

Welcome to this newsletter, whose aim is to keep supporters, alumni and friends of Careers Springboard West Berkshire updated with our activities and ongoing developments. Our mission is to support out-of-work professionals and managers.

Chairman's Update: George Athorn

This summer saw the completion of five years of operation. During that time we have helped over 450 people who have been made redundant. We are proud that this has been achieved at less than £150 per job seeker.



This is very cost-effective and has largely been achieved through the time and expertise of our volunteers freely given. However, our running costs (room hire, equipment, admin, insurance etc.) means we need ongoing funds to maintain our services.

In the past we have been fortunate to benefit from grants from Trusts, local councils and government agencies. But these sources are now more difficult to tap. We are therefore looking more towards our alumni - out-of-work professionals now back in well-paid jobs - to help us help those now in a situation similar to what they were previously. Later in this newsletter you can read how CSWB have joined localgiving.com to make it easier for alumni - and any other individual or business who wants to support us to do so.

Our Autumn programme is now well under way and it follows the usual format. As you'll read later our 'sushi' sessions have proved popular. Also we are excited about our new 'Interview Plus' programme, a collaborative project with the Watermill Theatre that gives job seekers opportunities for one-on-one interview practice through role playing.

In this newsletter you'll also read about developments within the Foundation for Jobseekers network, of which I am a trustee and of which CSWB is a member.

We hope you find this newsletter useful and look forward to your ongoing support.

George Athorn



We wish all our readers Merry Christmas and a prosperous 2012.

Autumn Programme

We are now well into our Autumn programme which follows our usual format of workshops and occasional 'sushi' sessions - bite-sized add-ons at the end of the formal workshops.

Attendance is slightly down on last year (see statistics later) which may mean that the rate of redundancies has slowed. Or it could mean that we need to beef up our marketing to those who could benefit but don't know we exist!



'Sushi' sessions well received

These 45-minute sessions have covered not just job seeking topics, but other options. There was a talk from Mondo Challenge who offer 'gap' period opportunities for volunteering in developing countries, while Garry Poulson from the Volunteer Centre West Berkshire has highlighted volunteering opportunities closer to home.

Watermill actors help our job seekers

A valuable new addition to our programme is 'Interview Plus'. This is the result of an approach by The Watermill Theatre as part of their outreach programme. Sponsored by West Berkshire Council, this project gives job seekers one-on-one interview practice using actors role playing potential employers.

The project started with a highly interactive 'kick off' workshop in September where job

seekers had plenty of opportunity to practise simple, but highly relevant, interviewing skills. This has been followed by one-on-one sessions (usually run on a Thursday at the Town Hall) between job seeker and actor. Job seekers have found these sessions extremely useful (see box).

"Just a quick note to thank you for the opportunity. Receiving individual coaching, feedback and watching myself in the recorded video gave me greater insights about my personal style, and how I can improve my interview technique.

I think the greatest benefit of the process was increased confidence and the practical side by seeing myself in action. Passing an interview is not only about the theory but acting it as well."

F4 Jobseekers News

The Foundation for Jobseekers is the umbrella organisation for the five executive job clubs in the Thames Valley. It carries out activities which are better done as a group rather than through individual job clubs.

Recent activity has focused on reviewing charters and charity status, training sessions for job club volunteers, including presentation skills and chairing meetings.

It has also provided help to others seeking to start job clubs in their areas, such as at Basingstoke and Colchester.

20 years celebration at Gerrard's Cross

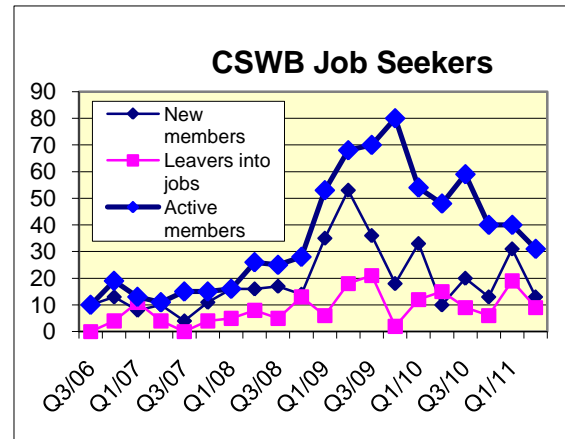
At the end of September George Athorn and David Skyrme went to St. Andrew's Church Gerrards Cross to join in the celebration of the 20th anniversary of Careers Springboard - <http://www.careersspringboard.info>, after which CSWB is modelled.

The original founders of Careers Springboard were job seekers themselves who wanted to combat the loneliness of and despondency of job seeking. When they got jobs they wanted other job seekers to avoid that and be "fast tracked" to some skills that they had learned.

In 1991 they found themselves in the teeth of a recession, with managerial jobs being decimated! What has changed today?

Steady as she goes

Currently we have around 40 registered job-seekers, with attendance at each meeting being between 10 and 15. The numbers are still trending down since the peak of Autumn 2009.



Even so, each month we get a steady trickle of new job seekers, more so in the last month, whilst others leave us having secured jobs in this difficult climate.

One thing that has surprised us is that we have yet to see many job seekers who are

"it is the toughest market I have known in 25 years."

John O'Brien, Managing Director, Dovetail (who runs our workshop *How Recruiters Work*)

casualties of the public sector cuts. We had prepared for it, but new members still predominantly (90%) from the business sector.

Finding Work After 40

Written by Robin McKay Bell and Linda Mifsud, two volunteers at Windsor & Maidenhead



Executive Job Club, this new book is based on the techniques and experiences of the five job clubs in our network (the Foundation for Jobseekers). They give older job seekers ways of overcoming "the seven elephants in the room" they encounter at interviews.

Job Seeker Profile: Kath Clouston



For many years I was a telecomms engineer for Vodafone, planning the capacity of their mobile phone network. While with them I left for therapy for mental health problems, returning to work part time for several years. In March 2010 a reorganisation left me redundant and I looked for more engineering work.

Careers Springboard West Berkshire (CSWB) was recommended both by an ex-colleague and the Jobcentre Plus. It was over 20 years since I had done any job-hunting and I found it challenging but liked the way CSWB broke things into manageable chunks and got the group to discuss them. The hardest and most useful thing was the 'Tell me about yourself' exercise - practising what to say about ourselves to a possible employer. It clearly showed up that I had not thought through what I really wanted from my next job!

I thought of myself as an engineer, but I had had new experiences and built up new skills which I had been ignoring. After going through therapy I had done very occasional work for Thames Valley Initiative, telling people about my experience of having a Personality Disorder so that workers could improve mental health services and current service users could think through what to expect of the next stage in their own therapy. Standing up in front of a group of people and talking about feelings is about as far away from engineering as you can get! I'd enjoyed it but gave up when it clashed with 'real work'. After redundancy I contacted them and asked to do some of this work again but saw it as a morale boost till I could get a 'proper job'.

Over the months, Springboard encouraged me to re-think what I wanted and what my skills actually are and I realised how much I was enjoying the odd jobs I was doing. I started applying for jobs in the mental health field as well as in engineering. Through TVI I trained

to co-present a short course which is being rolled out nationwide for workers who come into contact with people with a personality disorder (e.g. in the NHS and prisons). I have now presented several of these courses in central southern England and am looking at opportunities to present the same course for an organisation which covers another area. I'm not earning massive amounts of money but I wanted part time work and there is scope for expansion.

Careers Springboard helped me to keep moving through what could have been an isolating and depressing experience and it would have taken me longer to work out that I was heading in the wrong direction without their prompting.

My advice to other job seekers:

1. This is a good opportunity to rethink what you really want and to recognise all your skills.
2. Keep in contact with the people and organisations you already know, even if you don't see how they can help.
3. Do something constructive, however small, in parallel to job hunting. It's a great morale-boost and may lead on to more.

From recent leavers into jobs

"The last session that I went to included some very useful information on interview techniques. I was able to use some of these ideas at my interview and I believe that this was a significant factor in helping me to be successful."

"Speculative approaches to employers do work. Lessons learned? Cold calling was not easy, but introductions were helpful - networking events were a useful source. There are a lot of 'stones to turn over' so I targeted companies carefully. I sold myself with a clear and concise messages

- 1) What I could do for the company
- 2) How they would benefit having me in their team
- 3) Why I thought I would fit in.

TMAYs ("Tell me about yourself") are good practice for this last part."

Volunteer News



Since the Spring we have welcomed on board Lesley Adams as a speaker and coach. Earlier this year Lesley was made redundant from her post as Gateway Director Berkshire - Business Link. She

therefore brings a wealth of experience on starting companies as well as management experience from previous roles in large companies. an SFEDI accredited advisor and enterprise coach.

One of our former job seekers, Nigel Henty, has completed a contract away from Newbury so is now able to offer more time, helping with IT-related tasks and working alongside Bob Cooke on the "Tell me about yourself" session. On the other hand due to personal and other commitments we are sad to lose the services of John Refaussé, although John remains a speaker on our session 'Your Other Choices'.

If you know someone who would like to volunteer for us then please get in touch with George Athorn on 01635 253447. Volunteers do not have to come in every week (most don't!), but can give as much or as little time as they choose in their area of expertise.

A Future Volunteer?

We are pleased to announce that our membership secretary Gayle Ashby gave birth to a son, James, on 29th September. We have already seen them at one of our meetings - we start inducting our new volunteers early!

Gayle continues her work for us by working at home. Our best wishes go out to her and her family.

"I am sorry to write such a long letter. I didn't have time to write a short one!"

(variations of this attributed to Blaise Pascal, Mark Twain, Voltaire, Proust, Pliny the Younger...)

A reminder to our job seekers, that when writing a CV, email or letter to a prospective employer, that less is often best.

Keeping the Show on the Road

As our chairman noted in his introduction, funding is getting harder to obtain from cash-strapped local authorities and other public sector bodies.

We are therefore pleased to acknowledge that local solicitors Thomas Eggar have funded the



purchase of a camcorder. This is used in our mock interview practice sessions given by the Watermill (see page 1). Job seekers find it particularly useful to play back their 'performance' and receive constructive feedback.

Localgiving.com/cswb

We have been fortunate in the past to have received a grant from the Berkshire Community Foundation. They were one of the early adopters of a new system - localgiving.com - which makes it easier for individuals to donate to charities of their choice in their local area. They also approved our application to join this service.



For us, this service is attractive for three reasons:

- 1) It provides an easy way for our alumni - former job seekers, now mostly in well-paid jobs - to thank us for helping them.
- 2) Although we are ourselves not a registered charity, donations to this website means that individual contributions are topped up through Gift Aid.
- 3) Payments direct into our bank account mean that our administrative costs are low.

We are thus opening up a new channel of funding, from those who have benefited most from our services in the past. To make a donation in this way, you can go straight to our localgiving.com page at

www.localgiving.com/cswb

Volunteer Profile: John Newell

John is a professional career coach and assessor with over twenty years experience in the business. He blends his ongoing coaching work with volunteering for CSWB.



His qualifications include chartered member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development, a member of the Institute of Career Guidance and a certificated Life Coach. He also has qualifications in Training, Development and Psychometric & Occupational Testing.

Early career

John has previously held a range of managerial and administrative roles in the fields of politics and the public service, supporting Government Ministers and MPs, following a grounding in the Transport Industry.

Although not a linguist, John does have an in-depth understanding of Europe. He has been a member of the European Movement since 1962, including the developing of links with the European Parliament and Institutions. Initiating in 2000 Careers Europe, a system to help employees relocate to countries in the EU.

The Day Job

There are two strands of work in John's day-to-day work:

- coaching and outplacement
- assessment.

For the former, He delivers group and individual coaching assignments from junior to executive level across a broad range of sectors in many parts of the UK, operating in a one-to-one environment and delivering workshops. These have included aerospace, transport, food, drink, finance, engineering as well as the manufacturing sector.

As an Assessor, John carries out competency based interviews and role plays primarily in the banking, telecommunications, transport, travel and the utilities sectors.

Voluntary work

John brings his coaching and outplacement experience to our job seekers in two practical ways. First he runs the workshop *The Interview* alongside Linda Sutcliffe. Secondly, as an expert on competence-based interviews (see box) he provides 1-on-1 support to our job seekers.

On the administrative front, we would not have a regular Tuesday programme of meetings without John's organising capabilities and network. He puts together each session's programme, confirming existing speakers and occasionally adding new ones from his extensive network of colleagues in the area. It is due to John that we have external speakers with an up to date hands-on approach to the local job market - speakers like John O'Brien, management director of Dovetail Human Resources, and Roger Hunt, managing director of DJR Executive Resourcing.

He is no stranger to job clubs, having been heavily involved with setting up an executive job club in Basingstoke in the 1990s.

The Competency-based interview

A traditional interview seeks to identify the ability of the candidate to do the job and how well they would fit into the organisation. However, candidates may appear impressive at interview yet fail to match up to expectations.

The competency-based interview is more structured so as to get real evidence of the experience sought. It asks the candidate to cite examples of where they demonstrated particular competences, such as problem solving, influencing, collaboration and planning. For example a typical question to assess collaboration might be

"What have you done to build and maintain a useful network of contacts outside of your area?"

Assessors mark the candidate on each competency, so that they can make a more objective assessment of the best candidate for the job. Popularised in the public sector, competency-based interviews are now common in many large companies.

Feature: Writing Application Letters

In these days of online application and email, it is too easy to overlook the impact that a well-written letter can achieve. David Skinner and Linda Sutcliffe run our workshops on *The Written Word*.

There are two situations where a letter can boost a job seeker's chances:

- 1) A covering letter (accompanying a CV) in response to an advert
- 2) A speculative letter to a potential future employer.

In both cases, three paragraphs should suffice:

- Making the connection: "I saw..." "Your company is looking for.."
- Explaining your offer: "I have ..." (skills, experience, accomplishments that meet requirements / add value)
- Request for follow-up: "I would very much like to meet you to discuss how I can help..."

Always keep at the back of your mind the following four objectives:

1. **Make a favourable impression.** Your letter will be your first contact with the company, Don't leave it until the interview to make a good impression; you might never get that opportunity. The letter will probably be the first step.
2. **Inform.** A good application letter highlights the most important points from your CV or application form. It should underline the key details about your skills and experience that are most relevant to the job.
3. **Persuade.** Your key details, and the style and tone of your letter, should persuade the reader of your suitability for the position, and encourage them to interview you further.
4. **Get a meeting (or interview).** This is usually the main purpose of a letter, It must be interesting enough for the reader to want to know more, without giving everything away.

Remember – the harder it is to write, the easier it will be to read!

Ten Tips for Success

- Letters are very effective, especially as part of a speculative approach.
- The aim of the letter (plus CV, etc) is to obtain a meeting or interview.
- Plan your letter carefully before writing it - use a logical approach.
- Do your research so that you can target a named individual in the organisation.
- Pay attention to the conventions of letter writing - even an e-mail can be a formal letter.
- Use good quality paper and make sure the letter is presented well.
- Write a good opening paragraph to give your reasons for writing.
- In the main body, show how you can solve the organisation's perceived problems.
- Write a good final paragraph with an indication of the next step (e.g. 'I will telephone you next week to arrange a meeting...').
- Make sure there are no errors of fact, grammar, spelling or punctuation.

For our alumni

A reminder of how you can help us help others. This flier accompanies this newsletter. Go to:

localgiving.com/cswb

We helped you - Will you help us?

As someone who has benefited from Careers Springboard you'll know the needs and difficulties of newly redundant professionals in finding help whilst seeking a new job. As a group that provides such support, our services are provided free by volunteers, but we still need running costs for hire of rooms, administration, insurance etc. To date we have relied on funding from foundations, trusts and other grants - but these funds are running out. Below we suggest ways in which you and your company can help us keep the show on the road.

Your company can...	
Sponsor a programme flier	£25 pays for 50 membership packs
Sponsor a specific session	£50 pays for a term's programme fliers
Have an ad on our website	£1.00 is what it costs to run a weekly meeting
Provide a donation 'in kind'	£250 buys an entry-level sponsorship pack
You can...	
Make a one-off donation	
Make regular contributions	
Volunteer (i.e. back office work)	

To make it easy for you to donate personally, simply go to www.localgiving.com/cswb. Using this website gives us the benefit of an additional Gift Aid contribution. **And if you are a higher rate tax payer, you can claim higher rate tax relief on your tax return.**

Thank you for your support. To explore sponsorship options and other ways for supporting us please contact David Skyrme (Email: david@careerswestberks.org.uk; Tel: 01235 25 35 45)

Help us ensure that we remain here to help those who need us

We welcome feedback, comments, contributions. Please send them to:

david@careerswestberks.org.uk

Thank you for your support.