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Living with ME/CFS need not be the end of a persons productive working life if a new pilot project Work4ME succeeds in its aim.

The pilot project is being run by a group of professionals in Scotland who are determined to lessen the negative impact that ME/CFS has had on their careers, earning potential and self esteem and to regain some level of control over their working lives.

Their goal is to develop a co-operative, umbrella framework that will give members access to self-managed, sustainable employment or self-employment opportunities within a supported on-line environment.

The project was initiated by SKS Scotland CIC (SKS) a social enterprise Company in partnership with the Long Term Conditions Alliance Scotland with the objective of finding a workable solution for people with ME/CFS, who want to work, but find that the traditional workplace might not offer the degree of flexibility required to successfully manage a fluctuating health condition.

Research has found that people living with ME/CFS who re-enter the workforce are often unable to sustain set hours or inflexible work patterns and by necessity are forced back into the welfare system. As there is no graded path to work recovery available, this cycle of the "all or nothing" often leads to recurring bouts of ill health and contributes to further erosion in self esteem and well being. People with ME/CFS require a high degree of flexibility in the workplace and in managing their workload in order to gain a functional level of long-term stability.

As with most long-term health conditions, ME/CFS affects people to differing degrees and it is those who are able to function at a higher level for longer periods who would most benefit from maintaining their skills set and being involved in projects that value their expertise. By using the Work4ME approach, members would have the opportunity to utilise their skills, earn money and develop a self-managed level of work fitness that could, over time, provide the right balance for long-term health and personal growth.

The Work4ME core group are currently exploring structures which would allow members to tap into an on-line source of work when their health

allows and withdraw when necessary. Members who are self-employed can tender out work to others which would allow them to focus on their core ability while being supported with allied tasks. In order to generate work, individuals, businesses, social enterprise companies, charities and co-ops will be invited to propose pieces of work or projects to Work4ME. Each piece of work would be undertaken by members using the "buddy system" which would be in place to act as a support or seconder if required.

At present, Work4ME are in the process of developing a range of services including marketing, public relations, research and transcription as well as training and project management. Personal development therapies are also available such as NLP, stress management and coaching. It is envisaged that once the pilot gains momentum and more people join the programme, a wider variety of services will be offered to potential clients. *The group are specifically looking for volunteers to help develop their IT capabilities but people with all sorts of skills can join the group and offer their expertise.*

The project is being evaluated by Dr Doris Ruth Eikhof who is a lecturer in Work and Organisation Studies and Research Co-ordinator for the Stirling Institute for Socio-Management at Stirling University.

Interested parties can contact Liz McConnell, Project Co-ordinator at Work4ME by emailing her at : lizmcconnell@uwclub.net or following the Work4Me link on the SKS Scotland website : www.sksscotland.co.uk