

# Improving Support for People Affected by Cancer to Return to Work

March 2018



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An Ayrshire project has improved the support available for people affected by cancer who want to return to work. A growing number of people diagnosed with cancer are of working age. Many want to get back to work but find the right support isn't there to help them.

The Ayrshire Employability Project was set up to support people with cancer, and carers, to help them overcome the barriers to work. The project also worked with local businesses to help them understand how best to support employees affected by cancer.

The project is part of the Transforming Care After Treatment (TCAT) programme, which is testing and spreading new ways of supporting people with cancer. Health and social care leaders are being urged to look closely at the learning from this project and look at how similar support services can be offered across Scotland.

## People

This project offered people who wanted to return to work a choice of the kind of support they wanted. This ranged from support sessions that focused on building confidence, self-esteem and motivation, to careers advice and information on their rights under the Equality Act. Individuals were put in touch with a dedicated person from project partners CEIS Ayrshire, who coordinated all the support they needed.

**37** people were provided with employability support including money advice, support finding volunteering opportunities and return to work guidance on employee rights

**20** were supported by a range of services and activities including guidance on the Equality Act, careers advice, resilience training and volunteering. Nine out the 20 have already returned to work.



Reaching people with cancer who wanted support returning to work was harder than anticipated for the project. While cancer is a growing issue in those of working age, most people with the illness are still over 65. This meant the project had to employ a range of methods and use many communication channels, including media and social media, to get in touch with those in need of their help.

## Activities and outputs

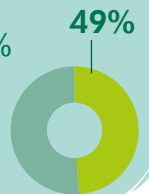
### Businesses

The project found that initially, many businesses didn't see supporting employees affected by cancer as a priority. This meant that as well as providing information and support to firms, the project also had to work with businesses to convince them this should be an area of focus for them.

19 business seminars were delivered to **186 people** from **76 organisations** across Ayrshire. 45 attendees responded to a survey asking for feedback. It found:



Almost half said they have reviewed organisational policy as a direct result of the seminar and 45% have been prompted to make changes to policy and practice.



A further 286 businesses were given information, guidance and advice about supporting people with cancer in the workplace through face to face contact at Ayrshire exhibitions and events.



The project team estimate they reached businesses with a total number of **7,500 employees**. The team are hopeful that their work will have created a better understanding of cancer in the workplace and more supportive environment for any of these employees affected by cancer now or in the future.

### Information



A campaign to raise awareness of the issues facing people with cancer in the workplace and of the support the project could offer took place throughout the life of the project in the media, on social media and via printed materials. This led to:



**114,284 people** being reached via Facebook during the project. A single Facebook campaign reaching nearly 22,000 people. **110 people** viewing videos on work and cancer. **281 people** visiting the Macmillan website for additional information

Posters and leaflets promoting the project and the issue of cancer and work were distributed to **55 GP surgeries** across Ayrshire.

### What next?

The results of the project so far are encouraging. However, the project also showed there is work to be done if businesses are to recognise that putting in place the right support for people with cancer should be a priority. There are also challenges in how future projects successfully reach out and engage with the people who need support getting back to work. Despite the challenges, the project played an important role in raising awareness of the challenges facing people with cancer and carers when they want to return to work, and changing policy and practice in businesses across Ayrshire. There are already plans underway to expand the employment support offer to people with other illnesses as well as cancer. The learnings from the project will make interesting reading as the Scottish and UK governments and businesses grapple with how best to support the growing number of people with cancer of working age.