

# POTENTIAL @ WORK

Make Oxfordshire's potential work for you

## Employers' Resource Pack



“ In today’s global, knowledge economy, an organisation’s success and competitiveness depend upon its ability to embrace diversity and to draw upon the skills, understanding and experience of all people. ”

**Equality and Human Rights Commission**

# POTENTIAL @ WORK

Potential@Work helps Oxfordshire employers tap into the pool of local disadvantaged people who are ready for work.

P@W is delivered in partnership by Aspire Oxfordshire, Oxford Homeless Pathways, Refugee Resource and Restore.



Potential@Work thanks Oxfordshire Economic Partnership for its support and funding.





# Contents

Connecting employers with people who want to work .....	4
Benefits to your business .....	6
Putting potential to work .....	7
Case studies .....	8
Frequently asked questions .....	10
Resources .....	12
Potential@Work partners.....	14

“ I have been working with Gezim since 2007... he is always polite, obliging, punctual and hardworking. One of my best workers, without a doubt. ”

**Housekeeper, Oriel College**

# Connecting employers with people who want to work

**We are fortunate to have high levels of employment in Oxfordshire. Many local employers find it a challenge to identify and recruit good employees. Oxfordshire's innovative Potential@Work campaign promotes the benefits of employing local disadvantaged people, whose talents are often overlooked in today's job market. Potential@Work is delivered in partnership by Aspire Oxfordshire, Oxford Homeless Pathways, Refugee Resource and Restore. Through Potential@Work you will uncover the wealth of underused talent in Oxfordshire, and discover a range of support and information to help you manage new and existing staff.**

## **Potential@Work benefits employers**

Some of the biggest challenges faced by employers are recruiting, training, motivating and retaining good staff. Identifying neglected sources of staff, including local disadvantaged people, will give you a competitive advantage. The reality is you are already employing people with a wide range of life experiences and personal issues. By plugging into possible sources of support and developing your managers' skills, you will give your business the competitive edge that equips you for today's challenging environment.

## **Potential@Work benefits employees**

Having paid work is good for people. Most people want to work, use their skills, contribute to their community and lead worthwhile lives. Work makes people healthier, happier and more independent. A diverse workplace is great for staff morale, which in turn enhances recruitment and retention rates.



## Potential@Work benefits our community

Many Oxfordshire employers are unaware of the potential talents of the disadvantaged people in our community. Having a pool of untapped human potential has costs to individuals, employers, social care services, the economy and society. Our society as a whole benefits when people integrate and contribute.

## Potential@Work benefits each of us

As taxpayers, we all benefit when people progress from receiving welfare benefits and social care support to being financially independent. As employers we benefit when a new employee relishes their opportunity to give back to the company that gave them a chance to prove themselves.

## Who are your potential employees?

Your potential employees are refugees, people with a history of homelessness, and people with a history of mental health issues. Like all of us, disadvantaged people have a range of strengths, skills, experiences and interests. What they share is a sense of purpose, skills in self-management, willpower and a willingness to work hard.

Potential@Work mentors disadvantaged people who are ready for work. People who are aware of their strengths and limits, and who are able to manage themselves effectively.

Your potential employees are resourceful people who have moved to a foreign country to seek freedom and justice; motivated people who have pulled themselves off the streets; determined people who have learned to manage their mental health issues. Your potential employees have overcome immense obstacles and achieved great progress in their personal lives while retaining the desire to work. Your potential employees have robust support networks and the knowledge to use them.

**Your potential employees are not your average workers. They are among the most committed, keen and hard working people you will ever meet.**

**Did you know?**  
87% of employees believe a company that supports society and community is probably a good company to work for.  
(Source: Business in the Community)



# Benefits to your business

**Employers can experience significant business benefits when they provide disadvantaged people with work experience or employment opportunities.**

**Why not choose to make a difference for your business and your community?**

**Make Oxfordshire's potential work for you.**

## Reduced recruitment costs

Many disadvantaged people already have qualifications and work experience, and are readily available for work. Most refugees with low levels of English language skills simply undertake a generic conversion course or spoken English practice to prepare them for work.

## Higher retention rates

Disadvantaged employees are highly motivated to work and get their lives back on track. Because of all the hurdles they have had to jump to get to where they are now, they have developed strength of character and a willingness to work hard. With gaps in their work history, disadvantaged people are more likely to stay longer in their jobs. Anecdotal evidence from employers indicates that they show high levels of enthusiasm and loyalty to their company.

## Happier staff

A diverse workplace can boost staff morale. According to Business in the Community, 87% of employees believe a company that supports society and community is probably a good company to work for. Your staff may gain great benefit through having opportunities to work alongside or mentor colleagues who have developed strength of character to overcome great difficulties.

## Stronger workplace

Your broad, creative recruitment strategy will ensure a strong, diverse workforce. Diversity enlivens traditional ways of working and introduces new ideas, skills and experiences, which can be of great benefit to your business. Employing diverse staff is likely to result in greater consumer confidence among people of similar backgrounds.

## It's a win/win situation

- ✓ Disadvantaged people in Oxfordshire have many of the skills and experience you need.
- ✓ Disadvantaged people make loyal, motivated employees.
- ✓ Employing disadvantaged people is good for you, your business and your community.
- ✓ An opportunity to fulfil your corporate social responsibility, demonstrating your corporate citizenship credentials to your staff and customers.
- ✓ Potential@Work can point you in the direction of advice, information and support.

## High quality skills and competencies

Having successfully overcome diverse life challenges, our clients are resourceful, resilient and self-aware. In addition, refugees are more highly skilled and qualified on average than UK citizens and may contribute new language skills that bring a competitive edge to your business. Research indicated that many businesses struggle to market their services or products to minority and ethnic communities. More than 65% of refugees speak three languages and could be a great asset for your workplace. (Source: Department for Work and Pensions)

## Support networks

There is a wide range of information and support available for employers of disadvantaged people, and Potential@Work can point you in the right direction. In addition, Potential@Work partners assist their clients to build robust support systems as part of their reintegration into society, so your new employee could have a ready-made support network in place before their work placement or job starts.

# Putting potential to work

**We encourage employers to trial prospective new employees through a temporary work placement. We work closely with employers and candidates, providing support and advice before, during and after the placement. Here are some of the key learning points we have gained during the time we have been working in partnership with employers to provide work opportunities for disadvantaged people.**

## **Mentoring**

Each work placement candidate is allocated a Potential@Work mentor whose role is to help ensure the placement is a success for all concerned. The mentor will advise whether your company is eligible for a back to work payment, which is provided by Jobcentre Plus.

## **Planning**

The work placement role and tasks need to be clearly defined, which can be arranged during a preliminary meeting between the employer and Potential@Work mentor, followed by a three-way meeting including the candidate. Terms and conditions are discussed and agreed during these meetings including placement duration, working hours, payment and disciplinary processes.

## **Expectations**

The work placement is always considered to be a temporary arrangement unless a suitable permanent position is definitely available. This helps prevent employers or candidates developing unrealistic expectations. Expectations about behaviour, personal presentation, punctuality and performance are discussed and agreed with the candidate during the pre-placement meeting.

## **Line management**

Candidates benefit greatly from having a nominated point of contact throughout their placement. Ideally, this person will be their line manager or immediate supervisor. This structure facilitates the timely discussion of any issues as they arise.

## **Communication**

During the placement, the Potential@Work mentor will maintain regular contact with the line manager, providing advice and support as needed. This also enables the mentor to maintain a record of the candidate's progress, and to provide positive reinforcement or challenge any behaviour affecting the placement.

## **Did you know?**

Many employment sectors are experiencing severe skills shortages and are dependent on skilled workers from overseas. According to the Department for Work and Pensions, 53% of refugees have academic qualifications and most possess relevant work experience.



# Case studies

**Employer:** Slade Estate Services Ltd

**We employ eight people and have been in business since 1987. We provide landscape maintenance services, working mainly in south Oxfordshire. We have a well-established team of gardeners and felt in a position to give a chance (and support, if necessary) to someone from Aspire.**

“We chose to give a chance to someone who, by strength of character, had worked through his problems and become stronger”

We were delighted when we heard one of their clients was ready to move into the job market. It's fair to say there were many people out there who could have come to us with more skills and qualifications. However, we chose to give a chance to someone who, by strength of character, had worked through his problems and become stronger.

The staff all took to Tom immediately. While his previous troubles were by no means ignored, they did not at any time form the focus of comment or discussion. Tom was keen to learn how we operate and, long before the end of his three-month probation period, he became a fully committed and accepted member of our team.

Making the greatest amount of money has never been the focus of our company – rather, we work to create an enjoyable work environment with a well-motivated workforce. We hope more employers will find out for themselves that 'doing the right thing' is immensely satisfying and giving people a chance should be the norm, not the exception.

**Employee:** Tom, landscape maintenance gardener, Slade Estate Services Ltd



“Before, my life was in quite a mess, my future was looking bleak. I am very grateful for being given the opportunity to get back into work, which seemed impossible before. Thanks to Aspire and Slade Estate Services, I am now in full-time employment and enjoying all the benefits that come with it.”

**Employer:** Oxford City Supplies

**If a work experience candidate has made the decision to try to overcome their fear and make the effort to regain the skills they have lost, then we feel we would like to give them the opportunity to achieve this. Every candidate is different and comes with their own set of issues, which also gives us as an opportunity to expand our own knowledge and understanding.**

“ Day-by-day you see people’s confidence grow and watch them enjoying the experience that will hopefully put them on the right track ”

We understand some candidates have not been in a work environment for a very long time, if at all. The biggest satisfaction is seeing people evolve from quiet, withdrawn characters who watch from the sidelines to people who integrate with the team, bond with colleagues and make a positive input. They are no longer looking in from the outside.

We continue to give our support to people who are going through a stage in their life that has caused them to drop out of mainstream society and away from the everyday things that we find so ‘normal’. Day-by-day you see people’s confidence grow and watch them enjoying the experience that will hopefully put them on the right track to achieve their goals.

**Employee:** Tariq, successfully completed temporary job with Oxford City Supplies



Previously, Tariq owned a restaurant but when his relationship broke down his problems escalated and eventually he became homeless. When he heard about the possibility of a temporary job at Oxford City Supplies, he was very enthusiastic.

Tariq’s placement mentor accompanied him to an informal meeting with the manager at Oxford City Supplies. Tariq was offered a trial shift, which he completed successfully. Subsequently, he was employed on a temporary basis for 16 hours a week, which did not affect his benefits. He was paid £5.60 an hour, which he welcomed because he wanted to pay off his debts.

Tariq’s role involved preparing orders by picking items off the storage shelves and loading them into vans ready for delivery. He enjoyed the opportunity to learn new skills and find out about the various products used by businesses. He was particularly struck by the fact that there are more than 20 brands of industrial cleaners. Tariq also went out on deliveries from time to time, which he really enjoyed.

When the temporary contract ended Tariq was offered a full-time post, which unfortunately he could not accept while living in emergency accommodation because this would incur a prohibitively steep rise in his rent payments.

On his last day, staff presented Tariq with a DVD player and some clothes. Several months later he received an invitation to the staff Christmas party, which he thoroughly enjoyed.

Tariq says the temporary job gave him confidence and he has never felt so valued before in a workplace. He liked being kept busy and meeting new people, and it gave him something to get up for in the morning. Tariq is keen to take up another opportunity once he has found longer-term accommodation.

# Frequently asked questions

**Here are some of the questions most frequently asked by employers who are considering offering work placements or jobs to disadvantaged people. Visit [www.potentialatwork.org.uk](http://www.potentialatwork.org.uk) for more information and links to employer resources.**

## **Q.** How do I know the person will fit in?

**A.** By offering a work placement to a prospective candidate you have an opportunity to get to know the person before making a longer-term commitment. Before the placement is agreed, you will be able to meet the placement candidate to discuss your work culture, requirements and expectations. Remember, many of your staff may have experienced similar issues: for example, 1 in 6 people have a mental health condition and some of them are your employees. Research indicates that employees with mental health problems tend to take less time off sick than others.

## **Q.** Will we be able to communicate with each other?

**A.** Most refugees who have low levels of English language skills undertake an English course to prepare them for work and life in the UK. More than half have academic qualifications and most possess work experience (Source: Department for Work and Pensions). If you have any concerns about a potential employee's communication skills, you could offer them a temporary placement that allows you to assess their suitability for the post.

## **Q.** How do we check if people from overseas are entitled to work in the UK?

**A.** Refugees have had their application for asylum accepted and been granted refugee status. From an employer's perspective a refugee is a legal resident, and can be recruited and employed just like any UK citizen. Any one of these documents will verify permission to work:

- Home Office letter granting permission to work.
- Travel document / passport.
- Application Registration Card (ARC) stating 'Employment permitted'.

Some asylum seekers have 'Exceptional Leave to Remain' or 'Humanitarian Protection', which gives them the right to work.

## **Q.** Will my new employee be reliable?

**A.** Anecdotal evidence from employers indicates that disadvantaged people make dependable, enthusiastic and loyal employees. They tend to be highly motivated to get their lives back on track, and have developed strength of character and a willingness to work hard. They have also spent time building robust support systems as part of their reintegration into society, so your new employee may have a stronger sense of connectedness than the general workforce.

## **Q.** Can disadvantaged people provide references?

**A.** Your prospective employee may have been out of work for some time or never formally employed, and may not be able to provide relevant references from previous employers. However, Potential@Work partners will provide references for our work-ready clients. In addition, Potential@Work mentors will support you with setting up work placements.

**Q. How does Potential@Work support work experience placements?**

**A.** Each placement candidate is allocated a back-to-work mentor. The mentor and candidate work closely together, before and during the placement. The mentor provides on-going advice, information and support to the candidate and the employer to help ensure the placement is a success.

**Q. How does Potential@Work support employers?**

**A.** Potential@Work partners offer a range of support for companies who provide work experience placements or paid employment to people who are using our services. This includes free mentors and, if necessary, reduced price training.

**Q. If the placement goes well, can I offer paid employment?**

**A.** Please contact the placement mentor if you wish to extend a placement or offer paid employment. The mentor will advise you of any issues, such as benefit restrictions, that may affect your potential employee's ability to accept such an offer.



“The two young men, Mohammed and Iskander worked with us on a placement organised through Refugee Resource. They turned out to be very hardworking, honest, helpful and reliable workers.

Some of my staff asked them questions about their lives: how they got here and why they were working instead of claiming benefits. They answered that they didn't want to rely on benefits and also wanted to challenge the belief that refugees just come to the UK to claim welfare benefits. The doubts in some staff members' minds have been cast aside. We learned not to be judgemental and to be more accepting.

Both men made a very big impression on my staff and me. We still talk about them, and wonder what they are doing and how they are. I think people like Mohammed and Iskander, who are working hard and being open, will make a big difference to people's attitudes towards refugees. ”

**Manager, Kitchen Department,  
Queen Elizabeth House**

# Resources

**If you are interested in offering a work placement or job to someone who has experienced disadvantage and lives locally please visit our website [www.potentialatwork.org.uk](http://www.potentialatwork.org.uk) for ideas, advice and information.**

## **Oxfordshire Economic Partnership (OEP)**

Formed in 1998 by key business support organisations, local authorities, academic institutions and businesses to inspire and motivate private, public and social enterprise partners to align their plans and activities towards the achievement of shared goals for the economic success of Oxfordshire. OEP funds Potential@Work.

⇒ [www.oep.org.uk](http://www.oep.org.uk)

## **Business Link Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire**

Provides advice and ideas to help you deal with challenges and opportunities, and grow your business. It also provides a range of advice and information about employing different types of people, including people who have disabilities, elderly and young people, and people from overseas.

⇒ [www.businesslink.gov.uk/southeast](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk/southeast)

## **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)**

CSR is about understanding your business impact on the wider world and considering how you can use this impact in a positive way. It means taking a responsible attitude, going beyond minimum legal requirements and following straightforward principles that apply whatever the size of your business. Business Link provides a guide that explains how CSR can benefit your bottom line.

⇒ [www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk)

## **ROBIN (Responsible Oxfordshire Businesses Network)**

The local Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) network, ROBIN, is looking for local businesses to join founder member Morgan Cole in making a difference to Oxfordshire.

⇒ Join ROBIN by visiting [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com).  
Or email [csr@ocva.org.uk](mailto:csr@ocva.org.uk).

## **Oxfordshire Race Equality Network**

Network members are human resources professionals, line managers and advisory partners who support their companies to deliver improved practices with regard to equality in the workplace and service provision. The Network is an Oxfordshire Racial Equality Council (OREC) Project.

⇒ [www.oeren.org](http://www.oeren.org)

## **Employability Forum**

This national, independent organisation promotes the employment of refugees and the integration of migrant workers in the UK.

⇒ [www.employabilityforum.co.uk](http://www.employabilityforum.co.uk)

## **Employers' Forum on Disability (EFD)**

The world's leading employers' organisation focused on disability as it affects business. EFD's mission is to enable companies to become disability confident by making it easier to recruit and retain disabled employees, and to serve disabled customers.

⇒ [www.efd.org.uk](http://www.efd.org.uk)

## **Talent not Tokenism**

In today's global knowledge economy a company's success depends on its ability to embrace diversity. Produced by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Talent not Tokenism is a guide to workplace diversity. The guide provides advice on how to identify, nurture and promote talent, and contains good practice case studies of employers who have benefited by creating a more diverse workforce.

⇒ [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)

## **Refugee Council**

The largest UK organisation working with asylum seekers and refugees provides Employing Refugees, a short guide to the main documents that demonstrate entitlement to work in the UK.

⇒ [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk)

## Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)

MHFA is a 12-hour intensive course, usually delivered over two days. The course is designed for anyone who may come into contact with people with mental health issues, for example at work, and provides an overview of common mental health problems, causes, symptoms and treatments. In Oxfordshire the course is delivered by Potential@Work partner Restore.

➔ [www.mhfa.co.uk](http://www.mhfa.co.uk)

## Create a healthy workplace

This Shaw Trust website provides advice and information about recruiting staff who disclose a mental health condition; helping people return to work after a period of mental ill health; and supporting staff with mental health issues.

➔ [www.tacklementalhealth.org.uk](http://www.tacklementalhealth.org.uk)

## Shelter Helpline

National charity provides advice and information about homelessness.

➔ <http://england.shelter.org.uk>

## Benefits

Financial incentives may be available from Jobcentre Plus for companies employing Potential@Work clients.

➔ [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)

**If you know of other services and resources that would be of interest to employers who want to make a difference in Oxfordshire, please send details to [info@potentialatwork.org.uk](mailto:info@potentialatwork.org.uk).**

## Did you know?

Many Oxfordshire employers appreciate the benefits of employing staff with diverse skills and experience. More than 65% of refugees speak their mother tongue plus two additional languages

(Source: Department for Work and Pensions)

“ Giving people a chance should be the norm, not the exception. ”

**Slade Estate Services Ltd**

Go to [www.potentialatwork.org.uk](http://www.potentialatwork.org.uk) for a fully up-to-date list of resources and links



# Potential@Work partners

**We work independently and collectively to provide targeted support for disadvantaged and marginalised people living in Oxfordshire. We work with people who have mental health issues, refugees and people who have experienced homelessness to access training, volunteering and work placement opportunities, and paid employment.**



Established in 1999, Aspire Oxfordshire is a social enterprise with charitable status. We run high quality businesses, providing opportunities for ex-homeless people to gain work experience before Aspire supports them into independent sustained employment. We regularly see individuals change their lives dramatically through work.  
➔ [www.aspireoxford.co.uk](http://www.aspireoxford.co.uk)



We provide high quality and effective homelessness services in Oxford City, including emergency and second stage accommodation, support planning and resettlement, training and education programmes, and links to other services.  
➔ [www.oxhop.org.uk](http://www.oxhop.org.uk)



Refugee Resource aims to relieve distress, improve wellbeing and facilitate the integration of refugees and asylum seekers by providing practical, social and psychological support. Our employment service offers employers access to committed, hard-working employees, and provides advice and information about permission to work and overseas qualifications.  
➔ [www.refugeeresource.org](http://www.refugeeresource.org)



A specialist mental health charity, we enable people with mental health problems to recover, get jobs, increase their skills, do more, and change their lives. We support employers to engage with staff with mental health problems. We provide accredited Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training.  
➔ [www.restore.org.uk](http://www.restore.org.uk)

“ Roza first came here on a work experience placement. She became our administrator and then trained to be our bookkeeper. Roza exemplifies how, given a chance, refugees can make excellent employees. ”

**Chief Executive, East Oxford Action Ltd**

# POTENTIAL @ WORK

Make Oxfordshire's potential work for you

[www.potential@work.org.uk](http://www.potential@work.org.uk)

“ We were impressed from day one with Tony’s attitude and ability to gel with the team. Clearly, his experience has enabled him to develop skills and a dedication that has directly benefited our work. ”

**Head of Business Development, Morgan Cole**



Make Oxfordshire’s potential work for you

[info@potentialatwork.org.uk](mailto:info@potentialatwork.org.uk)

The Potential@Work initiative is sponsored by:



**Potential@Work partners:** Aspire Oxfordshire (Registered Charity No 1113932), Oxford Homelessness Pathways (Registered Charity No 297806), Refugee Resource (Registered Charity No 1098876) and Restore (Registered Charity No 274222).

For reasons of confidentiality, some photographs are for representational purposes only, and names have been changed.

Written and designed by [www.goodthinkingcommunications.net](http://www.goodthinkingcommunications.net)

Photo credits : Jeff Milner, Darren Baker, Joe Tamassy, Gabrielle Dunkelman, Steve Cole, Chris Schmidt, Andres Rodriguez, Chris Fulton/[www.simplicityphotography.co.uk](http://www.simplicityphotography.co.uk)

[www.potentialatwork.org.uk](http://www.potentialatwork.org.uk)