



# BLACK COUNTRY FUTURES PROJECT

## EVALUATION REPORT 2022



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Appendix 1 – Case Studies

## 1. Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to examine the two-year delivery, and whether it met its aims, of Black Country Futures project

The project was aimed at tackling poverty and social inclusion, by assisting and supporting the most marginalised and disadvantaged people within Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall, and Wolverhampton, commonly referred to as the Black Country and was funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

Fifteen partners, One Lead and fourteen delivery organisations, worked together to develop a cohesive programme and took a collaborative approach to that delivery.

The project commenced in May 2020 with each delivery partner offering their own specialised support to the participants engaged. This partnership brought together services from community, voluntary and private sectors, due to the diverse range of delivery partners participants had access to a multitude of localised interventions and activities to commence their journey towards employment and inclusion.

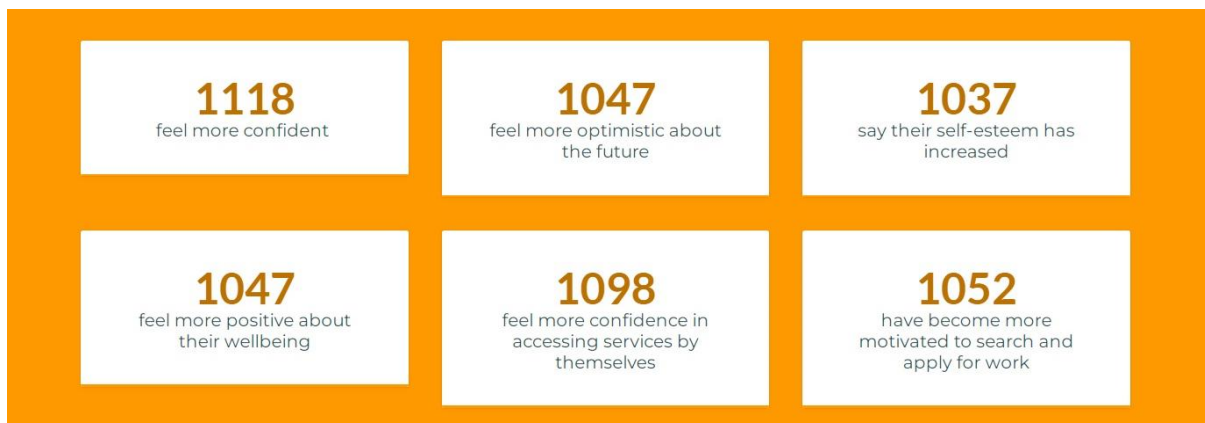
Black Country Futures supported people aged 16 years old and over and although all-inclusive prioritised support to the most disadvantaged and most isolated Black Country residents including

- Those aged 50 years old and over
- Black Asian and Minority Ethnic groups.
- Refugees and migrants
- People with mental and physical health issues including hearing and visual impairments,
- Lone parents
- Long term unemployed
- Ex -Offenders
- Care Leavers
- People at risk of redundancy
- People on zero -hour contracts
- People unable to access support elsewhere
- People on low incomes at risk of fuel and food poverty.

The project overachieved in relation to all targets and soft outcomes. We know that for most people, being able to find work or increase their chances of gaining sustainable employment is crucial in helping them build independent, stable lives. Despite the unexpected challenges presented by the COVID 19 pandemic, during the project we helped:



Crucial to this success was supporting and empowering people, removing barriers to work and helping them to build their skills, confidence and independence. As a result of our support we saw significant positive outcomes that will have long-term impact for individuals and move them closer to sustainable employment. As a result of the project, of those who were supported:



The Socio-Demographic characteristics of the Black Country Participants, compared to those of Black Country residents, clearly demonstrates that the programme engaged and supported the most marginalised and disadvantaged across the Boroughs as per the projects aim.

Feedback from participants, engaged upon the project, was highly positive and delivery partners encouraged participants to celebrate all of their successes and achievements, large and small.

The biggest challenge the project faced was commencing during the height of the Covid 19 pandemic and all the constraints that involved

## Conclusions

- The project was extremely successful in achieving its targets
- The project met the needs of its participants
- The project received excellent feedback from participants
- Strong working partnerships were forged
- The project enabled individual needs to be met in a localised flexible and holistic manner
- The project made a major contribution towards social inclusion within areas of high deprivation.

## 2. Evaluation Framework

The aim of this evaluation is:

- To ensure that the programme demonstrated equal opportunity access.
- To assess the programmes performance against objectives.
- To ascertain the impact of the programme upon its participants.

## 3. Programme Objectives

The main objective of the Black Country Futures two-year programme was to engage with the most marginalised and disadvantage people across the region and support them to both closer to the labour market whilst also increasing their knowledge, self-esteem, and confidence. This aim has been monitored via targets and soft outcome indicators

### Targets

Characteristics	Profile to be achieved over the lifetime of the programme
Number of people accessing the support provided by the project	1350
Number of people who progress into employment as a result of accessing the support provided by the project	135
Number of people who progress into education or training as a result of accessing the support provided by the project	135

### Soft Outcomes

Indicator	Profile to be achieved over the lifetime of the programme
Number of people reporting increased confidence and motivation levels as a result of accessing the support provided by the project	850
Number of people reporting increased levels of self-esteem as a result of access the support provided by the project	850
Number of people demonstrating that they feel more motivated to search for and apply for jobs, to enquire about training courses and/or volunteering opportunities as a result of accessing the support provided by the project	850
Number of people reporting increased confidence in accessing other services provided by mainstream providers as a result of accessing the support of the project	850
Number of people that feel more optimistic about their future and making personal life goals as a result of accessing the support of the project	850
Number of people demonstrating that they have improved well-being as a result of accessing the support provided by the project	850



## 4. Background

The fourteen Black Country Futures delivery partners, together with one other organisation, had originally formed the Community Matters project, part of the England wide Building Better Opportunities (BBO) programme with Heart of England Community Foundation as the strand lead. In 2019 Heart of England declined the offer of an extension to the Community Matters project with all delivery scheduled to end early 2020. Following this decision a number of meeting and discussions took place and Steps to Work was invited to be the lead organisation for a new two year programme proposal to The National Lottery Community Fund, which was successful and delivery commenced in May 2020.

A consultation, with residents across the Black Country was undertaken to identify the support deemed to have the highest priority by the very people who required the support, this enabled the partners to design their delivery accordingly. Lessons had also been learnt from the BBO programmes and these were incorporated into Black Country Futures. BBO programmes are steeped in bureaucracy and the amount of paperwork required to be completed has a negative impact upon the time spent actually supporting individual participants, Black Country Futures reduced the amount of paperwork required which enabled individual participants to receive more in-depth support.

There are also stringent eligibility restrictions on BBO and robust eligibility documentation, from the participant, is required. This has resulted in some of the most disadvantaged residents being unable to access individualised support when they needed it most. By using a lighter touch approach on Black Country Futures residents who are not able to access existing programmes were able to gain the support they needed.

One of the advantages of the BBO programmes was that it demonstrated how effective a more holistic approach to, supporting and developing, participants as opposed to the more restrictive delivery of some previous, and existing, funded programmes had been. Within these other programmes the length of time participants can receive support or the type of support available is determined by the programme contractual requirements and not by the participants needs. This more holistic approach was fully incorporated into the Black Country Futures programme with a focus upon the individual, to identify the most appropriate intervention for them, ensuring that no participant was merely a 'tick box' exercise. Although not a BBO programme Black Country Futures adhered to similar key principles, namely:

### i. Supporting the most marginalised and disadvantaged

It is acknowledged that some individuals and groups are more marginalised and disadvantaged than others. Black Country Futures supported people aged 16 years old and over and although all-inclusive prioritised support to the most disadvantaged and most isolated Black Country residents including

- Those aged 50 years old and over
- Black Asian and Minority Ethnic groups.
- Refugees and migrants
- People with mental and physical health issues including hearing and visual impairments,
- Lone parents
- Long term unemployed
- Ex -Offenders
- Care Leavers

- People at risk of redundancy
- People on zero -hour contracts
- People unable to access support elsewhere
- People on low incomes at risk of fuel and food poverty.

## ii. Tackling Social Inclusion

As social inclusion can severely affect an individual’s wellbeing and, in turn, have a substantial impact upon their confidence and motivation to seek support and opportunities, Black Country Futures sought to target these issues by addressing individual barriers to development and progression to seeking education, training and employment.

## iii. Resolute focus upon the individual

A ‘one size fits all’ approach to the most marginalised and disadvantaged is not sufficient to address an individual’s barriers and issues. Black Country Futures offered truly individually tailored and holistic support packages to help and support those engaged to overcome the challenges they faced. We work with many people who have been out of work for some time, have never worked, have barriers to work, as well as those in employment which doesn't meet their needs. There is so much more to our 'employment support' than just helping someone write a CV and apply for a job and practice interview questions.

We understand that to job search, you need motivation and aspiration. You need good mental health. You need stability and not to be in crisis / survival mode as you need to be able to plan ahead. If you have any issues which are preventing you doing this, these will need to be addressed. It is obvious to say that to apply for jobs and interview well, you need self-esteem and confidence. You need to be able to see and express your value to an employer. You need good communication skills and IT literacy. You need emotional resilience. You may need to increase your skills set and./or build work experience in other ways.

We know from experience that to succeed in employment you need all of the above, plus to be able to manage your finance, your working life, your caring and family responsibilities, your home, debt etc. You'll also need to understand what your employer will expect from you and what you should expect from your employer, and how to know if you are being unfairly treated. You'll need to know how to handle workplace conflict and how to keep your motivation levels up.

This is just a small sample of the support people may need and we do whatever we can to support people, whether we offer these services directly or through partnership work, as we want individuals to be able to not only find work (ticking a box), but to find and sustain suitable, fulfilling employment in the long-term, and be happy and able to thrive in their work and lives. Alongside traditional employment support we have worked with individuals to offer a range of support and services including:

Access needs	In work support
Accessing healthcare	Childcare
Accessing online services	In work support
Advocacy	Money Management and Budgeting support
Identification documents	Self-employment support
Digital Inclusion	Support for those on low-income and zero-hour contracts

Setting up Bank Accounts	Transitional support for carers
Translation / translators / interpreters	
<b>Mental Wellbeing</b>	<b>Barriers to work</b>
Agrophobia	Dyslexia
Anxiety	Ex Convict / Offenders
Confidence	Homelessness
Depression	Inequality
Hoarding issues	Long term unemployed
Mental Health	No qualifications
Motivation	No work experience
Self-esteem	Refugee
Stress	Residency/right to remain
Wellbeing support – Early intervention	School Leavers
Youth Mental Health and engagement activities	Immigration advice
<b>Financial support / Benefits advice</b>	<b>Skills Support</b>
Access to business finance/loans/grants	Customer Services
Benefit support/advice/calculations	Education & training
Budgeting / Money management skills	ESOL
Business finance	Functional skills
Debt	Literacy
Financial aid	Marketing –creating, designs and sharing
Financial Crisis support	Numeracy
Financial Poverty	Setting up and running a business – everything involved
Food poverty	Setting up and using websites
Fuel poverty	Youth Development Activities (Academic, Leisure, Sport, Career, Character Building)
Housing	Social Skills
Housing issues	Social media
Information on Welfare benefits	Telephone skills
Rent arrears	Time management
Tax and HMRC	Travel planning & route planning
Tenancy Issues	Understanding Business/Self-employment basics
Understanding in work benefits	Vocational skills
Universal Credit issues	Digital skills
Welfare Benefits checks	Family Relationship Skill Development inc. parenting
<b>Pastoral Support</b>	<b>Health</b>
Additional needs (social care)	Addisans Disease
Befriending support	Alcohol dependency
Bereavement	Asthma
Domestic Abuse / Violence	Barre syndrome
Early Help Intervention	Chronic pain
Loneliness and Isolation	COPD Bronchiolitis Asthma
Joint support/liasing with social workers for complex cases, care needs, issues with access to children etc	Diabetes
Goals and aspirations	Epilepsy
Life Crisis support	Glaucoma



Parental support including childcare	Health issues
Support with family breakdowns	Healthy lifestyle projects
Support workers	Mobility issues / Wheelchair users
Victim of a scam	non-epileptic attack disorder
Settlement Support (e.g., Local area knowledge, introduction to services...)	Sport and recreation
Community Integration Support (e.g., Cultural knowledge, mixing opportunity)	Substance misuse
Community/Leisure/Activities/Events	Tackling Obesity

#### iv. Better coordinated services

Organisation's working in silo are not always best placed to benefit individuals with complex needs and barriers, Black Country Futures actively encouraged organisational partnerships to enable coordination, collaboration, and a joining up of services available to individuals.

## 5. Black Country Futures

The aim of the Black Country Futures project was to deliver an effective support programme across the Black Country, supporting 16-year-olds and over who had multiple barriers to connect with local specialist services. The programme aimed to prioritise support to the most disadvantaged and most isolated Black Country residents including those who are aged 50 years old and over, BAME, refugees, migrants, people with mental and physical health issues including hearing impairments, lone parents, Care leavers, ex-offenders, long term unemployed, those at risk of redundancy or on zero hour contracts and those who were unable to access support elsewhere including those on low incomes who were at risk of fuel and food poverty.

The programme took a social prescribing and multi- faceted approach in addressing people’s needs in an holistic manner which, from the delivery partners previous extensive experience, and consultation with customers, included: social inclusion, volunteering, social care, digital inclusion, dementia support, employability skills & training, Information, Advice & Guidance, financial confidence & inclusion, debt advice, confidence & motivation, benefit advice, housing support, healthy living and practical life skills such as washing & ironing clothes, cooking on a budget and using public transport. All of this support was offered both on a one to one and small group basis to meet the needs of the beneficiaries.

The project consisted of a Lead Organisation, Steps to Work (STW) and 14 delivery partners from the third sector, public and private organisations. Their combined services provided a multi-faceted programme to reach Black Country participants who have previously “fallen through the cracks” of services and society, delivering the appropriate interventions necessary to help them progress closer to employment, whilst adding value and enhancing provision already available to them. The project provided fully supported routes to increase social inclusion, raise aspirations, develop personal and employability skills, and improve economic stability. The Black Country Futures vision was to support local people to reach their true potential, reaching the most marginalised in communities, ensuring that there was appropriate support available, thereby making sure that the essential support required was in place for the most vulnerable in society to access services to build a brighter future. The delivery partners were

Access 2 Business	Manor Farm
Green Square Accord (formally Accord Age Matters)	Refugee & Migrant Centre
Bilston Resource Centre	SWEDA
Black Country Housing Group	TLC College
Impact Training	Walsall Housing Group
Ideal for All	Well Training
Just Straight Talk	Zebra Access

All participants had access to a ‘pick and mix’ approach to the support available across the partnership by being able to access provision from as many, or as few, of the delivery partners during their time on programme. This more relaxed approach to referrals to other partners ensured that participants could fully benefit from all of the provision being offered. The provision available to individuals included:

**Access to Business** supported individuals, across the Black Country, to achieve a greater understanding of managing Universal Credit through improved IT skills, they gained confidence and

skills to address personal barriers that prevented them from improving their lives and social inclusion. Individuals were also supported to improve their general health and well-being through healthy lifestyle workshops and supported with financial management and budgeting skills.

**Green Square Accord** (formally Accord Age Matters) promoted the health and well-being of people aged 50+, with a focus on people within areas of high deprivation and high BAME areas, within Walsall and Sandwell, through a range of services, including dementia support, social prescribing, physical exercise, volunteering, social care, employment, training and social inclusion activities including the use of green spaces and outdoor activities.

**Black Country Housing Group** developed skills and capacity within communities, across the Black Country, for employability and associated life skills such as budgeting and Digital Inclusion to individuals. Alongside this they actively encouraged individuals to become volunteers thereby developing skilled and motivated community champions to become embedded within the community infrastructure.

**Bilston Resource Centre** offered support to individuals, within Wolverhampton, with Information, Advice & Guidance to help individuals identify their learning and career aspirations, and job-related activities such as support with CV's job application forms and interview technique sessions. They also offered digital support including basic IT, Microsoft Office and remote learning online. Support for individuals in relation to work experience, training and mentoring in catering, cooking and customer service was also available.

**Impact Training** offered support predominately, but not exclusively, to lone parents, within Dudley and Sandwell, and encouraged them to consider or find meaningful employment or further education or learning. This was accomplished by offering dedicated sessions that addressed confidence, motivation & aspirations, debt & money management, social skills, job search skills and sector specific skills.

**Ideal for All's** provision focused support towards disabled and disadvantaged people who were less likely to be able to access mainstream delivery, were furthest from the jobs market or and in need of specialist support through 'wrap around' skills development, health and wellbeing, employability and social inclusion sessions. These sessions included confidence & motivation, employability & soft skills, horticultural engagement, creative outdoor activities and developing meaningful volunteering and work placements for individuals

**Just Straight Talk** offered support to the most vulnerable individuals, across Dudley, Sandwell and some areas of Wolverhampton, many of whom suffered social isolation which can lead to anxiety and depressions. This support included a multitude of one-to-one support for individuals in relation to mentoring, assistance with applications and form filling regarding housing, benefits, legal issues and debt concerns, amongst others, advocacy and transporting and supporting individuals to meetings, appointments and interviews. The one-to-one support was also enhanced by group sessions and activities including coffee mornings, quiz night and arts and crafts to reduce social isolation and loneliness

**Manor Farm** provided wide ranging and multifaceted support across areas of high deprivation within Walsall. These support sessions included confidence building, budgeting, cooking on a budget, general life skills, learning to wash and iron clothes, making journeys outside of their local areas and using public transport, employability skills, volunteering opportunities alongside support to access services from food banks and progression routes such as recreational classes.

**Refugee and Migrant Centre** provision was aimed at supporting refugees and migrants through crises, disadvantage and isolation by offering support in relation to employability skills, ESOL, IT, translation services and one to one support and advice regarding HMRC, welfare, housing and finance.

**SWEDA** offered support that included coaching and mentoring for individuals, alongside confidence & motivation sessions, personal development planning, IT skills, managing a household budget, employability skills and access to volunteering and work placement opportunities.

**TLC's provision**, within Wolverhampton, was to predominantly culturally diverse individuals and included language assisted IAG services, employability skills, vocational skills training, digital skills, English chatter groups, wellbeing sessions including social meetings and health awareness sessions and enterprise support.

**Walsall Housing Group** focused their delivery and support to individuals within the most deprived areas of Walsall. This support included confidence & motivation, mentoring, literacy & numeracy, financial skills alongside access to volunteering and work placements.

**WELL Training** provided accredited training to individuals which was in relation to Digital Skills and Travel & Tourism. Alongside the accredited training individuals were also offered support regarding compiling CV's and jobsearch on a one-to-one basis.

**Zebra Access** is a specialised organisation that offers support to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and offers communication assistance by way of British Sign Language, Signed Support English and international Sign Language. Their provision within this project included confidence & motivation, English & maths tutorials and job clubs. Alongside their own delivery Zebra offered a specialist intervention by supporting any deaf or hard of hearing individuals to access provision from the other delivery partners by offering communication support, they also delivered awareness sessions to the delivery partners.

### **Partners Delivery**

All delivery was evaluated on a regular basis by individual participants completing questionnaires and reviews, this enabled the partners delivery to be reviewed and refined and ensured that the project was participant lead throughout the lifetime of the programme. Offering such a diverse range of support, all of which participants had access to, will have had a lasting impact upon the individuals supported by developing their life and employability capacity and skills, alongside improving their health and well-being, enabling people to fulfil their potential. This included those individuals who had been unable, less likely or were ineligible to access support elsewhere, including mainstream delivery. Participants have more resilient and been more able to manage household budgets, use IT effectively and have the confidence to make informed choices about themselves and their families and have become more enabled and empowered to make informed choices regarding accessing further training or support.

Regular reviews were undertaken with participants to identify and encourage progress and all participants had a detailed personal exit plan, when required, which detailed the barriers they had faced and overcome and the progress they had made towards their individual goals. This further built their confidence and self-belief and capacity to find the right services for them. The programme has enabled participants to develop long lasting skills which will help them minimise the risk of moving backwards and enable them to progress on their journey and increase their employability and life skill prospects.

By encouraging volunteering, and developing community champions, who offer peer to peer support, the project has enabled a team of skilled and motivated individuals who will be able to build stronger relationships within their local communities by working through, and with, community groups and associations ensuring asset-based community programmes are developed.

Having such a diverse range of partners brought together services from community, voluntary, public and private sectors thereby assisting participants to engage with local provision to support them to overcome the widest of social and economic barriers by offering a truly holistic programme which they delivered in the midst of a global pandemic.

The delivery manner, and the activities and support offered on the Black Country Futures programme was developed to meet the full aims of the programme and the needs of the most marginalised and disadvantaged people within the Black Country. Taking a holistic approach, rather than dealing with issues in isolation, and by ensuring a flexible localised with partners and services being able to work together is much more effective in supporting individuals to address issues. By offering intensive support rather than time limited dictated interventions delivery partners have been able to build positive relationships with participants and support them to progress at their own pace.

## Partners Quotes

*“Black Country Futures has been a fantastic project to deliver, despite the challenges faced during lock down. It is the first time Bilston Resource Centre has had the pleasure of working with Steps to Work, and this project has enabled us to develop new and positive relationships and partnerships across the Black Country. Through BCF many of our participants have benefitted in a huge way as we were able to adapt to addressing the most immediate needs, including meals for the vulnerable and work experience for long-term unemployed. We look forward to new ventures in working collaboratively with our partners and continuing to support our residents. On behalf of everyone at Bilston Resource Centre, a huge thank you to the National Lottery Community fund and all staff and volunteers that have been involved with this fantastic project.”*

*“Being able to work with other partners on the BCF project, under one umbrella, has been very useful, and to be able to share ideas and work in uniform with each other. The participants have been able to develop skills and progress into jobs and courses, thanks to the BCF project”.*

*“We thoroughly enjoyed being part of the BCF programme which has been a great support for our local clients at a time when they really needed our help and assistance during what was an extremely difficult time for everyone.*



The feedback that we received from our BCF clients has been fantastic. We would like to thank Steps to Work for their support and hoping we can work together in the near future”

“We thank Steps to Work for taking the lead on the Black Country Futures Partnership bid through The National Lottery Community Fund. The partnership has not only benefited the many participants we have engaged with its flexibility to support the removal of barriers they experience in order to progress closer to or into education and/or work, but also we have progressed as an organisation through our collaboration with partners Black Country wide. The partnership is a shining example of how commitment to collaborate and the ability to work flexibly, with the participant at the heart of everything you do, truly impacts the lives of our residents who need individualised support. The ethos of the partnership was shared and adopted by all and this is reflected in the project successes. We hope to continue this partnership working in the future and will continue to seek this opportunity”.

“For once, hand on heart, this project has been a joy to manage. I have been able to go out and join in activities with the staff on this project, whilst witnessing people flourish that would not usually have been eligible for such projects. We have helped 100 people in 2 years, who are now leading more fulfilled lives and are better connected to their community. The back of office paperwork was straightforward, which results in more time spent with people and this was also unique. We would like to thank The National Lottery Community Fund for this flexibility and funding. The project has paved the way for many people to reach their life goals whilst in my opinion shaped the way that future projects should be delivered.”

“As a Senior Support Worker on the BCF project it has been a pleasure to be part of something that has made such a difference to people's lives. It has proven to be easily accessible for those requiring immediate support with minimal restrictions for those not in work, not looking for work and those that are receiving very few hours from their current employment.

The sign-up process has been met with positivity when meeting individuals in need of help, advice and guidance. I have been able to quickly engage with those seeking immediate actions with benefit applications, social needs,

reducing debt, managing correspondence, building CV's and applying for jobs and all other employability goals.

BCF has provided a lifeline to those that have not been able to access support elsewhere and it's very sad to see such a valuable project come to end. It has been a privilege to be part of something that has truly made a difference to people's lives'

### Participant Quotes

"Couldn't have done it without you two wonderful ladies. 6 weeks with you has changed my life, you are part of my recovery and I don't think you know how much your support is appreciated."

'Support and help I have had is life changing. If I never got the help I needed to re train I think I would of always been on benefits'

"Finally having someone that listens to me and support me in the way that I need has made such a difference and I wouldn't have known how to start all of this process"

"Through working with Jackie on the Black Country Futures project I have managed to gain confidence and grow as a person"

'The project changed my life; it's been a pleasure working with everyone at Manor farm, thank you very much.'

'Thank you so much for helping me, felt like I was beating my head against the wall on my own trying to figure out how to start'

"I just would not have been able to achieve employment without the support you have given to me. I had no experience and limited qualifications at the start and somehow I have landed my dream job and have confidence to go with it!"

'I'm not a very sociable person but having someone to talk to has been great. The staff don't judge me, just offer support and ideas to move forward.'

## 6. Performance against Objectives

### Targets and Soft Outcomes

#### Targets

We know that for most people, being able to find work or increase their chances of gaining sustainable employment is crucial in helping them build independent, stable lives.

Programme Result	Profiled Target	Profile Achieved	Percentage of Target
Number of people accessing the support provided by the project	1350	1621	120%
Number of people who progress into employment as a result of accessing the support provided by the project	135	240	178%
Number of people who progress into education or training as a result of accessing the support provided by the project	135	275	204%

#### Soft Outcomes

Our participants include people impacted by loneliness and isolation, mental ill health, drug and alcohol misuse, poor physical health, unemployment, low skills and qualifications, and those who have experienced or are at risk of homelessness.

Therefore, our projects are not just about employment and training. We help people to make positive progress, deal with issues and crises, and build resilience and strong foundations, which will help them to change their futures for the better.

Programme Result	Profiled Target	Profile Achieved	Percentage of Target
Number of people reporting increased confidence and motivation levels as a result of accessing the support provided by the project	850	1118	132%
Number of people reporting increased levels of self-esteem as a result of access the support provided by the project	850	1037	122%
Number of people demonstrating that they feel more motivated to search for and apply for jobs, to enquire about training courses and/or volunteering opportunities as a result of accessing the support provided by the project	850	1052	124%
Number of people reporting increased confidence in accessing other services	850	1098	129%

provided by mainstream providers as a result of accessing the support of the project			
Number of people that feel more optimistic about their future and making personal life goals as a result of accessing the support of the project	850	1047	123%
Number of people demonstrating that they have improved well-being as a result of accessing the support provided by the project	850	1047	123%

## 7.Participants Socio-Demographic Characteristics

The Socio-Demographic characteristics of the Black Country Participants, compared to those of Black Country residents, clearly demonstrates that the programme engaged and supported the most marginalised and disadvantaged across the Boroughs as per the projects aim.

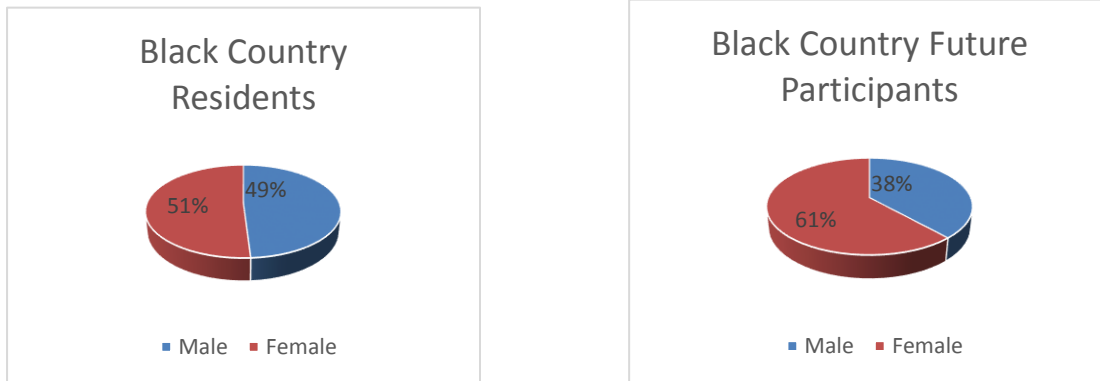
### Ethnicity

	Black Country Residents	Black Country Futures Participants
Ethnic Group	%	%
White; British	74.40	59.00
White; Irish	0.52	0.43
White; Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0.09	0.00
White; Other	2.13	5.05
Mixed Ethnic Groups; White and Black Caribbean	1.97	1.85
Mixed Ethnic Groups; White and Black African	0.14	0.25
Mixed Ethnic Groups; White and Asian	0.63	0.12
Mixed Ethnic Groups; Other	0.41	0.55
Asian British; Indian	7.52	6.97
Asian British; Pakistani	3.77	3.64
Asian British; Bangladeshi	1.11	0.99
Asian British; Chinese	0.36	0.12
Asian British; Other	1.64	1.36
Black British; African	1.04	6.66
Black British; Caribbean	2.35	5.73
Black British; Other	0.71	0.62
Other Ethnic Group; Arab	0.25	1.54
Any Other Ethnic Group	0.96	4.38
Prefer Not To Say	0.00	0.74

Sources NOMIS May 2022 & Black Country Futures monitoring system May 2022

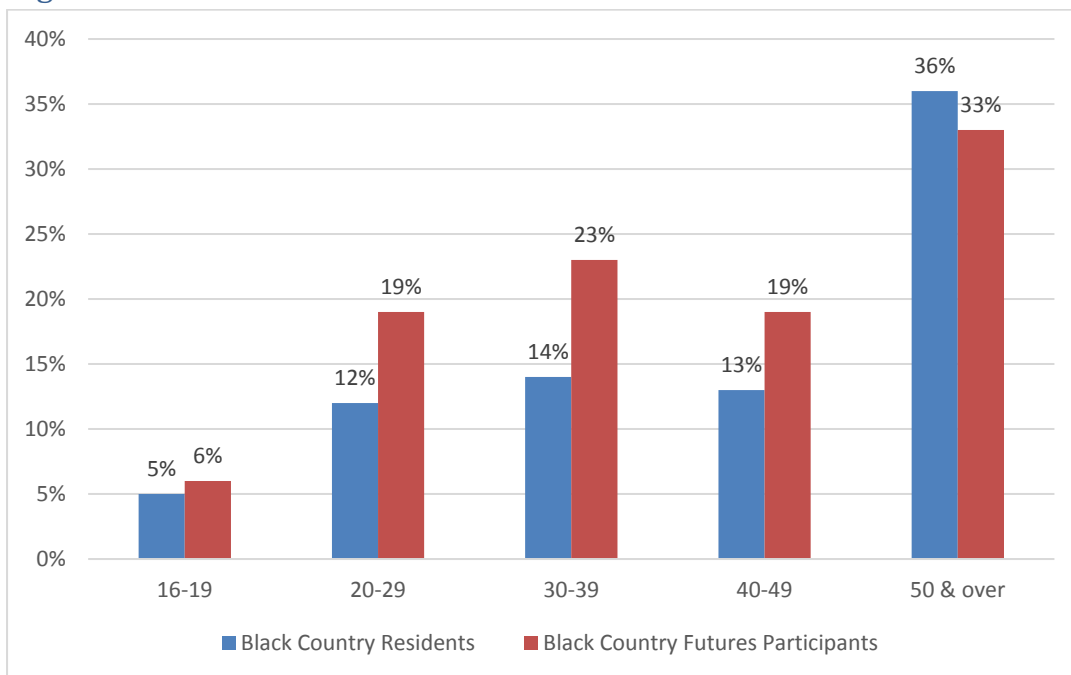
The statistics above, in relation to Black Country Futures participants, demonstrates the programme has been inclusive regarding ethnicity.

## Gender



The gender ratio is slightly more pronounced in relation to programme participants but is within acceptable parameters.

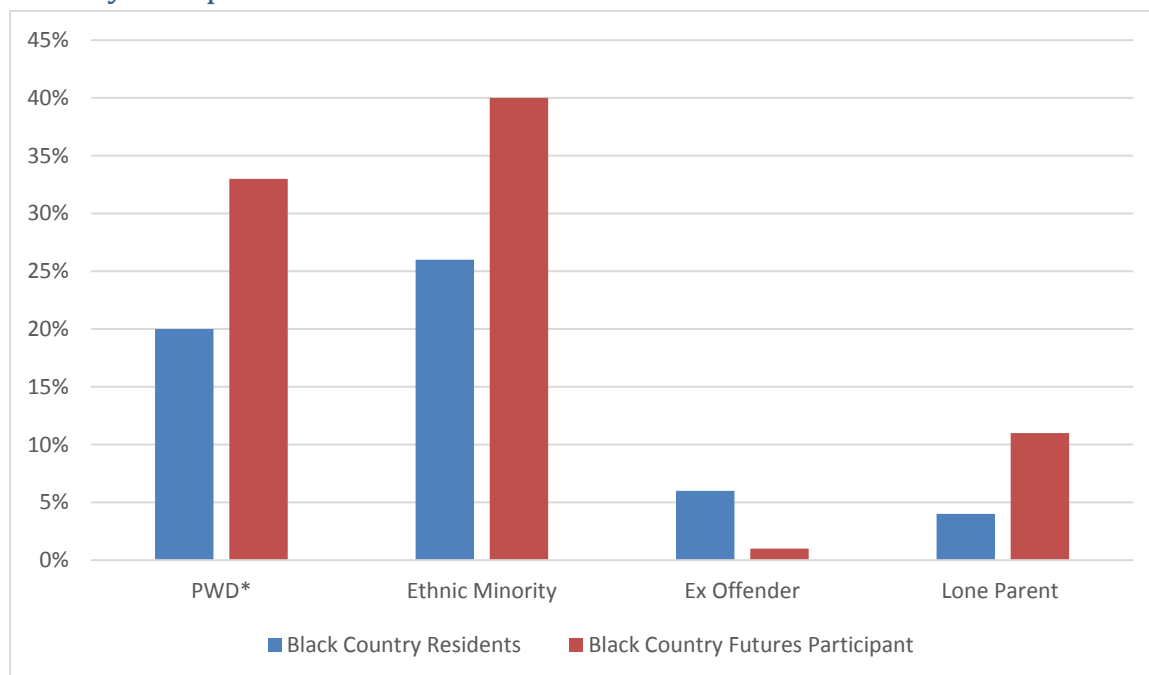
## Age



Sources NOMIS May 2022 & Black Country Futures monitoring system May 2022



## Priority Groups



(\* Person with Disabilities or health issues)

## Additional Priority Groups

- 66% of participants had been unemployed for 12 months or more
- 10% of participants were refugees or migrants
- 1% of participants were care leavers
- 3% of participants were at risk of food or fuel poverty
- 2% of participants were at risk of redundancy
- 31% of participants were unable to access support elsewhere

## 8.Challenges

The Black Country Futures project commenced in May 2020 just after the first national lockdown came into force, in March 2020, following the outbreak of the Covid19 pandemic. This was followed by a year of constraints including additional nation and regional lockdowns, recommendations to work from home and to not use public transport together with social distancing and gathering restrictions. All of which presented real challenges to both delivery partners and participants.

The well-being of a large proportion of participants was the initial concern of most delivery partners as many of the participants, and potential participants, were amongst the most vulnerable and isolated in the region. This led to engagements with participants being very different to how they were envisioned when the programme was proposed. Delivery staff became the sole point of contact for many participants, and they contacted individuals on a regular basis to ensure that they had

somebody to talk to and ensure their well-being. Delivery staff utilised telephones for calls and messages, zoom and teams, where suitable, for virtual meetings and even visited people's homes talking to them through windows and doors to make sure they were supported. Partners also delivered food parcels and cooked meals to participants during this time.

Although an extremely challenging time for all concerned the partnership rose to that challenge as clearly demonstrated by the results and outcomes achieved during this trying time period.

## 9.Key Findings and Conclusions

### Key Findings

- The project overachieved on engaging local people onto the programme
- The project overachieved in supporting participants to progress into employment
- The project overachieved in supporting participants into education or training
- The project overachieved in relation to soft outcomes
- The project was fully inclusive regarding ethnicity of the targeted Black Country Boroughs
- Higher proportions of people aged 16-49 engaged with the project
- Higher proportions of people who identify as having disabilities or health issues, belonging to an ethnic minority group or who are lone parents engaged with the project
- Higher proportions of people who were long term unemployed engaged with the project

### Conclusions

- The project was extremely successful in achieving its targets
- The project met the needs of its participants
- The project received excellent feedback from participants
- Strong working partnerships were forged
- The project enabled individual needs to be met in a localised flexible and holistic manner
- The project made a major contribution towards social inclusion within areas of high deprivation.

# Appendix 1. Case Studies

# Case Study



*'I feel as if I've finally got my life back'*

Abas was forced to leave his home in Iraq in 1994 because of the civil war in his country. Although highly qualified with a degree in Civil Engineering he has been unable to get work in that field as he doesn't have any proof of his degree.

The BCF project is supporting Abas to try and locate evidence of his qualification however many University records were burned during the civil war so we realise that this may not be possible.

Abas is incredibly hard working and his willingness to turn his hand to anything secured him a job as a Forklift Truck Driver, a role he was very happy in and in which he even received an award for 100 % attendance. Sadly, after 14 years in the job he was involved in a serious work place accident and due to his lengthy recovery his employment was terminated.

Abas fell into a depression and struggled to find his normal motivation and optimism – until he heard about the Black Country Futures project! He left our first meeting beaming from ear to ear and went straight home to tell his wife that that we're great!

With our support Abas now has a plan for his future. The first step is to gain an HGV licence as he wants to find employment as an HGV driver, he also feels that as his accident occurred when a lorry hit his forklift truck this would be the perfect way for that story to end! Abas has passed the assessment for this course and is now just waiting for a start date. The next part of the plan is to find a way for Abas to use his academic abilities. Hopefully we will be successful in our attempts to contact his university and gain the evidence he needs but if not we already have a plan B. Abas would like to complete a UK degree and we've been talking to the Open University about the best options. Abas has an exciting future ahead – look out for updates!



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# Case Study



*'Support and help I have had is life changing. If I never got the help I needed to re train I think I would of always been on benefits'*

Ferron originally worked in a warehouse. Due to Covid he was laid off which then caused great difficulty in finding other employment because of the pandemic. Ferron had an idea of where he wanted to be but because accessing training incurred a cost this became a barrier. Lack of confidence also became a barrier because Ferron did not have the right qualifications in order for him to apply for a job that he was interested in pursuing.

Ferron was supported by Manor Farm and was able to complete training and qualifications that would enable him to be a step closer to a job that he wanted to achieve.

Since June when I first met up with Ferron he clearly knew that he would like to support or mentor younger adults. Ferron has been through ups and downs throughout his adult life and has been in situations that most young teenagers do not wish to be in. Ferron was an ex offender who served time and wished to turn his life around and help other younger adults and guide them to a better future. Because of the life experiences that Ferron has, he has the experience and knowledge to guide these younger adults to a better life that have taken the wrong direction and guide them, understand them without judging them. But Ferron required qualifications and training to support him. He worked so hard over the coming months to accomplish these goals he had set himself which included many training courses that were online. All these training courses that he completed were passed with a high level distinction. Ferron even enrolled at college to complete a Level 3 in Counselling. Ferron originally applied for voluntary work with St Giles. He got called for an interview and was interviewed by a panel of 3 because of his life experiences and



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**"I found the training very valuable and fun at the same time, it was nice that Bob could share his own experiences with us as well. I will recommend this training to my colleagues and encourage them to attend"** Georgina Ball - Manor Farm

**"After the training, I have a better understanding and now I feel I can do more, especially towards engagement"** Harjinder Jheet - WELL Training

**"Course was really interesting and enjoyable. It was nice to meet up with other BCF Partners and learn something new"** Mark Jackson - Accord Age Matters

**"The training was excellent, giving great insight into deaf awareness. It has given me more confidence in dealing with a potential participant who has hearing difficulties"** Mandy Lamedica - Manor Farm

**"Loved practising basic sign language and very engaging style of delivery by Bob"** Peter Hoarle - Black Country Housing Group

**"Bob is a very warm and welcoming person and engaged the session well with all the participants of the day and I thoroughly enjoyed the session. Lovely smiling faces made me feel like I had known them years! I appreciated the length of the session and felt that this was just right. Equally Bob would have continued if further questions were asked and nothing felt 'rushed' Superb bite-sized refresher/ introductory session and I would highly recommend to anyone. Keep up the good work Bob!"** Rachel Evans - Just Straight Talk

**"Straight forward information to access the course - BRILLIANT! Really enjoyed the course - informative and relaxed"** Sue Evans - Manor Farm



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## Free bite-sized Deaf Awareness training enjoyed by our BCF partners!



Zebra Access offered FREE bite-sized Deaf Awareness Training as part of our commitment to our partners on the Black Country Futures (BCF) project and it was immensely enjoyed across the 3 separate sessions; judging by the positive feedback.

Bob Marsh, our Trainer, limited the training, hence 'bite-sized', to 1½ hours per session and everyone thought it fitted perfectly around their very busy schedules and they were able to learn and take away so much benefit from the sessions. Bob said **"it was a privilege to provide the training and also get to meet some of our counterparts on the BCF project. I wanted to make the sessions informative, inspirational and above all, FUN for our participants to enjoy in a short space of time for each session and I think we achieved our objective"**

The feedback received were all really positive and encouraging-

All participants said it was their first time attending an online Deaf awareness session, found it comfortable and easy participating in the training remotely.

All participants found it easy to log in via Zoom and enjoyed meeting other participants.

All said they would recommend the bite-sized Deaf awareness sessions to others.

If you would like more information for future bite-sized Deaf Awareness Training sessions please get in touch with Bob at [bob@zebra-access.com](mailto:bob@zebra-access.com)

[www.zebra-access.com](http://www.zebra-access.com)



*'New Beginnings'*

*'Thank you so much for helping me, felt like I was beating my head against the wall on my own trying to figure out how to start'*

*'You're a star and so helpful, 5starts would recommend you to a friend'*



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## Case Study JST



Amber came as a referral for training and career guidance by Stourbridge family centre. Amber has been a house wife for 13 years and has 4 children and a very supportive husband whom is very encouraging of Amber pursuing a desire for working for the NHS in some capacity.

Amber and her husband's situation have changed during the current covid-19 pandemic due to her husband being furloughed and then subsequently made redundant. Following this unfortunate change in circumstances Amber and her husband have supported each other and Amber feels ready to move forward with achieving her dreams but had no clue where to start, this was until she met with Just Straight Talk and signed up to the BCF-Black Country futures Project.

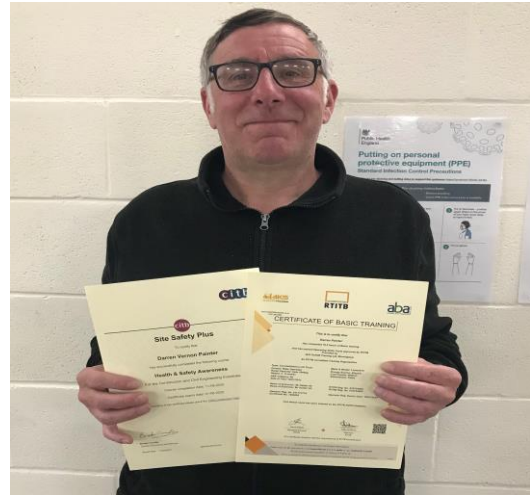
Engagement onto the project started with over the phone contact, gathering information and being proactive with searching for opportunities. Upon an eventual meet, socially distancing with a twist of normality to what we are used to we met face to face at a Café within the local area to Amber.

BCF provided details and information of ideas for career opportunities and really got to know Ambers strengths, interests and weaknesses. Following support Amber was thrilled to be taking opportunity to enrol for distance learning with Telford College. Amber feels that this is just the start of a very exciting journey and is committed to reaching her full potential with helping and caring for others.

We look forward to keeping in contact with ambitious Amber and know great things are going to come her way!



# Case Study



*'The project changed my life; it's been a pleasure working with everyone at Manor farm, thank you very much.'*



**BCF**

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When Darren joined the project he was feeling very low and lost, he didn't know where to turn or what to do.

Having spent many years working for the same employer, redundancy was a big shock to Darren

Darren was somewhat sceptical at first and he didn't really see how the project could help him but nevertheless he gave it a go and the results have been fantastic!

Darren has been an absolutely brilliant participant and has totally thrown himself into the opportunities – joining in with everything that has been offered.

Darren now has an updated CV which really shows off his skills. He has been supported to complete the CITB Health and Safety Awareness course, Working at Height training and most recently he qualified as a Fork-Lift Truck driver.

That's a very impressive training record indeed!

Darren's new found confidence and enthusiasm meant that he was a prime candidate for a public facing role at one of the new Covid-19 test centres. He was thrilled to leave the project and move straight into employment and Darren is confident that this work experience and the training beforehand will have set him up for a very successful future.

We are delighted at Darren's outcomes and so proud to have been able to support him. We miss him very much in our work as Darren was a pleasure to work with but of course, we wouldn't want to change a thing!

Well done Darren, thank you for having faith in us, just as we do in you!

# Back on the road to work!



Like many others in 2020/2021 Peter, 35 found himself out of work in the middle of a global pandemic, having consistently worked in building related industries most of his working life.

Being out of work for several months, Peter was referred to the BCF Project by his work coach at Willenhall Job Centre for help with his work search, as he did not have wi-fi at home. However, it soon became clear that lack of wi-fi was not his only barrier.

Even working remotely, Peter's enthusiasm for working and proactive attitude shone through and it was clear that he was highly employable. He mentioned that he had learnt to drive two years earlier and did in fact have a car, which was indeed taxed and mot'd, but being out of work for several months meant that affording to insure the vehicle was impossible.

Literally within weeks of joining the project, Peter saw the job with Nova Flo Ltd, specialists in installing liquid screed and underfloor heating and quickly found himself on a trial with them. He got on like a house on fire with his new boss and fitted in to the company, but as they work all over the country, being taken on long term was dependant on having his own transport.

This is where the BCF project was able to help, by funding the initial payment of his car insurance to enable him to commit to the job long term and he hasn't looked back since.

Joining the BCF Project was a turning point for Pete and we wish him all the very best for the future!

*'I just want to thank you for all of your help. It's been really good and everything happened so fast!'*



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Dee & Lucia

Just to update you, I went for an interview last week with Midland Metro and guess what? I nailed it! I was a bit nervous at first but relaxed as it went on. I have just received an email from them to advise I have been successful.

Super excited and really looking forward to it.

Thanks for all your help.

Couldn't have done it without you two wonderful ladies. 6 weeks with you has changed my life, you are part of my recovery and I don't think you know how much your support is appreciated.

I have given feedback to job centre and recommended your services to everyone I liaise with.

I have also mentioned to my coach that I would like to take part in the programme, with you both, maybe the first session for a new group. Something along the lines of sharing my life story and journey etc.

L



## Good News Story

L



L was referred to the programme as she was out of work sick and developed OCD due to the COVID-19 pandemic. L had worries about working with the general public due to the risk of contracting COVID-19. L, had multiple qualifications and experience in the health and social sector, but she developed numerous anxieties.

L, hoped to use the programme to find a part-time role working from home. L joined the programme and weekly group sessions although she had some concerns about being part of a group. L became a valuable member of the group supporting and providing guidance to the other group members.

L was an active member of the group and put in loads of effort to reach her goals outside of the programmed session with job searches and work preparation. L was forwarded a job fair opportunity delivered by the Midland Metro by our project officer Dee Jowsey.

L went along to the event and was successful in securing an interview. In L's words she 'nailed it' and was successful in obtaining a role with Midland Metro.

# Case Study- Sam



Sam was referred to project by West Bromwich JCP for wellbeing support. She had taken a break from paid employment to look after her terminally ill husband who had since passed away. She was also supporting with caring for her grandchildren as her daughter had health issues.

Sam identified that she required support to develop her confidence and skills. She had a good employment history and had previously been a care manager in a residential home. Ultimately she did not want to go back into care, as this would be too upsetting after caring for her late husband. She attended some remote wellbeing sessions to encourage her to take time out to look after herself and her own wellbeing.

Once she felt her confidence had grown, we then produced a CV that focussed on her wanting to be in a more shop floor, hands on role rather than a management job. We arranged regular job search appointments where we supported to search and send applications to employers. Sam also received advice on interview skills as she was applying for vacancies in a new area of work. After attending regular appointments Sam gained employment as a Warehouse Operative for an electrical company where she is repackaging small electrical products. She is enjoying the role and now feels more confident in her abilities.

*'I feel I can now look forward to opportunities in the future rather than keep looking back'*

*Sam, IFA BCF participant*



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## RICHARD GAINS A JOB IN DOUBLE QUICK TIME, THANKS TO ZEBRA ACCESS!

Richard commented, "I was amazed to gain a job in such a short time. I started my one to one support with Bob Marsh in July and within a week Bob arranged my interview with Argonaut Enterprises. Bob supported me with interview practice, how to demonstrate my skills, dress code etc which I found very useful. I was so pleased when I was offered the job as a cleaning operative working 20+ hours per week. Big thanks to Bob and Zebra Access, without them I would not have got this job!"

Bob has kept in regular contact with both Richard and Mike to ensure all was well and that Richard was happily settled.

Bob said "It has been a pleasure to support Richard and helping him to gain work. His approach to job searching has been recognised as nothing short of positive and proactive and that is what I believed got him this job so, all credit to Richard! I wish him all the very best in his new position with Argonaut Enterprises and wish to extend our thanks Mike for offering Richard the chance to work again"

Richard's manager, Mike Brickliffe said "After getting an urgent request from a major client for additional cleaning due to Covid 19, we were looking for an independent experienced worker. I contacted Bob at Zebra Access with a list of our requirements, and he gave us Richard's CV as a good match. After meeting Richard, I felt a good rapport with him and felt he would be a great addition to our team. He even brought in a cake for Argonaut's 10<sup>th</sup> birthday! Our clients are very happy to have Richard cleaning for them. We hope he will be with us for a long time to come"



Proud Richard in uniform



Richard with Mike and cake.

Richard registered with Zebra Access' Employment Job Club under their Black Country Futures (BCF) project in July 2020 after previously working for Asda for 10 years. Richard had tried unsuccessfully to apply for several jobs and attended a few interviews without success. After his first appointment with Employment Officer, Bob Marsh they went through Richard's aspirations and quickly established that with Richard's friendly and charismatic approach and customer service background experience he should soon be in work.

Utilising some employer engagement, Bob contacted Mike Brickliffe, Operations Manager at Argonaut Enterprises CIC, as they had a vacancy for a cleaning operative. They requested provision of Richard's CV; which Bob had newly revamped for him. Mike then arranged an interview with Richard but, prior to the interview, Bob provided Richard with some interview role play practice and useful tips.

Argonaut Enterprises CIC were impressed with how Richard conducted himself at his interview and within days, Richard was offered the job! Richard, and all of us here at Zebra Access, were delighted to hear the news. Due to the high-level expectations of the contractor, Richard underwent some training and was soon working at his own initiative and is thoroughly enjoying the experience of being his own 'boss'



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