

MAJAKKA - SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES FOR MIGRANTS

Helsinki is home to one third of all the migrants in Finland who, in turn, are three times more likely to be unemployed than native Finns. The Majakka (or Beacon in English) DP has come up with some solutions to this problem of unemployment by introducing Supported Employment Services for migrants, in three municipalities within the Helsinki region. This new approach included the setting up of local employment teams involving professional staff in new types of roles. Job coaches, job finders and language teachers are now working together with case managers to provide a comprehensive employment service to both immigrant job seekers and potential employers.

The **Majakka-Beacon** job coaches played a pivotal role in making the initial contact with employers and also with the job seekers. They were specially trained and there was a transnational approach to this training. It was based on the Irish “Diploma in Training and Education Supported Employment” that was developed during the Employment Community Initiative. However, this curriculum had to be adapted to fit the Finnish system and the DP has also produced learning material for extra modules based on its own experiences.

The employment team follows the basic principles of supported employment and these include on-going personal support by the job coach in job-seeking, job interviews, and also follow-up after employment. The services for employers include support in training in work tasks, on-the-job work-specific language training, support and aid in necessary paperwork and information concerning immigration, multicultural issues and diversity. With the assistance of the job finder, the project has built up a new recruitment and support service for employers by focusing on developing a more diverse workforce in the Helsinki region. The idea of developing supported employment services for unemployed immigrants is a new one in Finland, although other services for immigrants are quite well developed.

A particular feature of the DP’s approach is that the job coaches work in pairs with one job coach coming from an immigrant background and the other being a native Finn. This practice seems to increase the clients’ confidence in the service and gives a positive signal to employers by demonstrating that migrants can undertake skilled and demanding positions. The immigrant job coach can use an “outsider’s” view of the services, individual rights and obligations as well as the different rules of the Finnish working life. Some immigrant job seekers are doubtful and wary when they have to deal with public authorities. However, the DP’s experience is that meeting a project worker with a migrant background decreases the job seekers’ wariness and the meeting or interview can become less formal and more honest. Many employers do not have any previous experience of immigrants, either as fellow citizens or as employees. The DP has discovered that the immigrant job coaches have given more credibility to its work and in this sense have helped to solicit employers’ cooperation. The presence of the job coach in the work place has also served as an example to fellow workers on how to communicate and get along with the new employee and it has also assisted the social integration of the new employee into the everyday life of the company.

Another innovation is the use of the language teacher in the work place. This ensures support for job-specific language learning that the employers usually do not have time to provide. The assistance from the case manager has given migrants the self-assurance to tackle their health and other problems. This makes for smoother progress in the integration process, especially as the job coaches have now more time to concentrate on employment-oriented tasks.

All of this innovation and investment has paid handsome dividends. About 80% of all project beneficiaries have found jobs in the open labour market or have started in work training placements or vocational training courses.

The needs to train job coaches and to extend supported employment services have been mentioned in the Finnish National Action Plan for Employment during the past few years. At

present, the new employment service centres that have been established in Finland seem to be the most promising arena in which new roles and approaches can be mainstreamed.

Contact

Dr. Kristiina Härkäpää
Development Manager

Rehabilitation Foundation, R & D
Pakarituvantie 4–5, SF-00410 Helsinki, Finland

Tel.: +358-9-5304 747

Fax: +358-9-5304 729

Email: harkapaa@kuntoutussaatio.fi

<http://www.kuntoutussaatio.fi/tutkimustoiminta/beacon.html>

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