

## Summary

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### **The Bridge: changing attitudes and communities by turning skills and experience into earnings for self-advocacy organisations and self-advocates**

#### About the DRILL Programme

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DRILL (Disability Research on Independent Living and Learning) was an innovative 5 year, UK wide programme led by disabled people, for disabled people and funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

Launched in 2015, the programme was managed by a partnership of Disability Action Northern Ireland, Disability Rights UK, Disability Wales and Inclusion Scotland.

The aim of the programme was to build better evidence about approaches which enable disabled people to achieve independent living. The findings from the projects it funded can be used to inform future provision across a wide range of policy areas, and give a greater voice to disabled people in decisions which affect them.

This is one of a series of summaries of the project supported by DRILL. Final reports, toolkits and summaries of all the projects are available from the DRILL website at [www.drilluk.org.uk](http://www.drilluk.org.uk).

#### **Overview of the project**

This project aimed to find solutions and specific routes into sustainable income generation and employment for people with learning disabilities.

## Approach

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The project carried out four focus groups consisting of self-advocacy organisations from different parts of Wales who had recently done projects.

From these focus groups, the self-advocacy toolkit was produced and piloted with two self-advocacy projects and with people who wanted to start a new People First group.

## Findings

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The business world has its own language, culture, legislation, funding and support systems. It is challenging for anyone to break into that world, especially those with learning disabilities.

Government-funded business support services are excluding people with learning disabilities through their language use and lack of resources to be able to offer time and flexibility to provide the necessary support.

Many people with learning disabilities experience low expectations from the people around them, meaning that they believe that earning money isn't for them.

Current schemes to encourage self-employment for people receiving benefits such as Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) are not a good fit for people with learning disabilities, as business development takes much longer than a year.

The unique selling point of a self-advocacy organisation is the lived experience of the members. It is important to make sure that members who were employed were front and centre stage.

Co-working was essential for the team members to have a shared understanding of what they were learning and putting into practice.

Taking risks was one of the areas of developing business-like thinking that groups and individuals had to work on. Risking a review of benefits when changing what you do can prevent people from taking risks.

## Findings (continued)

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Invisible support, which people don't realise they are giving or receiving, such as being available to answer small questions when they come up, showing someone where to find the answer to a factual question and being able to give encouragement if things go wrong. This can make the difference between personal and business success and failure.

The standard models for providing business start-up support are unlikely to work with people with learning disabilities because they are not flexible enough and do not provide the adequate invisible support.

People with learning disabilities often don't have much self-confidence; and low self-esteem. Self-advocacy organisations offer an opportunity to change this by using the skills they have and the ability to learn new skills.

## Recommendations

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The project outlined many recommendations, some of which are listed here. All recommendations are included in the full reports which are linked below.

- Action from Government, business support services and services designed to support people with learning disabilities is needed to help self-advocates and their organisations be accepted into the business world
- Jargon words will need to be explained and business thinking will need to be developed over time. The toolkit provides a glossary of business words and a 'business blocks approach' to aid this
- Participative Action Research is an effective method for involving people affected by research in the research that is carried out
- Invisible support must be recognised and understood. Ways of creating invisible support opportunities need to be identified, without formalising it into something explicit or visible as this may make people feel less skilled and affect relationships within the team
- Changes to Universal Credit are needed, as it currently does not provide a reliable financial safety net for disabled entrepreneurs
- Businesses must celebrate the successes of people with learning disabilities, making them role models and featured in the business
- Career advisors, job coaches and support services must talk about starting a business when discussing disabled people's future and work.

## Final report

The Bridge: changing attitudes and communities by turning skills and experience into earnings for self-advocacy organisations and self-advocates

Please click on the report name to read the full reports, which are split into six sections.

## Project partners

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**Barod Community  
Interest Company**



**Social Firms Wales**

**socialfirmswales**  
enterprise, employment, empowerment

**Carmarthenshire  
People First**



**My Life My Choice**



**People First Dorset**

