

“Retain/Regain helped me to get my life
in order and allowed me to manage my
mental health. An excellent service!”

Beneficiary

DELIVERING VALUE, CHANGING LIVES

Richmond Fellowship Knowsley RETAIN/REGAIN

**RICHMOND
FELLOWSHIP** 
MAKING RECOVERY REALITY

Background

In July 2012 SQW Ltd (SQW) was commissioned by Richmond Fellowship (RF) to carry out an independent review of its RETAIN/REGAIN service in Knowsley, covering the period from launch in December 2008 to March 2012.

The purpose of the review was to assemble existing evidence and to measure the wider social and economic benefits of the RETAIN/REGAIN service. The review involved both quantitative and qualitative assessment processes.

RETAIN is RF's national job retention service for people with common mental health problems, such as stress, anxiety and depression. The service aims to maximise employee's chances of maintaining their employment when problems arise, by working with individuals on a one to one basis and also with their employer. Its aim is 'to help people to STAY WELL – STAY WORKING'. The project, which also helps people who have been unemployed for less than six months to regain employment, has been delivered in Knowsley since December 2008, as part of the wider North West Target Wellbeing Programme. The service is currently benefiting from a 12 month extension following a successful bid to the BIG Lottery for funding directed towards the future sustainability of the service.

“Accessing the service was the single most important decision I have made, the help I received was excellent. I have stayed in work and moved forward on a personal level.”

Beneficiary

The context for the service

The North West, and Knowsley in particular, suffers from significant economic and health challenges – the Borough was in the top 10% of deprived local authorities in England in 2010. In the UK overall, the annual economic cost of sickness absence and worklessness associated with working age ill health is estimated to be over £100bn. Increasingly evidence, changing attitudes and a supportive policy arena recognise that work can be good for health – the Black review of the health of Britain's working age population 'Working for a healthier tomorrow' is the pivotal document for this agenda. Government acknowledges that public sector intervention is needed to demonstrate the potential value of, and then to deliver, talking therapies and work-oriented actions which can improve mental health.

The RETAIN/REGAIN service is thus closely aligned with current and emerging national policy. Its objectives and outcomes underpin its aims and it was clear to stakeholders and employers from the outset what the service was trying to achieve and how it would be delivered.

“With your help I learned my situation was not hopeless and I could survive my ordeal. You were a real lifeline, your guidance giving me bursts of clarity, enabling me to see beyond the immediate misery.”

Beneficiary

Performance and achievement

The project database provides details for 306 beneficiaries who used the service during the period, which is more than double the original target of 150 beneficiaries. There were two distinct strands of interventions offered: client focused interventions and work focused interventions. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and other counselling (Person Centred/EMDR trauma therapy) were delivered in partnership with Listening Ear, with 51% of beneficiaries being referred for counselling.

Outcomes

The RF database contains outcomes for 231 (75%) beneficiaries. Over two thirds had retained their employment immediately after their engagement with the service. Positively, a further 7% had changed their employment, 2% had been redeployed internally and a further 5% had entered employment. In addition, 4% had sought volunteering or a placement and 5% had engaged with training and education. SQW reports this as “a strong achievement, given that over half of beneficiaries surveyed believe they would have been signed off sick or resigned and become unemployed in the absence of the service”.

The target aim for the project was a retention rate (those who gained or retained employment) of 70%. The evidence available is for the outcomes associated with 231 beneficiaries, but results suggest this was exceeded, with a retention rate of 81%.

Follow-up surveys were carried out independently by RF, with a total of 101 questionnaires completed.

The results are as follows:

97% of beneficiaries reported reduced isolation

84% of beneficiaries reported an improved sense of independence

90% of beneficiaries reported an increased ability to address problems/negotiate solutions at work

Benefits – attribution

The outcomes of the project are considered by SQW to be mainly attributable to the intervention. Whilst beneficiaries may receive some support through personal and professional relationships which may be sufficient in some instances to help them to remain in employment or retain work, clients generally self-refer or are referred to RETAIN/REGAIN by their employer, suggesting that the additional support from the service was required.

The project complements the provision of other providers receiving referrals from partners such as Employer's Occupational Health teams or Trade Unions. The service is clearly substituted by some beneficiaries instead of using their employers' in-house service or accessing counselling services via their GP. It offers advantages over these alternatives, as it is impartial, comprehensive and non-time bound.



90% of beneficiaries reported an increased ability to address problems/negotiate solutions at work

Benefits – value for money

SQW concludes that the service was delivered economically; the total cost of delivery during the period was £252k. The service performed well financially given its budget allocation and was considered 'low risk' by funders. Cost per beneficiary was approximately £800, which is relatively small in comparison to the potential salary and tax benefits that could be received as a result of the individual's return to employment. It is at the higher end of the cost per beneficiary figures identified in the Value for Money Assessment Report for the North West TWB programme; however the support provided through RETAIN/REGAIN is relatively resource intensive, and from the evidence available, "we (SQW) consider the service to have been delivered efficiently. The service has also exceeded all of the outputs and outcomes envisaged, and is considered to be of value for money."

The overall return on Investment for the North West TWB programme as a whole was estimated to be c. £3.60 for every £1 invested, based on 23 out of 94 projects. Using the information available from the outcomes recorded for 231 beneficiaries SQW made an indicative estimate of Return on Investment for the service. A total of 186.5 beneficiaries either: remained in employment, were redeployed, changed their job or entered employment. If it is assumed that 75% would have lost or not gained their employment in the absence of the service, then 140 beneficiaries achieved a positive outcome as a result of the service. Based on an average annual salary in the Borough of £23,400 to £24,000, the

project may have generated an initial annual benefit in the order of £3.3 - £3.4m – benefits which may or may not have persisted over time. On this basis, an indicative Return on Investment is £13 per £1 invested, excluding the reduction in benefit payments to those previously unemployed.

Overall, the service is considered by SQW "to have provided good value for money in terms of economy, efficiency and effectiveness."

"Invaluable, I don't think I would have been back in work otherwise. Thank you!"

Beneficiary



An indicative ROI is £13 per £1 invested

Views from beneficiaries and stakeholders

Awareness and motivation

The majority of respondents (64%) found out about the service through their Occupational Therapist or HR officer at work, and a further 5% found out about the service through their manager. This suggests a strong buy-in from employers. Stress was the most common reason (42%) for accessing the service, over half claiming that their stress was work related. Depression was the second most common reason, with almost a quarter of respondents providing this as a reason. Twenty per cent of respondents stated that bullying in the workplace was their motivation for contacting the service.

Benefits and satisfaction levels

By far the most commonly accessed support received by respondents was supportive counselling, as most clients require space to talk things through and reflect on their situation. Client focused interventions are most valued, as they provide the foundation for dealing with employment issues. The service has a strong correlation with client needs resulting in high satisfaction levels – 91% of respondents were either very or fairly satisfied with the service. In terms of lasting benefits, 56% of those retaining employment immediately after support remain in employment, with a further 20% obtaining a new job and remaining in employment.

The majority of respondents (83%) would use the service again, 93% would recommend the service to others and half would be prepared to pay for the service.

In summary, the critical success factors for the service were considered by SQW to be:

- quick, easy access to RETAIN/REGAIN Employment Advisors
- comfortable surroundings for one-to-one sessions
- good relationships with several local employers/HR/Occupational Health professionals who tell staff about the service
- strong partnership with Listening Ear Counselling service and regular reviews of waiting lists for referrals to counselling ensuring timely access
- supportive links with the TWB team which provides community information often invaluable in signposting clients to other services

“Excellent help and guidance when needed. The jigsaw pieces fit great!”

Beneficiary



93%
would
recommend
the service to
others

Changing lives – a couple of case studies

Case study 1

Circumstances when first started working with RETAIN

The client had just been signed unfit for work by his GP. Prior to this he was working and had been experiencing difficulties for some time. He had lost confidence in his role and felt he was not getting support from his line manager. Work was taking a lot out of him – he was becoming socially withdrawn, was physically anxious all the time and worried about his employment and relationships.

What happened during engagement with the service

The client had a first session to talk through his situation. The following sessions were arranged as regularly as the client felt he needed them.

Challenges faced and how they were overcome

The client was feeling undervalued and lacked confidence in his workplace. As well as support from the RETAIN Employment Advisor the client was also offered counselling at Listening Ear.

Role of the RETAIN Advisor

The RETAIN Employment Advisor worked through a return to work plan with the client, detailing what his activities would be for three days a week over a period of three weeks. These sessions were held at the client's workplace. As well as discussing the client's return to work they also discussed his previous roles and what he enjoyed doing. As a result the Employment Advisor encouraged the client to apply for a new role.

Changes in relationship with employer

By planning what he was going to say to his manager during his sessions with the RETAIN Employment Advisor, the client felt able to talk clearly to his manager about work issues.

Next steps/outcomes

The client was successful at interview. The new job has changed his life and he feels that it is a good fit for him. He has his social life back, has started a new relationship and feels happy and content.

How the service has made a difference

The client considers the service to be accessible and really supportive. It provided him with a safe space to talk, vent and be listened to. The service was professional, practical and impartial. It explored all avenues enabling the client to go back to work and tackle issues whilst acknowledging his desire to move on. He is no longer feeling anxious and consumed by terror.

“Without the service I would have lost everything. I now have a new job in a different department.”

Beneficiary

Case study 2

Circumstances when first started working with RETAIN

The client had endured 12 months of intense stress and pressure in a work environment that didn't allow her any work-life balance. This led to her seeking help from her GP who diagnosed work-related stress and anxiety. The client wasn't sleeping, was crying continually and was unable to function day to day which led to depression.

What happened during engagement with the service

RETAIN provided the client with the space to talk and be listened to. The service allowed her to use the premises to meet with her line manager, and supported her during the meetings. The client was also referred to counselling for CBT. The RETAIN Employment Advisor helped the client to formulate an action plan and start her return to work journey.

Challenges faced and how they were overcome

The client lacked confidence and was unable to think clearly. She also faced the challenge of having to meet with her line manager, put steps in place to return to work and make decisions that were right for her. The RETAIN Employment Advisor supported and aided the client to consider her options in a safe, impartial space.

Role of the RETAIN Advisor

Supported and aided the consideration of options and action planning. Arranged access to counselling provision.

Changes in relationship with employer

The client was able to return to work under conditions that were mutually agreed with her employer. Later the client came to her own decision to resign and take steps towards finding alternative employment.

Next steps/outcomes

The client has since resigned and is seeking part time employment whilst establishing her own business.

How the service has made a difference

RETAIN provided a lifeline during a really unhappy, unstable time in the client's life. The Employment Advisor supported, encouraged and enabled the client to improve her mental health and make positive changes in her life.

“The support on a weekly basis was a lifeline in a difficult time. The professionalism, expertise, knowledge and caring way in which the sessions were held are a credit to the organisation.”

Beneficiary

Postscript

SQW concludes that a brief analysis of the qualitative quotes and case histories provided by the service “highlighted the scale of the support provided and how helpful it was, that it was considered professional, accessible and independent. The guidance and advice the service provides was invaluable in helping clients to assess their situation and confront issues. The expertise, knowledge and general mannerisms of the RETAIN/REGAIN Employment Advisors were highly commended.”