense of where he is going in his life, identifies particular forms of work as 'unsuitable' for him. While this evaluation is partly grounded in financial factors, the perceived ethical value attached to the labour is also remarked upon.

'I worked in a call centre as well. That wis along the same lines that you just asked for a shift and they would give you it- three hours, fifteen pound. It was cold calling and I don't like dain stuff like that... you were phoning wee old wummin who haven't got a clue what you are talking about and that is just no nice, you don't want to do that' (Raymond, age 19, currently in training/ education).

Additionally, employment becomes established as intricately linked with issues of well-

being and self- worth.

‘Something that I kind of refuse to do is like call centre kind of stuff cos I hate it when they phone me so I don’t want to be someone who just like annoys other people for a living, do you know what I mean?’ (Gail, age 24, currently on JSA).

The desire to seek worthwhile employment for more than the receipt of a wage and the independence it brings becomes well established by the time respondents are in their twenties. By this time they have had some experience of the labour market and the nature of available opportunities for those who leave school with little or no qualifications. This experience can become implicated in participant’s thoughts about themselves and the future.

Fading aspirations

Many of the issues grappled with by school leavers persist and have deepened by the early to mid- twenties. For a number of participants ‘where they are’ at this moment in time does not provide a strong foundation to enable optimism for their future. Quite often ‘where they are’ can be related to the resources individuals have, or have not, accumulated over a period of time through work experience, qualifications, earnings and the relationship between the labour market and social roles and prestige. For a number of participants, thoughts towards a future *in employment* are marked by frustration and uncertainty.

- *‘What do I really want to do with myself?’ (Sean, age 25, JSA)*
- *‘I’m trying tae think tae find work an that nowadays’ (Mick, age 47, JSA)*
- *‘Once it comes to me I will know’ (Karen, age 23, Lone Parent Benefit)*
- *‘Only realise something before [when] its too late’ (Jim, age 27, JSA)*
- *‘It’s definitely limiting me but I would do something else if I could think of something... there is nothing I can think’ (Julie, age 24, Lone Parent Benefit)*
- *‘A don’t know I’ve no ideas’ (Bobby, age 25, JSA)*
- *‘You cannot plan for the future on nothing’ (George, age 48, IB)*

Experience of work shaping aspirations

Difficulties imagining a future are most keenly present in those whose experience of employment has been marked by repeated, accumulated and negative experiences of temporary, casual work at the lower end of the manual labour market.⁷ For a number of interviewees, experience of this work is understood as exploitative, unsuitable, and literally 'injurious' (physically and psychologically).

These experiences can come to shape individuals' relationship to particular areas of employment. One woman describes her son's experience on a New Deal initiative where he was exposed to hazardous work. The story can be understood in two ways and Jackie herself is in two –minds about her son's experience with this particular employer. On the one hand, it gave him an opportunity to show his commitment to work, but on the other he was put in a dangerous situation. The second interpretation stands as an example of how loyalty and commitment to an employer may in fact be counter productive.

Attempts to interview Jackie's son were thwarted when he was admitted to hospital for 6 weeks with a lung infection. It is highly unlikely his previous employer would have supported him through this period.

'It was cases, I think it was boxes, you had to make the boxes and they put the bottles in them. They didn't put the bottles in them but Jim made the boxes and banged them up into so many... The gloves that they gave them weren't good enough- he used to come back with big slashes all up his arms and all up his hand... Three months in there and not a wage, not a penny and he didnae bother. He didnae bother because it was a purpose, he would get up and walk to work and back, it was a purpose in life' (Jackie, age 40-49, Income Support).

In referring to Jim's vulnerability there is a sense that some employers may actively seek

⁷ Some research suggests that attitudes or commitment to work is constituted by the relationship between individuals and the labour market itself (Danson, 2005, p291; Nordenmark, 1999). In some writers the link between the experience of particular forms of work and aspirations is more explicit and fundamental: 'Casualisation profoundly affects the person who suffers it: by making the whole future uncertain, it prevents all rational anticipation and... belief and hope in the future... the awareness of it never goes away' (Bourdieu, 1999, p82).

out the most vulnerable and docile workers in the context of large labour surplus at the lower end of the labour market. In this case, loyal and committed workers can be used to implement a policy of deliberate understaffing that can increase the competitiveness of businesses that require low-level of skills from a workforce.

'There was two boys on this table working with a Stanley blade, they fired those two boys cos they had a daftie [referring to her son, Jim]. I'm sayin' this cos he [Jim] was fantastic. He can do the work of three for three months and that's what they done. They told him that after this they would keep him on and they didn't (Jackie, age 40-49, Income Support/ Lone Parent Benefit).

Another woman describes how sheer workload influenced her decision to leave employment.

'[I] went to work on a cruise ship and only lasted 4 months, I hated it. When I came back I was so drained because it's 4 months of continuous work and I didn't get a day off in the 4 months' (Gail, age 24, JSA).

In other situations, the low status and rewards associated with particular forms of work have come to be discounted in thoughts towards the future. Estimations of their own self worth become closely connected to their experiences of the workplace.

Karen- *'I don't want to do cleaning again...I think I've done enough of that... that's out the window...I really don't want to do that again.'*

Interviewer – *'What did you not like about it?'*

Karen – *'Being a scrubber... a want something better.'*

Anticipated returns and aspirations

For another man, cyclical experiences of short term scaffolding contracts, unpaid training courses and 'hard graft' have culminated in the feeling that

'I've done a lot of hard work out there but I've got nothing to show for it.'

(Bobby, age 25, JSA)

Bobby struggles to reconcile his efforts over the last 3- 4 years with his absence of material and symbolic assets (money; certificates; car) to show for his labour. There is a sense that his difficulties in providing an income impacts on his ability to fulfil his role as a partner (living apart) and father to his two infant children. Research suggests that the financial deprivation associated with unemployment and casual low paid work can have a greater impact on the self- esteem of people who have few alternative roles or sources of social support (Waters and Moore, 2002). In Bobby's case, the loss of regular income associated with steady employment affects his capacity to fulfill his perceived social role as a father and provider. When thinking towards the future he repeatedly comes back to the present circumstances in which he is caught and his attempts to change them. During the interview Bobby referred to his attempts to 'try' and change his current circumstances on no fewer than ten occasions.

'Am tryin... Start getting ma head doon and start getting things... I'll need to start getting a grip of myself now... I need tae get a really decent job and start saving up, get like a wee car and that... need to start saving ma pennies' (Bobby, age 25, JSA).

Despite his numerous attempts to gain a lasting and rewarding break into the construction industry there is a sense that Bobby's modest ambitions have not simply '*cooled down*' or reduced his '*willingness to think about forward planning in other spheres of their [his] life*' (Webster et al, 2005, p14). Rather, his experience of work and training led him to dwell on his current circumstances to the extent he finds it difficult to make concrete and realistic plans for the future.⁸

Paying the rent continues to be a key financial consideration when clients think about moving into work. For those who only have access to low-paid employment, this creates

⁸ Bobby meets the criteria of 'discouraged job-seeker' outlined by Van Ham et al (2001)- namely, the combination of perceived lack of jobs at the local level allied with low human capital.

the classic 'benefits trap' situation.

'I have been for a couple and I was working as I told you there today I was only getting £400 per month and my rent is £500. Now I cannot survive on it, so you have two way decisions: you either go to work and not pay your rent and get kicked out your house; or stay on the job centre money knowing full well that your rent is paid and your house is safe at the end of the day. To me I know what I would choose- I would choose to stay on job centre money. A lot of other people might not choose that but I would say they would if they were put in that position.'

For one woman, employment opportunities are perceived to offer nothing more (financially) than what housing benefit already provides.

Karen- *'They say its better for you but when you've got the rent and all that on tap just now, its quite hard... Especially being a single parent... My other mates have gote jobs... one is working at Tesco and the other one is in the toon.'*

Interviewer- *'Are they happy with the jobs they have got?'*

Karen – *'I think they are at the moment, aye... doing aright, getting by, pays their rent' [laughter].*

In comparing her own circumstances with her friends and peers, Karen went on to describe how the impact of unemployment and low income can vary according to the centrality of work to individual identity.⁹

Karen- *'The now am no [looking for work]... I spent quite a lot of time with Ryan [first child] so I don't just want to... put her [infant daughter] into nursery*

⁹ Nordenmark and Strahnd (1999, p580) refer to the importance of work for individuals in relation to its capacity to 'satisfy the socially defined needs of different people'. In this case, Karen clearly prioritises the time she accords to her children vis a vis paid employment.

straight away.'

Interviewer – ‘*So you feel you want to focus on being a mum?*’

Karen – ‘*Aye with her [daughter] just now – cos I had all that time with Ryan [first child]... I want to have some time with the weans [children] before they do get older... it’s the wee ones that you miss, well the stupid wee things... I don’t want to miss out on things. All right, fair enough, my ma’s [mother is] on my back all the time saying “You can’t cope on the benefits”. Am like that, “A know”. At wan point a will get a job.’*

The prioritising of *social* needs meant that local low paid casual work could also be referred to positively in the interviews. This was often the case for women where the location and flexibility offered by this employment sector fitted around the demands of family life (for example, dropping off and picking up children from school and/ or nursery). This relates to understandings of roles beyond the labour market in which paid employment is seen as a secondary priority. The section of roles within social networks explores this in more depth.

In some cases, the suitability of particular forms of work is expressed in relation to personal attributes- in this example, the public meeting between customers and potential employees and a grounded estimation of abilities to deal with the kind of situations they may be faced with.¹⁰

‘Working in a shop which I really don’t want tae dae... I don’t like people at the best of times- working wi’ them and listening to all the complaints like every single day like would make me anti people [laughter]’ (Gail, age 24, JSA).

¹⁰ For an example of relatively successful training and employment opportunities within local retail developments (Leeds, Glasgow and Durham) see Laine (2002). A key component of the success in this sector was to change negative perceptions of retail jobs and promote them as entry into the service industry in general.

'Working in a shop, I don't want that, it is really something I am not prepared to do, its not something I want to do, its not something that interests me. I just don't want to do it' (Lorna, age 25, JSA).

'Aye, like a back storeroom person... If I worked in a shop I couldn't handle working with customers... you only get people coming in and giving you dogs abuse and I'm just one of they ones no for taking it... I'd just turn around and tell them to shut up or somethin' (Bobby, age 25, JSA).

In Bobby's case, his self-awareness shapes his aspirations. In this case there is a clear difference between the communication and 'technical skills' required of him for the largely male dominated industry of construction and scaffolding work and the more feminine 'softer skills' demanded by service employment (Danson, 2005; Future Skills Scotland, 2002, 2003). The deference and linguistic aptitude required for customer handling is identified as intolerable.

Perceptions of opportunities and labour market factors as shaping aspirations

We cannot ignore the influence of the local labour market and the opportunities present (or absent). In some cases job search has come to be associated with a narrow range of employment options. In Gail's case, aspirations are mediated by labour market factors, the simple availability of only a limited range of opportunities.

'It's not about barriers it's there are no jobs to be honest cos there really isn't any... like a month ago when I went up to the job centre there was actually nae jobs, there was none coming up for chambermaids at all' (Gail, age 24, JSA).

Similarly, Bobby intimates how a shrinking pool of opportunities can influence the sharing of job availability amongst network contacts. The vulnerability of homogenous networks to downturns in particular labour markets is highlighted.

'My brother got me in construction sites but there is hardly any work there at the

moment... just enough to keep him, my brother and his boy in work the noo... The contract out there for scaffolding is no really very good, its not a permanent job that you can keep a hold of... There's plenty out there but there are just too many companies and scaffolding out there... They are all fighting each other over jobs... There is just too many of them.'

The personal experience of labour market 'failure'

So far we have shown how aspirations are shaped by desire for work that is seen as worthwhile and appropriate. How these aspirations combine with available opportunity is shaped not only by the objective measure of what jobs are out there but also individuals' access to resources such as qualifications and their formative experiences of entry-level jobs. The experience of rejection in seeking more ambitious aspirations can be explained objectively by an absence of qualifications or experience. However, failure is also perceived as a reflection of personal value as a member of both the labour force and society as a whole. Thus conceived, repeated experiences of rejection, or the expectation of future rejection that follows, can contribute to people withdrawing from, or at least considering the 'costs' of, entering particular areas of employment.

For Jane, the sense that her 'face doesn't fit' illustrates this personal experience of having little capital in the labour market. Her repeated experience of failure in interviews is compounded by the lack of acknowledgement from potential employers- an absence of feedback after spending a full day on trial for a dental nurse post as an indicator of the value of her time and presence.

'He didn't even pay me or nothing... he didn't... send me a letter or anything to tell me I didn't have the job. So that's how I've been like that with myself through the years- "I'm never going to get anything' ... he just blanked me. A lot of that has happened through me getting jobs, so that's why I've no really tried my hardest to get something that I want.'

The lack of value or recognition expressed in the term being 'blanked' is also found in a

younger man's account.

'When you go to the interview they don't tell you if you got the job or anything... I found that shocking as you are sitting building your hopes up and you don't get a phone call back. When you phone them they go "no" and they are like that "Sorry". You are like that "Whit are you no telling me for"' (William, age 17, Pathways to Work Programme).

Coming up against negative valuations in attempts to negotiate local labour market or training opportunities led some participants to develop compensatory tactics and strategies: in particular, the minimising of risks to well-being and self-confidence through bringing to the fore their own 'qualifying personal experience' or strengths. In her attempts to bridge out and better her current situation Jane cites her own personal experience of social problems and addiction in her extended family and in the local area in general. In identifying her own 'qualifying experience', she illustrates both the limitations and importance of this in developing her estimations of what she is capable of.

'Basically I have only got family experience. I have a lot of cousins and everything and I have experienced all of that... The social worker thing has just came into my head but I have thought about it in the past but I thought to myself I would never be able to do that... I thought to myself it was only brainy people who could do things like that. Maggie [auntie] was like that, "Don't be daft!"'

Ambition is risky

When available work opportunities are perceived to offer little chance of making life better there is often stress on the conflict between the experience of work and the opportunities that available work is said to provide. Any further loss of autonomy or control over one's choices becomes a matter of tactics and negotiation.

'[What] they [Job Centre Plus] were giving me wasn't what was going to help me- I don't know, fill the spaces or something like that. So I said, "No, if you canny give me what a want then I don't want it"' (Gail, age 24, JSA).

For Gail, ambition is a matter of negotiating risk. She describes her feelings of vulnerability and the worth of investing in new occupational skills. There is a sense of how these feelings of insecurity contribute to ‘playing safe’, of not taking risks that can further undermine her self-esteem.

Gail- *‘I feel like am too auld tae start something brand new.’*

Interviewer – *‘How old are you if you don’t mind me?’*

Gail- *‘Twenty four... I think that’s auld... A really dae, I think its too auld. I don’t think its too auld tae learn tae dae something- I just think I know how to dae that [hotel work], a done it for four and a half years.’*

Interviewer – *‘So it’s like...’*

Gail- *‘Failure. Maybe I don’t want to fail’.*

From a different angle, Gail illustrates how despite her ‘on the job’ expertise she felt herself priced out of the local labour market at particular times of the year by her lack of cultural capital. She felt she could not compete with students in the market for chambermaid work as they could bring additional qualities better suited to the *milieu* of the hospitality sector. Gail maximized her sense of control in work by knowing as much as anyone else on the job. This also minimized those occasions where she would have to ask others for guidance and advice (most notably managers).

‘Everything my bosses knew I knew... If a guest asked me something I’d know it like that’ [clicks fingers to indicate ‘immediately’]. *All the students have to go back to school because all the hotel jobs are too [inaudible]... students with backpacks on them [laughter]. So once they go back in September I’ll get a job’.*

Gail sees her opportunities as available in a short window when others withdraw from her

sector of the labour market. This is despite her knowing as much as her bosses, a feeling that someone of her background needed to have extra knowledge above and beyond the remit of the post to compete.

Aspirations, social networks and life strategies

For Gail, the work that is available to her on return from four months abroad is the very same 'tradition' she has been negotiating her release from for the last four years.

'She [mother] is a cleaner and she has about four or five jobs... She cleans the dormitories in the university and she cleans another women's hoose out in Bearsden for about two days a week. Then she works in like an office sort of thing cleaning there for like a couple of days a week and then she's got a night job which she does seven days a week. That's cleaning offices as well. It's a lot and it's still not enough. Only one of them is through the proper job centre. The money that she makes from that she's still [pause]- They told her that she should claim for two pound odds or something cos she was two pound under what your supposed to make... a mean it's terrible, it's just terrible... ma poor mammy.'

In recounting her mother's current employment situation Gail goes onto describe how difficult it is to 'fund' her own ambitions from available work opportunities and forms of social capital within her network of family and friends. There is a sense of her feeling 'reduced' by returning to cleaning work.¹¹

Gail- *'A need a job but there's like none. It's so hard to find one, it's not that am expecting a lot- a just want you know to be working, you know, like in a hotel...'*

Interviewer- *'Do you talk to your mates, your aunties, your cousins about getting work?'*

¹¹ Research by Dooley (2003) suggests there are both economic and psychosocial losses associated with a perceived fall from adequate to inadequate employment.

Gail- *'Aye well, I ask- but see, I don't want to be a cleaner, that's really what I just don't want to be. I know chambermaid is like basically cleaning but it just feels like a tiny wee bit above cleaning... which is bad because everybody a know is a cleaner.'*

From one perspective it is clear that Gail's aspirations are in no small way fuelled by the role and meaning of employment in her mother's life. As has been noted, for women with children and/or families, local 'flexible' labour in the form of casual domestic work has often been an important income stream in households where the male partner was either the 'breadwinner' or whose income was generated through a particular range of welfare benefits. Gail does not share these aspirations but is aware of the risk involved of mapping out a different life-course for which there is an absence of successful examples.

What seems important to note here is the role played by her mother in supporting and enabling, to some extent, Gail's aspirations. In the same way Mick describes *his* aspirations through his daughter,¹²

'She passed her [driving] test and everything first time... that's a measure, I mean I'm so proud of her, cos a didn't have they chances when a was younger. When a see her I say that could've been me. So I put it that way, know, she's ma future sort of thing, she's like me when I was younger' (Mick, age 47, JSA).

There is a sense that Gail's mother aspires for, and with, her: she provides via housing policy, the resource of housing; she also provides, through her manual labours, practical, financial and emotional support for Gail to engage with her ambition to move beyond the immediate social and geographical horizons defined as problematic.

'I read like totally avidly and I think it would be nice to work in, you know [bookshop]- they kind of people, people who read I could handle [laughter]...they use their brain a

¹² Mick's story is also an example of potential trajectories for males for whom there are no perceived work based opportunities to establish an adult identity. In the absence of work Mick found esteem and respect amongst his peers through stealing cars.

wee bit mare than people who just sit like in front of Trisha [laughter] and like Jeremy Kyle and then Rickie Lake or something... I'm a drain on her... When I wanted to go to America she went and got a loan and she just said "I've got a thousand pound – go away" [laughter], so I did.'

Gail's visit to America was to meet extended family. For her mother it was perhaps a social and cultural investment, a form of 'bridging capital' and an opportunity for Gail to build on her experience of people and places out with the local area. Gail's mother, in effect, plays a crucial role in sustaining her aspirations.

Gail's example illustrates not only how experiences of work can be shared across generations but also how different generations adapt and draw upon opportunities available to them. In this case, individual aspirations can be related to specific forms of support and identifiable resources (in the form of paid work; housing; financial and emotional support). However, at this point in Gail's story, the structural barriers to her ambition remain intact.

Summary

Early withdrawal from education can have an on-going influence on young people's aspirations and opportunities even in buoyant labour markets. This much is already known, but the data here explores the personal processes of changing and shifting aspirations of those at the low-end of the labour market to illustrate the emergence of 'soft' barriers (including protecting self-esteem against further injurious experiences) to competing through the development of skills post-school. Poor or no educational qualifications combined with an absence of accessible opportunity, or negative work experience can diminish even modest aspirations.

4. Experiences of employment, training and skills

In this section we use data collected from the interviews alongside community animators' diary entries to explore participants' experiences of employment, training and their interactions with employability agencies. On a general level, data collection was guided by a focus on the role of network contacts and the strengths and weakness of particular networks in relation to employability issues.

Access to opportunity within social networks

The data suggest that the social networks studied are isolated from the labour market in terms of access to rewarding opportunities within the emerging service sector.¹³

Moreover, the data suggest that the further an individual is from these labour-market opportunities the more likely their networks will remain so.

Analysis of interviewees' social networks suggests that they are to a large extent socially and geographically homogenous. With important exceptions, there is an absence of vertical linkages between people with different social and economic resources.¹⁴ Non-local contacts were predominantly through extended kin networks. This applied across the three selected areas where interviewee networks ranged in size but were largely defined in relation to a few key individuals.

Those who were unemployed or on long-term benefits identified contacts such as family, friends and acquaintances that live locally. The durable nature of these relationships over time and the character of shared similarities in life-experiences, opportunities and reference points produced a key orientating back-drop for value formation and decision-making around issues such as jobs, training and aspirations.

¹³ This resonates with Social Inclusion Unit research which found that within Scotland there are 'pockets of intense deprivation where the problems of unemployment and crime are acute and tangled up with poor health, housing, and education. They have become *no go areas* for some and *no exit zones* for others' (Mooney, 2002, p111).

¹⁴ Linking capital is found amongst interviewees working in *newly created and funded occupations* within the employability field itself. The creation of new employment out with existing labour market structures offers potentially qualitatively different opportunities and trajectories to those offered by existing occupational positions.

The networks were marked by limited access to economic capital (thus the prevalence of favours and small loans), a scarcity of transferable cultural capital (qualifications) and the possession of forms of human capital (soft skills such as language and communication) that had specific and narrow exchangeable value in contemporary service sector of the economy. The scarcity of exchangeable forms of capital in relation to the contemporary labour market allied to the social and geographical measures identified above suggest a key bridging role for outreach workers.

Finding work: the transfer of information through networks

Those interviewed highlight the difficulties of facing a changing labour market and the changed orientation, and usefulness, of their network contacts in relation to work opportunities. This would provide a dilemma for many, particularly older workers. Do they take the risk of going down formalised paths and the potential failure and crisis of confidence it can involve or continue to go down informal routes, the downside of the latter being that much of the work accessed this way is poorly paid and/or insecure? Many of the changes that have taken place in the job market over the last thirty years have meant that routes into employment have changed radically and as a consequence access to employment via locally based social networks is becoming less common. In addition, formal interview processes are particularly daunting for individuals previously used to being brought into work by friends, workmates and foremen. Darity and Goldsmith (1996) highlight how interviews may be an unfair and so inappropriate method to evaluate the capacity of the long term unemployed for particular occupations. The very qualities most often looked for by Human Resources Managers (esteem, confidence) are those most affected by the experience of unemployment.

Brian (age 48, Incapacity Benefit) mentions that after twenty five years of manual labour his first interview (for a mini bus driver) took place last year. At the time, his anxiety combined with a lack of understanding of how evaluations of potential workers are made by employers.

'I just succeeded in the interview and what have you, I was a bit shaky. I said to them

[employer], “I very rarely go for an interview for jobs as its normally someone I know always gets me a job”. I said “This is the first interview I have been to in about 25 years.”

The lassie was like that “How does it feel”?

I said, I am like that [hands extended, shaking], you know “Don’t get me wrong I am very open, you won’t get any lies off me.”

In a manner related, Jim (38, F/T employment) recounted how the age of thirty he attended a job interview for the first time. However, the lack of transparency in the process led him to fall back on more familiar routes to paid employment.

‘I have never been for an interview as such in my life. I went to the shipyards and I got a test. I sat an exam ... you got a wee quick, “What trade do you want to do, which one are you suited to? We will let you know”. That was your interview... Then I worked in a building site through a pal.’

Finding work through skills and training

The formalisation of the labour market has had an impact on the quality of social network contacts in relation to employment related social capital. Careers were less formal routes based on reputation and contacts once pervaded are now mediated by post-school training and educational programmes, a situation reflected in one woman’s observation that

‘You even need a certificate to be a bin man’ (Lorna, age 25, unemployed 6-12 months).

This trend for certification has also coincided with the decline and so increased competition for traditional apprenticeships- openings that once would have been accessible with the cultural and social capital found in the current areas of high unemployment.

In Jane's (age 19, F/T employment) experience (see below) leaving school and entering the world of training and education comes to be marked by frustration and feelings that the world of jobs and opportunities lies anywhere but where she is. On leaving school the younger interviewees describe their ambition and desire to get into employment or training (see section on aspirations). However, an issue commonly cited by those working with unemployed clients is the short-term nature of the client's perspective. The animator diaries traced a not uncommon feeling amongst school leavers that post-school education and training courses extend the delay between school and the reality of paid employment, independence and adult status. A lack of seriousness and care characterised one woman's account of post-school education:

'It was like the people in my class and all that were basically carrying on. It was like being back at school, they were just carrying on and talking through the work and you weren't concentrating- so the lecturer was just basically letting it happen. She was going out and in, all these kinds of things. We [other students] were always going up, we were sittin' in the class for ages and its not as if anybody else came in and said to ye "Yer teachers not going to be in today"' (Jane, age 19, F/T employment).

The interview data suggest negative views on training are heightened when there is perceived absence of a link between training and education and opportunities for paid work, or when remuneration for work and training undertaken is low. One interviewee's anger recorded in the animator diaries as *'doing a lot of work and not getting paid for it'* (Bobby, age 25, intermittent employment for last 24 months). One challenge for employability workers is to provide sufficient examples of a potential future to those unable to see the benefits of investing time in building skills to access higher level employment. When negative experiences occur in aggregate successively for individuals or concurrently between individuals, the abstracted rationality of investing in training is harder to uphold. The tension between immediate experience and the proposed benefits of strategic approaches to career development is illustrated below. On this occasion, the employability worker was able to forestall further (self) exclusion from future opportunities. The lengthening of the gap between the urge and action was a key factor

in this example

'After doing the Gateway to Work I was gonnae just, piss off mare or less cos I hid to do the Glasgow Works thing and I was just gonnae chuck it. Ah went up to Carol and ah says "Look I've just done 2 weeks in the Gateway to Work and noo they want me to do another 2 weeks in this place" and a says "What's happening here? Am no too happy about it... a just want a job and I don't want to go through all this". She kinda explained to me... that's the way I need to go if I want to do that kinda job. So, they talked, well they didnae talk me round - they just made me realize it would benefit me in the long term if a go to the place. So if it wisnae fir them I'd probably have just chucked it there and then and wouldnae have done it' (Stuart, age 24, F/T employment).

For this client, the benefits of following a particular course of action became realised when his advisor clearly signposted the benefits and costs of proceeding with a particular program. This positive intervention by his advisor was crucial for his continued attendance on the course. The development of a particular understanding of the connection between certain actions (i.e. training) and outcomes (employment) appears to be a casualty of negative or unsatisfactory experiences in the labour market. In the next chapter, a fuller account of the experiences of agency and employability focussed interventions in this realm will be explored with particular reference to the experience of time.

Networks' role in shaping perceptions of work and identity

In the current policy context the idea that paid work assists social inclusion is grounded not only through its financial remuneration but that it is beneficial for individual well-being, is therapeutic in its own right, providing structure, meaning and identity as well as access to social networks (Freud 2007; Gordon and Waddell 2006). In the accounts we collected the beneficial effects of paid employment were not a given. This can be another barrier to people seeking employment.

This is illuminated with reference to the stories of two individuals, Brian and Carla, who

described their 'cycling' between paid work and periods of claiming benefits and attempts to re-establish themselves in the labour market. Central to their stories are attempts to uphold a positive self-identity, of self-respect and gaining respect from those around them.

The stories illustrate how the experience of work itself can be a key factor in shaping feelings of esteem and how as individuals they navigate the transitions between periods of work and non-work with this maintenance of identity as a key factor in decisions. Carla's story is one of ultimate success whilst Brian is still at a difficult period on the 'cycle' of work and claiming benefits. The interaction between the character of work available in the small geographical area they live and their desire for respect and autonomy are clear. Also clear, is that there is a rationality that underpins decision-making around staying on benefits or moving off them, but the economic component of this reckoning is not sufficient in its own right to explain or understand it.

Brian's story

Brian is a middle aged man in the Pollok area, at the time of interview in receipt of Incapacity Benefit. For many years he earned a living as a labourer on local building sites and was proud of his reputation as someone who could be trusted to do the job. He believes the character of the work eventually took its toll on his health producing a back problem that was later diagnosed as sciatica. The extent of his health problems in relation to employment were described;

'I find it hard to get back into work for the simple reason I would probably only last three weeks in a job even if I was just sitting down. It doesn't matter what kind of job, even a light job you know, the doctor has told me to definitely lay off the heavy work. So the building game is out for me, even driving jobs, I did a driving job... it only lasted a year but I was glad at the same time because I was feeling my back was playing up.'

Brian's sciatica has produced threats and challenges to his identity that are more prominent in his account than the financial costs of removal from the workforce. His

experience is not just about coping with ill health; it is about the challenge of facing a discontinuity that threatens his sense of who he is and how others perceive him. His story therefore has themes in common with others who are trying to establish or re-establish a coherent life narrative and identity in the face of changing labour market opportunity. This is most significant when the roles that become available require a significant degree of personal reorientation and adaptation.

Brian would like to come off Incapacity Benefit and work full time. He sees being on benefits as stigmatising, evident in the distinction he makes between the *'truly incapacitated'* (people like him) and those who are *'kidding the system on'*. There is a threat to his moral identity involved in being on benefits with an *'invisible'* illness such as sciatica.

'The back is a funny injury, it's a hard one to spot, people think you are kidding on. I went to the doctors, I went to the hospital, they verified it was down to sciatica you know.'

Brian also saw being a good worker as essential to his sense of self and the respect he commanded within his social networks.

'There are a lot of boys out there who know the kind of work I did out there and a lot of boys who used to shout on me to do the work alongside them because I did the graft'.

Managing his identity and managing his illness becomes intertwined with managing his finances. A financial barrier to coming off Incapacity Benefit is the administration that follows if his experience of work is unsuccessful.

'I'm no' scared of work. If they turn roon' and say "You are alright for work" I'll go to work. But it's the amount of paperwork, the amount of paperwork if you have to go on the sick after three weeks, it's a stress... so you say to yourself it is a waste of time me working because I am going to last only two or three weeks and have to get on the

Incapacity again.'

In this regard we see an element of the 'poverty trap' explanation for his long-term removal from the labour-market. Brian has an in-depth understanding of the workings of the benefit system as is illustrated in this report;

'When I was getting paid off they said they didn't need night drivers and I said "Ok fair enough". They said "We can pay you off, the last day will be the 15th April". I said "Can you do me a favour, I don't want to lose my Incapacity can you pay me off on the 7th April so I don't go over the year because you automatically go back on to Incapacity again". They paid me off on the 7th, a week earlier so I didn't lose my Incapacity.'

However, another key element is at stake, not just his short-term financial security but his identity in the eyes of the men he once worked with. As has been noted earlier, the data suggests that while women are more likely to be able to access meaningful roles out with employment, for men their role and performance in employment is a primary source of esteem and identity. Having established himself in his working life as reliable and dependable, he is concerned the invisibility of his sciatica would undermine his reputation if he lost a job through it.

'I get scared, do you know what I mean? I feel I am not showing my true potential to people because I have this injury and if I go out and start working for them and only last two weeks they might say "Thought he was a good worker"... I would feel my reputation was at stake as I would be saying to myself I am letting these people down.'

So the administrative and financial barriers of the benefits system combine with the emotional and gendered identity based risk of returning to work a lesser worker. The threat to identity is not removed by his staying on benefits as that brings the risk of being seen as someone playing the system. Brian is forced to adapt to a new set of circumstances and seek work in alternative segments of the labour market. He also speaks of the increasing casualisation in the labour market (hinted at earlier in being laid

–off after a year) that influences his perceptions of the future.

‘A lot of people are not willing to go out and work a day for the simple reason- “Why am I wanting to go out and work for a year and then they pay me off”. There is nothing on the horizon for me, nothing in the future when I retire, no redundancy or nothing, it’s three weeks wages or something like that... You cannot plan for the future of nothing.’

In contrast, the relative security of Incapacity Benefit may seem attractive but it is important how its attractiveness is shaped by the character of the labour market rather than the attitudes of the workless.

Changing direction- new opportunities

The non-manual nature of many opportunities in the service sector at first sight may seem an ideal solution to Brian’s inability to take part in heavy manual labour. However, these bring fresh challenges that Brian’s previous experiences of work have not prepared him for. In his previous role on construction sites, Brian did not need a CV or interviewing skills, his reputation alone and his network of contacts had been enough to sustain employment. Brian had recently applied for a job as a van driver and had to go through interview. It was his first interview in 25 years and he believes his nerves put him at a disadvantage. Alongside this skill deficit however (something that could be easily remedied by ‘job readiness’ programs), is the idea that the new labour-market opportunities do not carry enough financial remuneration to be seen as ‘proper jobs’. From Brian’s perspective it appears that migrants who are willing to work for less money are keeping wages low in a casualised economy.¹⁵

‘I feel there is a lot of people coming into the country, the refugees and what have, you they are taking a lot of work off us because it is cheap work. We... work to make a living, everybody likes to have a leisure bit of pay, time so they can have a weekend...we would all love to go out and make a living and work but we’re not wanting to go out and work

¹⁵ The perception that the influx of immigrant labour compounds low wage conditions in particular areas of the labour market (here, construction work) has been referred to as a process of ‘double marginalisation’ (Peck and Theodore 2001, p492).

for pennies you know what I mean? ...The value of work has long gone. People are not valuing their work because the money is not there.'

Brian shares this perception on his own kin network. He remarks that his son, who has recently acquired an apprenticeship, is bound for Australia.

'It is devaluing the true labour and the apprentices about here. I feel once the apprentices have done their time here they are not getting the money, are moving away. My boy is an apprentice plumber... it is going through his head that he is leaving the country. He says "Once my time is out I might immigrate da". I said, "Good for you, there is nothing in this country for you, the trades are dying out here."'

Carla's story

The search for work consistent with one's identity is a theme cutting across Carla's experience of work and non-work. Carla has been a care worker for over 26 years. Although the work was casualised she was able to tolerate this because her identity was shaped more by her family commitments than workplace role.

'I went back to the home to do different shifts, the more kids I had, the more I had to do shiftwork. Everything was to suit my husband and kids because you didn't have childminders 26 years ago. There was just you and your husband and your family that helped out, so I went back and forward all my life until I'd had enough of it and realised I was only lining one man's pocket because you worked for a pittance, a night shift was about £14 a night for looking after 37 residents.'

Carla's personal strengths lie in being helpful, having good interpersonal skills and being empathetic. In her work as a care worker these qualities stood her in good stead and she found ways of making the role meaningful to her. In one of her many care related roles she tells this story of how she often did extra to maintain the well-being and happiness of those she came into contact with through her job.

'I was working with another lassie once and we went to bath this wee woman, she was desperate for a bath and I was saying to her, "I'll wash your hair and make it all nice", I ended up doing all the hairdressing in the hospital as well. I was doing everything, "Do you want a haircut? I'll do it", "Do you need a jumper? I'll knit you one"... I ended up leaving my curlers in there in the end. I ended up doing their beards and their eyebrows and everything.'

Her employment history was characterised by low paid work offering no pension or holiday pay, conditions she describes as 'slave labour'. After becoming a single-parent Carla increased her working hours and was promoted to a supervisor. Her increased working hours began to put pressure on her in her dual roles as a parent and worker.

'I am quite family orientated so I felt I didn't want to be out for breakfast, lunch and dinner.'

This pressure was compounded by her relationship with her boss who began to bully her, leading to her taking time off on sick leave and being subsequently dismissed. Through this experience and its protracted nature with subsequent tribunal proceedings, being without work began to erode her self-worth. The injurious experience of losing her job and being on benefits led to alcohol use that developed into a problem.

'You have been in work 26 years and it has all changed, everything in life is changed. I'd never been to the benefits agency in my life. The doctor hand me a sick-line, what do I do with this? Take it to Social Security where I was treated like a piece of rubbish.'

Her negative experience at the benefits agency was framed by her feeling she was treated without dignity, respect or the privacy that would be appropriate for telling her story of workplace bullying. Her experience of being on benefits was one of losing a sense of the future. The process involved in being a claimant left her feeling vulnerable and bewildered. The experiences of time described earlier and the disconnection between effort and reward, crucial to maintaining a sense of agency, re-emerge.

'I didn't want to know what was in front of me. I was absolutely terrified...I said [to the man at the jobcentre] "Where do I go from here" and he said "Go and find yourself a job because all you are getting is £56 a week." I wanted a job, I didn't want to be like this, I've never been employed. "Believe me; you are not getting a ticket at this door." I wasn't looking for a ticket...that was it, they weren't helpful, they didn't tell me where I could go so I sat in the house and kept drinking and drinking as I didn't know where I was going. It had all become computerised and I was like flipping hell I have never used a computer before which scared me so I wasn't going to go in.'

All Carla's contacts with her working life were severed and the self-esteem she felt from being able to support her family was lost also. Her feelings of control and self-efficacy in being able to change her life became completely absent. Her relationship to time had been transformed.

Her previous employer's refusal to give her a reference compounded her feelings of lacking control. Eventually the drinking she employed to stop her fearing the future began to make her return to work less and less likely.

New opportunities

Carla currently works as a community based employability worker, a role she finds consistent with her identity as a 'helper' and one in which her injurious experiences of the cycle of work and unemployment produce a sympathetic outlook that supports her role. Carla's story illustrates how work in casualised labour-markets can shape the vulnerability of workers and how the paucity of training and personal development opportunities that characterises the sector can increase feelings of insecurity and undermine individual resilience to the vagaries of flexible employment.

Although Carla was ultimately successful in regaining employment and taking advantage of new opportunities in the Glasgow's voluntary sector, her success is down in part to personal characteristics that give her an advantage in a certain type of role. It is not work

per se that is therapeutic for her but work that matches her sense of who she is and what she can do well. However, a key role for employability workers is revealed; the reconnection of a sense of agency through individual effort in a manner which does not personalize previous disappointments.

Summary

Data presented in this section, particularly the two stories, illustrate the influence of three forces at play. The first force is the labour market itself that provides the opportunities and nature and quality of work available. The second force is the agency of the individual; the sum of their individual skills, attributes and qualifications and the possible actions in the labour market that they can enact on account of them. However, a third force is also in evidence; the action of the social network that through its relationship to the labour market can structure access to certain positions, and affect the perceived desirability of certain positions, as much as the stock of resources an individual may possess. Traditional ways of addressing employability can concentrate on the individual level of agency without reflecting its relationship to the social network; how the aggregate of people someone comes into contact with can exert an influence by the creation of roles, identities and values attached to certain forms of activity. It is within this realm of the 'core economy' (the transactions of family and community life) that outreach approaches can operate to increase the likelihood of helping those distant from the labour market sustain a trajectory into paid employment. It is with more depth into this realm of influence and agency that the next chapter explores.

5. Working within social networks

In this final data section we explore the social capital (see literature review for discussion) that people have access to in their local area and family based networks. The aim is to illustrate what this can tell us about successful working with those who are furthest away from sustainable employment and have proven intractable to existing solutions tailored for a broad population. We will look at the strengths and weaknesses respondents evidenced within their social networks, how these helped or hindered them in their ambitions and how they shaped their aspirations.

The deficit view of social networks in areas of high unemployment

Previous explorations of social networks in relation to employability have highlighted to varying degrees, the negative influence of interpersonal factors in shaping employability (Murray 1998; MacDonald and March 2001; Furlong and Cartmel 2003, 2004; McQuaid, 2006). In these studies, persistent experiences of worklessness for both individuals and communities are said to make certain forms of social capital and links to employment harder to acquire. Indeed, McQuaid (2006) has included local cultures of work as one of the multiple “vectors” that interact to shape supply-side influences on the likelihood of individuals finding sustained employment.

Limitations of network knowledge and values

Indeed, there was evidence of network-based barriers to employment information in our data. Stuart (age 24, in F/T employment) was an example of this, pointing to a deficit of aspiration in his local community of Royston. For him, ‘moving up’ meant ‘moving out’ to another area where he met with a higher degree of aspiration.

‘Like when I stayed in Royston I didnae know anyone that had bought a house, I didnae know anyone that owned their own house and no one in my family really worked, and all my friends were kind of in and out of work, know what I mean. They all did like the unskilled work, kind of bottom level stuff... and since I’ve moved away, most of my friends now have all worked all their lives and are in steady jobs. It’s things like that.

In Royston as long as you don't turn out to be a junkie or a criminal then you are doing alright for yourself. That's why I was happy doing security work and menial kinds of jobs.'

'Well now I stay in Crownpoint, my friends are all kind of ambitious and everything and that way through the last few years I've probably grown up as a person. I feel like I've realised there's a lot of stuff I can do and I've got a lot of skills it's not just about having a job and not being a drug user, it's about aiming for the big prizes and having goals in your life, know what I mean?... I don't really talk to any of them anymore because I don't stay in Royston anymore, so I haven't really had contact with them in the last couple of years'

However, not all experiences of network based knowledge around work were negative. For some opportunities network knowledge remained crucial to tapping into labour markets. However, these labour-market opportunities may be restricted to forms of labour that have a long tradition of employing local people, rather than new forms of work. The informality of recruitment, in some cases, could also be indicative of casualised working practices that were disadvantageous in the longer term.

'I ask my sister about jobs, like back storeroom person... I worked in a shop and I couldnae handle it, working with customers, you only get people coming in and giving you dog's abuse... I'd just turn round and tell them to shut up or something. My brother, he's a joiner I was like "Give us a job as a labourer with you?"' (Bobby, age 25, JSA).

Interviewer: *'So how did you get your first job on a construction site?*

'Through a friend I was telling him I wisnae working after giving up the kitchen and complaining about how it was too many hours, he was working as a labourer, "Do you want a job, and I was like "Ok then"... It's easier than going to the job centre, I find it easier getting work this way' (Bobby, age 25, JSA).

Despite evidence of network deficits it was also common was for respondents to identify positive aspects of help and support. Furthermore, rather than the removal from work of entire networks, we found that access to paid work often underpinned many of the social capital transactions within people's networks. The social transactions that characterised support in local networks included help with finances and subsistence (requiring access to money from some network contacts) and support in raising children. Additionally and importantly, this activity within social networks would also girder positive self –identity and well-being.

Help and assistance with local networks

Finances and subsistence

Help and support with financial matters could be in terms of lending or giving money to 'tide over' periods between payment of benefits or wages, or through providing access to cash through informal paid employment opportunities. Another key way in which financial assistance could be provided was through help and advice in accessing benefits. It is important to understand how social networks facilitate access to cash as it complicates the idea that financial independence is the primary motivating factor leading people to seek formal employment. Our data on lending and giving loans also challenges the assumption that networks are characterised by worklessness. Whereas some individuals had been removed from the labour-market in common with their close network contacts, for others it would be precisely because their network contacts were in work that they could have informal access to loans and gifts. In the following extract Moira reports how her daughter (employed informally as a cleaner in the mornings prior to her full-time retail job) helps her out financially as part of the general support she receives from her.

'Every Friday and Saturday the two of us are of in her motor... she does help me out a lot, she bought me nice paint and all that for my toilet... she's good that way, if I am ever stuck she'll say to me there's my bank card go and take money out, you don't get many daughter like that, giving their mother their bank card!'

(Moira, age 40-49, P/T employment)

Network members could also offer opportunities to earn money. This could help as in the example of this mother in her twenties (Mary, age 20-24, Lone Parent Benefit) who supplemented her benefits with occasional work for her father. Although just one example, it does highlight a different take on the nature of social networks and their relationship to employment opportunities- that they are not devoid of positive social capital. However, the nature of the work, low-paid and low-skilled does add to the understanding of how experiences of work could shape attitudes to the labour market. In such circumstances work is made to pay (both economically and psychologically) through being sporadic, as a short-term solution to immediate problems rather than a long-term investment formative of self-identity. In Mary's case, the access to employment she sought and offered was only ever temporary, a situation that suited both her and her father who offered her the work

Interviewer- *'So what kind of things does your dad do to help you?'*

Mary- *'He helps me out financially, he has his own business so he gives me work so that I can earn money off him, if I am stuck...he's got snack vans and he rents a kitchen, so if I'm looking for money he'll say come here and clean out the kitchen for me.'*

Help with finances and subsistence also occurred between family relations experiencing a degree of financial hardship. Jackie (age 40-49, Income Support) describes how her son is a source of consistent and constant support despite his own financial difficulties and perilous connection with the labour-market. Jackie, who suffers from long-term limiting health problems, is unlikely and unable to find paid work herself.

'He had learning difficulties when he was at school, like anger management kind of stuff but he's here first thing in the morning and he is here last thing at night... the boy's life is on hold because of me. He's put his life on hold. Do you know what he done, see when I was just getting £21, see when he was getting his money, he was going up and buying two of everything. His life was on hold, no way would he go to work when I was in that state'

The care and work her son performs in supporting Jackie illustrates strength rather than a deficit of this particular network but also reveals some of the values and functions that underpin transactions between the two. Her son, who is still to establish himself in the labour market, removed himself from job search to help care for his mother.

These relations of obligation to kin and the work of care, particularly to one's parents, are strongly in evidence amongst participants. Indeed, care is one area in which traditional practices associated with working class female domestic culture remain. One woman, Karen (age 22, Lone Parent Benefit) with two young children, describes the extent of her own care work. That what matters most to her is her family's well being is self-evident.

Karen - *'I kinda go between him [grandfather] and ma ma, know whit a mean? The two of them live on the same street... I go tae the shops and that for them... Am kept busy... wi' the two... I pick up ma ma's medicine fae the doctors and things like that fur her...'*

Interviewer – *'So you're like a carer basically?'*

Karen – *'Aye, well aye...but its no down [recorded] at the social, am not down as carer but on ma ma's forms am down as looking after her... Ma granda am just kinda helping oot cos the last couple aw months he's been no well... So I just try and help him as much as a kin... I'll always look efter ma mammy cos my ma's my ma... She does everything for me and she's quite bad the noo, so... I try an' dae ma bit for her.'*

Favours in relation to care, finances and subsistence were not always from direct family members. Indeed, they illustrate the ways in which reciprocity and obligation are developed to cope with the demands of living in particularly vulnerable circumstances. In situations where housing prices and policy can prevent an escape to a 'better area' and perhaps the capacity to privatise one's lifestyle through detached housing or the

associated ability to construct a self out with the local area, 'being a good neighbour' can be a form of social capital in itself (Gilfillan 2002; Cattell, 2001). In Jackie's story the feeling of self-worth she derived from being a reliable, dependable and helpful neighbour was evident throughout.

'I know everybody in the full street because they aw come fae roon aboot but there is a couple I have just met. The wee woman over there, she wis blind, I go in and help her every noo and again. And Stan, I have got to help him [lives across the road] cos he canny work his washing machine. Anybody in the street could come in here an have a cup of tea. I know every single one of them, nobody really dislikes me or dislikes ma family or anything... [That] wee lassie, her daughter comes over, 'Eh, ma mammy wants ye', mibbe she's sittin depressed. It just depends if they come tae me.'

On one occasion, Jackie's need was such that her neighbours responded in kind. She received food parcels after a DWP review '*whipped me off benefits*'. On questioning the limiting nature of her illness the individual working for the agency expected her to *immediately* manage both her and her son on £21 a week.

'If it wisnae for her [neighbour], one time I was really and truly hungry, really and truly didn't have anything, bread, ,milk, food, nothing, because of the social (security)'

Support in raising children

On such occasions, network supports adapted to failures in more formal sources of support. This was also the case in childcare where informal, network based assets grounded in trust based relationships could be a preferred option to those based on secondary –relationships (formal childcare). In such cases, the 'knowing' and trusting of network contacts facilitates the transactions and exchanges.

In the case of Mary we see how the task of raising children as a lone parent is supported by a number of network contacts and family members. Her network is partially based around her existing family and her father's new family (by her father re-marrying, Mary

is introduced to an additional extended peer and kin network). Family gatherings offer advice and support regarding the practicalities of bringing up children.

'We go round every now and then and she (father's partner) will make a big Sunday dinner and we will all sit round the table and tell each other what's been going on in our life and that. We talk about what the weans are doing, because three of them are round about the same age so, same age as (her daughter's name). There's older ones but they're roughly the same age so it's just like saying 'oh she can do this now' or 'he can do that'. I learned (daughter's name) how to go a two-wheeler bike and the two lassies helped her with that. We all help each other out and give each other advice and that.'

Having childcare responsibilities has been described recurrently as a supply-side barrier to employment in the employability literature (see literature review). The provision of community-based and affordable childcare would therefore seem an appropriate response. However, in Mary's story there is a deficit of trust with formal childcare, something that the childcare offered informally by her mother has implicitly.

'I didn't have good experience the last time I put Libby in childcare, so I wouldn't want like to put her back into childcare, I'd rather my mum was watching her... Aye my mum would look after her so I could go out and do my course.'

Returning to Jackie, she reports her feelings that it is better to spend time with children rather than 'throw money at them'. This raises questions about the place of paid work in relation to the formation of identity and the enactment of adult roles. Counter to her own preferences she offers the example of her sister, whom she feels uses money first and foremost to solve any personal problems she may be having with her children. In such an example money is understood to be an immediate but short-sighted way of solving issues between human beings. It also reveals a reason why paid work (economic activity) may not carry as much esteem as expressive family roles, particularly when the enactment of the former is seen to undermine the latter.

Roles in social network as instrumental in developing positive self-image

Roles within social networks can be instrumental in the development of self-esteem and understanding of where individual strengths lay. Jackie portrays herself in the data as an informal support worker, highly valued by those she assists. Enabling this is the time she is able to invest in the community and the daily enactment of neighbourliness.

'I know everybody in the street. The wee woman over there, she is blind, I go in and help her every now and again. And Mick (lives across the road) I have got to help him because he can't work his washing machine.'

To a significant extent, Jackie picks –up on support needs that may be missed by more formalised forms of support or people who may be beyond the reach of such services.

'He was in hospital with a coma. Since he came out of the coma, he has never been the same. But he has never went for any help... As soon as a letter comes through he comes over to me be disnae know what to do. If someone sends him a text he disnae know how to get the text. He tried to put his washing machine on and it bounced all the way out of the kitchen. Its things like that. It's a shame.'

'He gets income support, you know the income support you get if you are sick, like myself now. I knew you needed fifteen points, that's what you need to have. Now, I know Mick has got more problems than this one fifteen points which means you get it. So I explained it all to him. So I got the form and I filled in most of it. I filled in his date of birth and everything but when it came to the crunch to actually sending the letter he was like "You'd better no', you better no''. He thinks it is wrong, he thinks he's not entitled to it. I mean, as soon as a doctor sees, as soon as a doctor has a conversation with him, he'll know'.

'It's a shame because there's a lot going unnoticed, there's a lot [people with problems], not just with John, there's another few in the street. There's weans, a wee lassie, her daughter comes over "Ma mammy wants ye". Maybe she's sitting depressed. It just

depends if they come to me'.

Jackie's experience and actions highlight the limitations of paid-work, in some contexts, in relation to social inclusion, self-worth and access to social capital. Jackie's interpersonal skills have been highlighted by her network members as a possible source of paid vocation for her. However, the chances of fulfilling this in a paid capacity seem limited for her. What are also highlighted are the emotional costs and rewards that came with using one's 'qualifying personal experience' as a form of capital in the contemporary labour market.

'Ma sister has turned round to me and says "See what you have done", I have done a lot of psychology things to pass time and I got my head down into education and done a lot. I done Maths, English, Creative Writing, I write short stories and things like that. I have got quite a lot of certificates and my sister said to me "See what you're doing, as in just sitting with people, people get thousands a month for that". She says "All you need is to get your motor, get a wee motor and that way you could travel out and do one to ones with people'. At first I done a wee bit of counselling up at John Wheatley, ye know, drug addicts, counselling them. I found it hard, I took it to heart, I was greetin' too much in front of them. I couldnae do it.'

The network focussed role of community animators

The evidence from the networks is of highly trusted and reliable sources of support. At the root of this trust are the perceived failures of formalised forms of care and support (the benefits agencies in the case of Jackie and problems with formal childcare in the case of Karen) and the security provided by primary relationships to 'be there' when they are relied on most. Primary roles in social networks, be they the peer group or kin, are the place where individual clients derive their sense of worth and pride. Injurious or unsatisfying experiences of work mean that the secondary roles of labour market employment are unlikely to be seen to offer viable alternatives in the maintenance of identity.

Tied to this, is the idea that network members encounter each other as individuals, not as problems but as individuals with both needs and assets to offer the network and wider community. Thus Mary's sporadic need for cash does not undermine her ability and perception of herself as a caring and devoted mother. Moreover, the work she can put in to earn money means she is not relying on a 'hand-out'. Jackie meanwhile does not feel a loss of pride from receiving support from network members, indeed one of those key sources of support is able to see her strengths in the midst of her personal crisis and help bolster Jackie's self-esteem and belief in her self as a worthy individual.

This is stark contrast to the descriptions of contact with benefits agencies and employability services found in the data. Here the impersonal nature of the relationships finds individuals with needs being defined by their needs, as someone without work, as someone experiencing failure, which affects how individuals perceives themselves. The nature of professionalized help therefore comes to focus on their *worklessness*, defining their role and their failure, defining their sense of who they are, rather than core economy *activity* that may provide a more effective measure of identity and worth.

Community animators encounter individuals in a manner mirroring how individuals experience themselves within their primary networks. Their worklessness is not their defining characteristic but their identities as a parent, an informal carer, an individual with a history and aspirations, likes and dislikes and a sense of who they would like to be. The animators' freedom to refer clients to a range of support services and not just those related to employment therefore complements the support found in the network. Although referring clients to agencies who's work is firmly located in the realm of secondary relationships, this can be seen as important in the development of linking capital that is limited in the networks we studied.

Another issue to remark upon is how gender shapes the likelihood of maintaining a balance between primary and secondary roles. Women who see their social role primarily as caregivers can make local employment opportunities work both financially and emotionally- even if this is only in the short term (also seen elsewhere in the example

of Carla). This is part a consequence of the nature of the available work in the care and service industries (that mirrors to an extent family based roles) and that the tenuous relationship with the flexible and casualised low-skilled labour-market does not challenge sense of self in quite the same way it may do for men.¹⁶ One conclusion may be that women are more likely to be exploited within the current and emergent range of opportunities available to low-skilled workers (Burchell et al 2007). Men, on the other hand, who ‘opt out’ of available work opportunities may fund themselves, socially and financially, in other more culturally informed and often riskier ways (Winlow 2001).¹⁷

Nurturing relationships

Can the focus on the interpersonal, what people look for in their relationships with each other, also inform successful working practices between agencies and clients? The quality of time spent nurturing relationships in networks is a key characteristic. Personal exchanges and obligations and their currency *over time* facilitates the development of trust in a manner different from the exchanges in the work sphere (limited to the period of pay or execution of a professional role). The handling of time as a commodity characterises both network interactions and the interactions between the community animators and their clients. The exploration and recognition of personal strengths needs time to flourish. Not only the availability of time (as an abundance), but a particular quality of time that sees the attention on the client and allows focus on the emergence of abilities, wishes and selfhood.

This is reflected in the testimony of Stuart when he describes the time he was given in his meetings with community animators as the thing that mattered most to him. Time in which he was able to explore the opportunities he perceived to be available.

‘They just listened to me a lot mair, know whit a mean, they listened to what I had to say and went along with my ideas rather than try to force something on me. I had a bit

¹⁶ Waters and Moore (2000) found that male self esteem was more strongly correlated with income than women. This may be related to the stronger positive association in women between alternate social roles, social support and self esteem.

¹⁷ Both interviews and fieldwork identify ‘entrepreneurial’ practices amongst young males in car theft, drug dealing and violence.

freedom to try and pick my own kind of stuff.'

For Stuart, it was not the length of time that mattered but how that time was given and received. Being listened to suggested a partnership or a relationship marked by understanding and respect, an event that encouraged Stuart to talk and work with his ideas. His talking and his thoughts are experienced as having value through having an impact on other people and how they orientate their time towards him. Here, the 'gift' of being listened to can be seen as a form of reciprocity, a practice of exchange and so a crucial component in interactions between existing and potentially new network contacts.

To this extent, outreach workers can be seen to increase respect for clients' circumstances and restore faith in them as having the capacity to exercise control on their own future.

Interviewer- *'How would you feel if you were going up [to Job Centre] yourself, what would be the difference?'*

James- *'I don't know but I think they might think I was just somebody else off the street, obviously I am somebody off the street but like somebody like just a ned.'*

Interviewer- *'I see what you mean, you were represented by someone?'*

James- *'It was if, naw I think it was Julie [community animator]... who ran me up it was if you were there yourself, it made me feel good as when we got in we were talking and I felt if they were talking and I felt if they are talking to the Advisors I had a good chance here. It made me open up a wee bit an aw.'*

Here, the presence of an outreach worker can be seen as a resource through which James

can use to be someone other than the person he believed he was being perceived to be.¹⁸ One employability worker suggests that this is a core component of change and engendering feelings of confidence.

'I think everybody lives differently but they are scared to open up that wee bit but see when they open up its amazing you know and I think they become different again' (Carla).

It may contribute to a key issue perceived in equal measure by both service providers and the individuals they work with, that is, a lack of confidence amongst the workless and the long term unemployed: the sense that individual opinion and actions are without efficacy, value or impact.

Indeed, earlier in this report we described how differences in the perceptions and experience of time between those in work and out of work can influence perceptions of what is happening in clients' interactions with agencies. The impression left on clients is often a relentless and anonymous process with lack of recognition of individual circumstances and perceptions of agencies 'not really wanting to help'. A conveyor-belt metaphor was invoked by one client (Lorna, age 25, Job Seekers Allowance) to reflect the alienation of the experience.

However, taking the time to listen and to work to a clients' particular relationship to the world does not fit easily with a rationalised approach aimed at increasing point in time outcomes at a minimum expense. Fieldwork with practitioners suggests that the negative evaluations of de-personalised, de-contextualised working practiced evidenced by clients is shared by practitioners. Precisely because their time was accounted for, clients' repeated failures to attend meetings was seen as undermining practitioners' efforts, increasing their workload and seeding doubt as to the reliability and readiness-for-work of clients. In one interview, an outreach worker refined this point by noting that the existence of 'no-shows' amongst those who self refer should not be seen as evidence for

¹⁸ Freda and Clayton (2005) identify negative stereotyping and prejudice as a key issue faced by young people looking for work.

lack of motivation or dis-ingenuity in wanting to find work; their presence at the door of an agency is evidence against this. Rather it is characteristic of what animators refer to as the 'nodding dog syndrome' or 'saying aye but meaning naw'; that some people find it difficult to openly reject proposals they are not interested in. Again the focus returns to the nature of the interaction and resources or worth placed in understanding the starting position of the client and creating the climate for truthful disclosure to service providers.

The dual experience of time

Underpinning both the animator way of working and also attitudes to training and the deferred gratification it represents are experiences of time that are socially shaped and reinforced as well individually experienced. For many of those in the study, a particular experience of time characterised the rhythm of life in areas of high unemployment.

For participants in this study, time was often experienced as static, abundant, less dynamic and often characterized by an inability to exercise control over it. Whereas time endlessly moves forwards in the world of employment, can be lost or poorly spent, and relates to our future goals, for those outside work time can hang heavy and can define an absence of trajectory, direction or agency. It would not be uncommon and was indeed a recurring feature of working with the client group, for agreed arrangements for interviews to be forgotten or ignored. We recognised that the character of *our* working lives had set the agenda, with interview arrangements being made to fit the rhythms of the working day. In this regard, our possession of diaries in which to note down agreed times of our next meetings were a symbol of our possessing a different relationship to time.

In the interview data there were numerous examples of time being experienced in large segments needing to be 'killed' or 'filled' rather than seeing time as something that needed to be micro-managed in a goal-orientated manner. For one father the sheer availability of time puts into sharp relief the contemporary importance of money for social inclusion in cities (Burnett and McKendrick 2007; Burnett 2006). In doing so, he draws attention to the relationship between social roles (father); motivation and practices (getting up to take children to school); social and economic participation and aspirations for both him as an adult and for his children ("where do you want to go?"). Without the

money to spend, or a reason for being, his movement is prohibited, activity is limited and time as experienced is disinvested of purpose: issues that reinforce the importance of outreach work going to the places people will be found.

'It's as if the more time that you have the less you know what to do with it... I only had to get up in the morning to take the kids to school so I done that... sitting watching daytime telly as there was nothing to do. When it pours with rain, where do you want to go?

Shopping centre? So we went to the shopping centre and wandered about'

(Jim, 38, F/T employment).

Community animators can operate in both experiences of time- that of the paid worker with time as commodity with high value and that of the workless with an abundance of time. Consequently they can also act as bridges between the two experiences. Hence, the informal nature of animator contacts, meeting on streets and the 'drop-in' nature of return visits and the fact that clients have the opportunity to speak with someone *'like me'* largely on their own terms and at their own speed, is vital to their success. This approach is most carefully crafted in relation to first contacts, the long term unemployed and those people deemed most likely to turn away from statutory services: the metaphor of *'planting a seed'* often used to describe first waves of surveying and door knocking is suggestive of an ethos that has a different sense of time and effectiveness to target orientated approaches that are tied to the pressures of policy and funding. Interactions between individuals living, to some extent, to different time signatures can disclose some of the fundamental issues faced by those defined in employability terms as 'hard to reach' and 'hard to help'.

The 'stalled' time experience characteristic of older clients was a function of having been unemployed for a long time. Younger clients would have a sense of time that could not move quickly enough but crucially felt that they had no power to shape they experiences within it. One senior advisor recounted her work with the gap that can exist between younger clients' qualifications and resources and their 'unrealistic' hopes and

expectations.¹⁹ She recognised the importance of supporting aspirations when describing how she would sit down with clients, map out exactly what was required and how long it would take to reach their stated aims.

These social, experiential and practical skills are often unwritten and can be a taken for granted part of the job. These skills are, however, a key aspect of service provision and can increase the likelihood of a client staying with a particular course. Younger participant's accounts are also characterised by the frequent unsuccessful attempts made to contact key workers in employability/ training organisations and the feelings of powerlessness, sometimes anger, this generated. Being kept waiting was a frustrating and, importantly, a not uncommon experience. It may seem contradictory, given that time was an abundant resource for the jobless. However such experiences reinforced the sense that they lacked control over their time and because of this, their being subject to forces beyond themselves.

This was particularly pointed in one woman's account of the abrupt ending of a proposed series of counselling after two sessions in which she describes how an out reach worker *'Never got back to me so we never finished what we started. See the things I told her as well but we never finished what we started'* (Lynn, long term IB). The sense of betrayal and lack of perceived connection between investment and pay-off is explicit.

The success of an employability service is judged in relation to results: in particular, numbers of people gaining employment and job retention. The level at which these outcomes are produced significantly affects the status and funding of an organisation and those who are employed within it. Indeed, the drive to produce outcomes may be intensified when competing organisations, and those who work within them, depend on their existence from similar sources of funding. In this sense, outcomes can often be of more significance to managers than employability workers and to employability workers than clients: thus, chasing hard outcomes may reflect the needs of the organisation as

¹⁹ We have already looked at how school leavers, through having endured often meaningless experiences at school, can want 'things' here and now.

opposed to the client.

Summary

This chapter has illustrated the strengths of a client-centred or ‘personalised’ approaches to assisting the “hard to help” into sustained employment. Crucial to its success is an understanding of where the clients are at the start of the process, their current aspirations (not necessarily in relation to paid work) and resources, rather than being led by an externally defined outcome (a job and removal from benefits). Such an approach is more likely to produce sustainable employment suited to an individual’s aspirations. What this also underlines is the time sometimes necessary to help those currently furthest away from the labour market into employment.

6. Discussion and Implications

Personalised approaches and starting with the individual

The client-centred ways of working illustrated in this report are intensive and time consuming and crucial to their successes is the recruitment of capable and skilled staff. However, it may represent the most cost-effective means of working with individuals for whom previous employability approaches have proved ineffective. Existing mainstream employability strategies, coupled with favourable economic conditions, can help those closer to the labour market who have aspirations and resources in place and can ‘make work pay’ both financially and psychologically. However, once this portion of employable individuals has left benefits and entered the labour market, a law of diminishing returns can characterise strategies to find sustained employment for the remainder.

To this extent, in the absence of revision, the current mainstream models of service provision will not address key problem areas in relation to improving awareness of, and access to, existing services and so employment for the hardest to help. The evidence of this study suggests that the daily routines and resources of those targeted by the FEA did not mesh easily with the patterns and rhythms of the workplace or those agencies funded to engage them.

Indeed when we adopt the frame of reference of those for whom work ‘pays’, or *has come to pay*, we can begin to lose sight of how experiences and barriers can accumulate, become hardened and come to structure (that is, become an everyday practice and expectation) long-term exclusion from the labour market. Time itself, or to put it another way, the longevity of occupying a marginalised position *in relationship* to formal employment has its own exigencies to be overcome as is shown in the high employment take up rate of FEA clients *after* two years: a finding that is not without consequences for social and economic policies whose funding and performance measurement rarely extend beyond this period.

If we bracket off this temporal and relational component it can lead to exclusion from the

labour market being mediated through the needs and capacities of organisations and/ or described in terms of inherent stereotypical personal attributes and values such as ‘not wanting to work’ or ‘being unreliable’: outcomes that are unlikely to bring such individuals closer to finding employment. Indeed, a core theme to emerge from this research is the importance clients placed fleshing out their own lives in relation to these interpretations. For many, engagement with services was often unsatisfactory: feelings ranged from those that pointed towards a lack of sensitivity to clients’ circumstances (or incapacity to work with those circumstances) to those that suggested a basic lack of human recognition when engaging with services.

The capacity and ability of community animators to accompany their clients through the travails of unemployment, poor work experiences and family and neighbourhood relationships means that such deficits rarely come to define their relations with their clients. Often the animators represent the only lasting and perhaps sincere link with a hopeful outcome. They are a resource to turn to when the time is right for links into agencies for training or work experience that might lead to something long term. Moreover, the multiple, interlacing and complex barriers faced by FEA clients often means the animator can be equally adept at linking into sources of formal support not immediately visible to employability agencies: interventions that may provide one step towards future employment. Indeed, this inter agency bridging approach seems crucial to understanding clients holistically.

This is why standardising referral processes between mainstream agencies and the more intensive and sustained approach of out reach work can offer the promise, however fragile, of good value in the long term. The trust slowly built over time by the animators’ low key personal approach was characterised by listening, engaging and respecting: in the current employability market the time and money needed to first tap into and develop these relationships is scarce. To this extent, in each interaction between clients and agencies this reciprocity and mutual trust is at stake. In this sense, incorporating out reach assessment and evaluation approaches can compliment mainstream provision and be used to extend and fortify clients’ networks into education, training, employment and

self- development.

Linking to the right sort of opportunity

In addition, throughout this report there is the legacy of the injurious effects of poor work in a post-industrial, flexible economy. We see individuals being unable to access the right sorts of opportunity; those which offer a projection of their self into a future that they can live with. Often, a lack of formal qualifications and skills has led to a cyclical experience of poor work leading to a loss of faith in the ability of work to lead to a satisfying life. This phenomenon points to approaches aimed at individuals but also employers; low-skilled and low-paid work does not appear to provide an initial foothold on a labour market ladder, rather a point in a cycling between poorly paid jobs with poor conditions punctuated by further time on benefits or in the informal economy. For employers, the complaint may be heard that these types of jobs are ‘hard to fill’ and indigenous workers do not have the right motivation to hold them down.

Running contrary to this are the forms of employment that are a product of the employability strategies themselves, jobs such as the community animator role which can accommodate those with poor work histories yet provide them with meaningful engaging work that is likely to lead to more interesting opportunities in the future. If retention is an issue in these positions, it is more likely to be because people have moved on to rewarding and sustainable work opportunities in this area of employment, creating an opportunity for someone else who’s employment history has been equally precarious.

When thinking in terms of social capital, we can often use the metaphor of personal wealth- social capital as a resource an individual has access to and in some sense owns. Yet social capital also belongs to communities and is generated beyond the individual- as something an individual taps into. On this second definition we can begin to understand the role of the labour market as crucial in creating the social capital that individuals can access, particularly when transport issues and not owning a car prevent accessing opportunities in other areas. The forms of employment in a local area and the variety of roles they represent cannot be disconnected from individualised understandings of social

capital. For the low skilled, a range of achievable jobs that do not lead to the development of skills does not produce social capital in a meaningful sense. Yet this is not to say that such roles are not important and cannot come to represent a stronger future orientation for workers with imagination from employers.

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