



OUR IMPACT 2024-25



'Dom is an absolute pleasure to work with - approachable, supportive, and always focused on what's best for our customers. We've really valued his insight since he graduated from his supported internship.'

LORRAINE EYRE,
General Manager,
The Coastal Kitchen Family

A YEAR OF ENORMOUS PROGRESS

The last year has been a transformative one for our work creating inclusive work opportunities for people with learning disabilities.

We have become Empowering Employment, born from the seeds of Minstead Trust's employability programme. This new growth illustrates our commitment to supercharging our impact for job seekers and in the inclusive hiring space.

Our mission has always been clear: to break down barriers, challenge perceptions, and enable individuals to thrive in meaningful employment.

Over the past year, we have worked tirelessly alongside employers to foster workplaces that embrace inclusivity. We have seen first-hand the transformative power of employment - not just in providing financial independence, but in building confidence, self-worth, and a sense of belonging. With each new

opportunity, we are proving that inclusive hiring is not just beneficial for individuals, but for businesses and communities alike.

This report highlights the achievements, challenges, and inspiring stories that have defined our journey. It is a testament to the dedication of our team, the commitment of our employer partners, and most importantly, the resilience and talent of the individuals we support.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to our success. Together, we are not just creating jobs; we are encouraging everyone to see ability over disability.

Chris Hillman

Chris Hillman
Head of Empowering Employment



OUR ACHIEVEMENTS IN NUMBERS

For the past three years, we have worked with learners and businesses to make meaningful change. This is just a snapshot of our progress so far.



(Rolling figures since April 2022)

Case study

IESHA

Skills for life, not just employment

Iesha's experiences on placement have given her key skills that can help her move towards living more independently.

'I just love working here,' says Iesha, volunteer at Lymington Library. Her shift begins with 'putting the books back... in alphabetical order,' then moves to office tasks - 'whatever they want me to do.'

The children's corner is her favourite: 'Seeing the little ones reading and their mums reading to them' makes every visit special. Volunteering has boosted her reading too. 'I found it difficult, but with my Read Easy coach Sally twice a week I can read more, and shelving authors helps my everyday life.'

Iesha's confidence has blossomed. 'People ask, 'Where are the children's books?' and I show them.' Mentor Diana 'was with me most of the time; now she steps back so I can manage.'

Travel training brings freedom:

'I can get the bus to Southampton, Lymington, Romsey, next Applemore and Tesco - and even the train to Weston-super-Mare.' Proud of her growing independence, Iesha now aims for a paid role 'organising books - something I enjoy.'

'I just love working here'

IESHA,
supported in her
volunteering role
by Empowering
Employment



WORKING SMARTER TOGETHER



Last year we strengthened our collaboration with Smart Training & Recruitment (Smart) to enhance employment opportunities for individuals with learning disabilities and autism across Hampshire and Dorset.

Smart, an Ofsted-approved training provider, offers a diverse range of apprenticeship programmes designed to equip learners with essential skills for the workforce.

This partnership enables our trainees to access supported apprenticeships with Smart, allowing them to develop practical skills while working in real-world environments. Through this collaboration, participants receive tailored support, including job coaching and mentorship, ensuring they can confidently navigate their employment journeys.

Smart's commitment to inclusivity has been recognised by their Disability Confident Leader status (Level 3), reflecting their dedication to championing disability employment within the business community.

Together, we are addressing the low employment rates among individuals with learning disabilities, striving to create a more inclusive and diverse workforce.



MAKING A DIFFERENCE



'The people who work here are lovely. There is a good atmosphere...I've learnt to work under pressure, work efficiently and use my initiative'

FOR JOB SEEKERS

Greg was referred into Empowering Employment after a period of challenging experiences with unsuitable employers and the misuse of zero-hour contracts. Working with Greg, we could see that hospitality was his passion and he belonged in that environment.

Greg wanted to learn, and our supported apprenticeship pathway was the perfect fix. At Marsham Court Hotel, Greg has found a long term, structured apprenticeship contract.

Greg said: 'I've learnt to work efficiently and use my initiative...It (the apprenticeship) has given me something to strive for.'

FOR BUSINESSES

Marsham Court Hotel, a family run business on the Bournemouth seafront, is award winning and nationally recognised for its inclusivity and approach to supporting guests with disabilities.

'We are passionate about inclusivity and providing opportunities for people to shine.'

'When Empowering Employment approached us about Greg, we were delighted to welcome him into the team, and we look forward to growing our supported apprenticeship partnership to offer more employment opportunities for those who need it.'

James Dixon-Box
Operations Director



'We are passionate about inclusivity and providing opportunities for people to shine.'

PLOTTING A POSITIVE PATH FOR LEARNERS

Last year we embarked on a pioneering partnership trial with Positive Path Foundation to enhance employment opportunities for people with autism in Hampshire and the Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole areas.

Positive Path Foundation focuses on creating as many opportunities as possible for its members aged 16+ with high-functioning Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) and other hidden disabilities to meet, socialise, develop life skills, grow as individuals and, most importantly, to have fun.

This collaboration ensures that their members who are ready for employment are seamlessly integrated into Empowering Employment's pathway, providing tailored support and training to secure meaningful work. Those joining Empowering Employment's programmes are signposted to Positive Path Foundation to bolster their social and emotional well-being. This unique partnership creates opportunities for those with hidden disabilities, who may not otherwise receive social care support, helping ensure they are not left behind.

By combining our resources and expertise, we strive to empower more individuals to achieve their employment aspirations, fostering a more inclusive and diverse workforce.



Case study

CONNOR

Connor joined Furzey Gardens as an Assistant Gardener after rebuilding his confidence with support from Empowering Employment and the Positive Path Foundation.

'I had a bit of a rough journey,' Connor admits, after resigning from his first gardening job. 'Jane got my confidence back and supported me with getting this job here, it's helped massively.'

Connor's job at Furzey Gardens is hands-on:


'You're learning all the plants and planting them at the right time of year... there's weeding, mowing, strimming, cutting back, pruning.' Gentle guidance from his Empowering Employment adviser matters: 'He's given me encouragement and a confidence boost so when visitors ask questions, I can answer.'

Connor is also passing skills on:

'We've got a couple of students doing work experience. I guide them, make sure they're OK; I've never done that before, but I like it.'

The setting lifts him daily:

'Hearing the birds is like music in the background... the fresh air washes a bad day away.' Looking ahead, he smiles: 'A friend's thinking of starting a gardening business, maybe that's something I could do with him.'

A man with short brown hair and a mustache, wearing a dark blue jacket with a 'Furzey Gardens' logo on the sleeve, stands outdoors against a background of trees and a blue sky. The jacket is a high-visibility style with reflective strips. The man is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera.

'Jane got my confidence back and supported me with getting this job here - it's helped massively.'

CONNOR,
supported in his job
by Empowering
Employment

INTERNSHIPS THAT TRANSFORM YOUR PROSPECTS

We have partnered with Portsmouth City Council and City of Portsmouth College to run the Portsmouth Supported Internship Programme, creating job opportunities for young people with special educational needs.

Participants aged 16-24 with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), gain hands-on experience in council departments and external businesses, supported by job coaches.

The programme combines workplace learning with employability training from City of Portsmouth College. Empowering Employment provides expert job coaching, ensuring interns transition successfully into paid work.

Our initial pilot saw four out of six interns secure jobs once completing their placements, with employers like Voi Scooters and Comserv offering roles. The initiative is now expanding, doubling participation and further strengthening inclusive employment opportunities in Portsmouth.



Case study

VOI SCOOTERS AND LUKE

'I fix the scooters and bikes that roll into Voi's warehouse,' explains Luke, the mechanic now mentoring intern James. 'Since day one he's been doing the same as me - repairing, battery swaps, palletising, even forklifting - and he brings positivity; smiling, cracking jokes.'

Luke says James's growth has been striking. 'When I first met him he was shy, a bit unconfident,' Luke recalls. 'Now his mechanical skills-especially on the bikes-are deeper than mine. He's taken charge of our fleet swap-out, quality-checking new scooters, palletising the old, organising shipping. He had no idea; now he owns the process.'

Guiding James has stretched Luke too. 'I had one teaching style: show-and-copy. Working with James opened my eyes to different needs and approaches.'

That insight earned Luke his own team-leading apprenticeship, arranged through Empowering Employment. His message to other employers: 'Try it-you'll be pleasantly surprised by the intern's work ethic and the support you receive.'



voi.

'I had one teaching style: show-and-copy. Working with James opened my eyes to different needs and approaches.'

LUKE,
Mechanic mentor

SEEING THE BIGGER PICTURE...

Our work at Empowering Employment is part of a wider national need to improve employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities.

Employment provides individuals with independence, confidence, and social inclusion - while also reducing reliance on adult social services, generating significant cost savings for the public sector.

Those who are neurodiverse are twice as likely (28%) to not be in education or employment than the average young person (14%), firing our commitment to facilitate work experience for young people.

There are **13 million neurodiverse people** in the UK, yet many face unnecessary barriers to employment. With **almost 600,000 Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)** in place, around **25% of these young people are leaving education each year** - yet too few find meaningful jobs.

This untapped workforce presents a huge opportunity for businesses willing to embrace inclusion. Beyond staffing, inclusive employment benefits businesses by engaging the **£274 billion Purple Pound** - the spending power of disabled people and their families. Today's job seekers are also **tomorrow's customers**, and inclusive workplaces reflect and serve an increasingly diverse society.

We realise that we cannot solve these challenges on our own, and that is why we are delighted to be partnering with organisations across the country who share our passion and determination to improve inclusive hiring for all. We welcome conversations with any organisations who want to make a difference.

...WHILE BRINGING INDIVIDUAL CHANGE



RACHEL

Apprentice graduate

'The apprenticeship programme has helped me to become more confident.

Now I realise how much I can do.

I am enjoying working at Lily & Lime cafés in Portsmouth.

It's helped me socially and professionally.'



JOSH

Job seeker's story

'At the start of my work experience I would hide round the back and someone would have to bring me a drink before I felt ready to work.

But gradually I built up my confidence bit by bit. My family knew my confidence was low, but now I won't shut up!

But that's a good thing, as you need confidence to be able to get a better job.'



CHARLIE GREEN

Milestone Infrastructure

'Having a clear and demonstrable social value helps a company to win contracts.

It helps us better differentiate ourselves from our competitors.

Increasingly, contracts are won not just on price and quality but on the ability to demonstrate a positive social impact.'



DANIEL

My first paid job

'When I first started working at Lily & Lime, my confidence was very low. I had very low self-esteem issues. I had low confidence.

Now that I am here? I'm having the time of my life and doing this apprenticeship will help me take ownership of the things I'm good at.'

OUR TEAM

Connect with us on LinkedIn
www.linkedin.com/showcase/empowering-employment



CHRIS HILLMAN

Chris is Head of Empowering Employment and is responsible for the overall operation of the team, creating the Employer and Provider Partner Networks and overseeing our supported apprenticeship delivery.



DIANA O'GRADY

Diana is the Programme Lead for Step Up for Work.



ABIGAIL HURD

Abi is an Employment Mentor based in Portsmouth.



ELLIOT JACKSON

Elliot is an Employment Mentor based in Portsmouth.



HAYLEY SWINDELLS

Hayley is an Employment Mentor based in Bournemouth.

OUR WORK PROGRAMMES



STEP UP FOR WORK

This combines small group teaching, 1:1 support and real experience of employment in a voluntary work placement.

Together these activities aim to help learners gain the skills, experience, knowledge and behaviours to make them more employable.

Your mentor will then help write your CV and will help with job hunting. Your mentor will be with you every step of the journey, providing support in work and outside of the workplace.



SUPPORTED INTERSHIPS

This is a structured, work-based study programme for 16 to 24-year-olds with SEND, who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.

The core aim of a supported internship study programme is a substantial work placement, facilitated by the support of an expert job coach.



SUPPORTED WORK EXPERIENCE

Work experience plays an important role in our work programme pathways.

It can provide exciting and challenging opportunities to those who want to find out more about the world of work.

Learners can choose from placements at one of our many business partners, helping them prepare for employment or an apprenticeship.



JOB COACHING

Are you about to start a job and are feeling nervous about what's to come? Do you need support with inductions, training and the working environment?


Job coaches help support you to do your job confidently and efficiently. They help in many ways, depending on what help you need.



SUPPORTED APPRENTICESHIPS

Apprenticeships with Smart Training and Recruitment help you develop skills while working.

Available across Hampshire and Dorset.



'The support I get for my internship at an adventure playground makes me feel confident. The more experience I have the more chance I'll get to do what I want. It's amazing.'

KEELEY,
Job coached by
Empowering Employment



empoweremploy.org.uk

 Connect with us on LinkedIn

Registered charity number: 1053319. Empowering Employment is part of Minstead Trust, a charity that supports over 320 people with learning disabilities along the south coast of England.

**Empowering opportunities
for businesses and people**