# Speech by Peter Bates at the inception of Job Coaching in Nottinghamshire, 1998

What is the best way to learn French? Go and live in France. Take a friend who is a fluent French-speaker. Immerse yourself in the culture, make new friends and live your life there as a French citizen. This is job coaching.

Job coaching was developed by Marc Gold 25 years ago. Since the mid 1970s, hundreds of job coaching projects have been established all around the world. Thousands of people with disabilities have started work. University Departments have analysed job coaching and found that it is cheaper than day centres. People who used to rely on health and social care services are now tax payers instead of tax takers.

So what is Nottingham’s story? In 1991, there was a national conference on job coaching in Leicester, but I don’t know of anybody from Nottingham that attended. In 1992, the Department of Health commissioned a national study of job coaching. They found 1600 people who were placed in employment through job coaching schemes, but none in Nottingham.

In 1993, the Committee for the Employment of People with Disabilities (the CEPD) in Nottingham agreed that Nottingham needed a job coaching scheme. This group included representatives from Boots The Chemist, Greater Nottingham Training and Enterprise Council, Nottingham Healthcare NHS Trust, Nottinghamshire Social Services Department, the Employment Service and others.

In 1994, the CEPD ran a conference at Centerparcs where 50 people from across the county met to discuss job coaching. You might have been there. There was widespread support for the idea – Nottingham needed a job coaching scheme.

In 1995, two unemployed people, Mike Briggs and Eric Hand gave us 20 weeks of their full time effort to build a network of contacts and develop a project specification. Despite a couple of generous donations, there was still no revenue to fund the operation, although we were awash with theoretical support. By way of contrast, in 1995, Liverpool already had 7 job coaching teams up and running.

In 1996, Marion Blake from the Employment Service, who had been a tireless campaigner for job coaching, arranged a meeting with Remploy. Remploy’s expertise in working with people with disabilities, harnessing the goodwill of Brussels, and bringing organisations together was just what we needed. It has taken two years from that first meeting, but I am delighted to see the dream becoming a reality.

Job coaching belongs in a broader context. Over the past two hundred years, the western world has become poorer and poorer. We have shut away people who are different, and so our children have grown up with a narrow and impoverished understanding of what it means to be human. In the last two decades that process has been reversed a little, as some of the big institutions have closed and people who need support have moved into ordinary houses. But a good quality of life is more than a house.

Many people with a disability still live their lives entirely surrounded by other disabled people – it is like living in a ghetto or a prison. But I want to let you into a secret - Nottingham has an escape committee. There is an informal network of disabled people and their friends from all walks of life who are digging tunnels. People with all kinds of disabilities are slipping out from the ghetto and quietly turning up as neighbours, work colleagues, sports fans, worshippers, volunteers, and students.

* So next time you turn up to work here at D10, you might find that the worker on the next computer has brought her own chair.
* Next time you play squash at The Village, you might get beaten by a person who doesn’t read or write.
* Next time your daughter goes to school, she might learn some British Sign Language so that she can greet everyone in the class.
* Next time you sing in the choir at St John’s, you might be joined by someone who can do tunes, but doesn’t use words.
* Next time you start an evening class, you might find that the student on the next desk to you is brilliant and gets stressed easily.

I am delighted to be at the launch of WorkRight: The Nottingham Job Coach Initiative. I would like to welcome the Job Coaches and all of you, their friends. Welcome to the escape committee.