



Empowering people to transform their lives



Annual Report

2019 - 2020

Why Clients come to Works for Us – Client Feedback

"I wanted to say a huge thank you. For Nettie's (Confident to Work) course, the support from you all and for my focusing chat with Tracey. I refocused, I moved on, a step at a time. I found a local job advert as a Parish Manager, part-time, flexible. It all happened so fast, I had the interview and then after I had been home for an hour they phoned and offered the position! I still can't actually believe it, they accepted my transferable skills and seem really keen to train me up to cover the areas like the accounting that I need to pick up a little knowledge from."

"I found myself out of a job for the first time in 30 years due to redundancy and felt like a rabbit stuck in the headlights with no direction as to where to go next. My CV was out date, Linked In profile was blank and I had no idea what to expect from an interview. Works for Us changed all this with advice through 1-2-1 careers advice, courses exploring interview techniques, CVs and even advice on how to dress to impress. Staff and volunteers are welcoming and friendly, and I now have the confidence to look for a new role now I have the skills to do so."

"Since meeting the team at Works for Us which began in November, they have been able to give me the support I never had before. If I had known about you in 2014 when I became unemployed, I would have come for help then. I have been so pleased with the support from the one to one meetings with Kelly, Jay from the NCS and Rachel at the NEP.... WfU and the NEP is a really friendly environment to be working in. This is something everyone should be aware of - for 38 years since I was 12 years old, I have suffered from petit mal epilepsy and usually have around 7 seizures a month. Since I have joined the support teams (at WfU and the NEP) they have taken so much worry and anxiety away from me. Since I joined in November, I have not had one seizure break out. I cannot thank you all enough for all you have helped me with... "

Chairs Report

Dear Friends,

As it comes to the end of our 40th year, it is also our third, and final, year of project funding from the National Lottery Reaching Communities Fund. The POP project has been successful and effective in achieving positive outcomes for our clients. Together with some ESF funding we have, during the last three years, engaged with over 1160 clients; meeting and exceeding our outcomes targets, with over 200 people moving on to paid employment or further education/training.

The funding has allowed us to provide a range of support to our clients which includes ESOL, Computer Literacy, Interpersonal skills, Preparation for Work courses, building confidence through Art classes, one to one coaching, Dress for Success, practice interviews and volunteering opportunities. We have also managed to increase our reserves to a more sustainable level during this year.

As the POP Funding was coming to an end a significant amount of time and endeavour has been spent in working on securing future funding, to continue our services and best meet the needs of our clients. We have focused on developing a proposal to apply for further funding from the National Lottery - with additional support from Milton Keynes Council and MK Community Foundation. In order to inform the bid, a range of focus groups have been held with a wide cross representation of community members in Milton Keynes which provided valuable insight into what has worked well and what we need to change and adapt. The bid will be a joint project in partnership with Citizens Advice Milton Keynes with a view to establishing a 'One Stop Shop' (based at the Library in CMK). People will be able to get advice and help with money, benefits, housing and employment in one place at the same time. The insight gained from the focus groups has helped to steer the bid to deliver the most effective pathway for our clients. This new bid has also helped to start to deliver on one of our strategic objectives of finding a suitable partner to help improve our services to clients who are looking for work or wishing to change or improve their job opportunities.

In August 2019 we were informed by the National Lottery Reaching Communities Fund our bid was successful and as such approximately £500k was allocated to us and Citizens Advice Milton Keynes over the course of the next 3 years. We were able to announce our success in October 19 when we could actually begin the project.

Once again, I wish to convey my sincere gratitude to Works for Us Staff, Tutors and Volunteers without whom this would not be possible. This year we said farewell to Natasha Evans, our Supported Volunteering Co-ordinator who has moved to pastures new. A special thank you to our Funders and Supporters throughout this year - we are indebted to you and grateful for your continued support. I also wish to thank my fellow Trustees for their time and support, I appreciate everything you do to assist WfU and me.

As we have come to expect, this year has had its own set of challenges to overcome and we are still here and delivering. We do not know what next year will bring as the Government has announced a national lockdown due to Covid 19.

Alexa C Wilkinson, MBE

Chair of Trustees, Works for Us

March 2020

Services and training offered

The charity provides the following Services and training:

- Careers Information, Advice and Guidance
- Employability and progression support
- Volunteering/work experience – support to find appropriate roles to develop work-based skills and confidence.
- Job Clubs – supported job search, CV preparation and help with job applications
- Personal Development – Interpersonal Skills, Confidence building courses and Art workshops
- Basic skills– Computing and English for non- British clients (ESOL) classes
- Support to improve health and wellbeing - through access to NLP coaching and courses on Improving Wellbeing, Dealing with Stress & Anxiety and Making Positive Changes (A Solution Focused approach)
- Job related skills - Getting Ready for Work (GRoW) provides job related skills including identifying skills and strengths, CV preparation and interview techniques and skills coaching
- Access to one- to- one support and the provision of good quality work clothing (through the Dress for Success project) for interviews and for those starting work
- Access to external job-related services such as National Careers Service and the Neighbourhood Employment Project
- Support to improve health and wellbeing – through access to informal learning opportunities and clubs.

Most of our work is undertaken with those that are considered to be furthest away from the job market and who face multiple barriers or challenges to gaining secure and stable employment. We have a successful history of helping disadvantaged people - these include those: with low skills; from ethnic and migrant communities; with physical and/or mental health issues, having few or no qualifications; recovering from domestic violence; and carers and lone parents. Many of the clients we see will be affected by more than one issue and the above list is not exhaustive.

Performance and Achievements

This year, we have continued to provide our core services and have achieved successful outcomes on our third (and final) year of project funding from the Big Lottery 'Reaching Communities' Award. The Personalised Opportunities Package (POP) was a three-year project which aimed to develop and improve a range of skills for people who are unemployed – in particular those further away from the labour market. The project began in February 2016, and officially finished at the end of January 2019, however an accrued under spend enabled us to continue running the project until October 2019.

The POP project has enabled us to continue to provide an important service to help address the barriers that disadvantaged people face in gaining, and remaining in, work. Over the course of the project, we engaged with over 1160 clients. More than 700 clients have attended courses and training which has helped them progress towards employment, further education or training with over 200 successfully obtaining work. Analysis of our client characteristics shows that we have a considerable spread across the different areas of Milton Keynes and that we meet a wide range of needs across our client base.

We then commenced a new three-year project, again funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, working in partnership with Citizens Advice Milton Keynes. The Integrated Support and Advice Partnership (ISAP) aims to improve outcomes for clients by integrating the services and support provided by both organisations.

The ISAP project has expanded our service base with an office in the central library in Milton Keynes where clients can drop-in and access support from us and our partner, Citizens Advice. Our training courses continue to be delivered from our offices at The Point with any follow-on casework undertaken at Acorn House. During these first few months of the project, we have over 170 new clients registered with us in addition to an existing cohort of more than 180 clients who were still accessing services through the previous POP project. During this time, 50 clients have successfully obtained employment.

During this year we have continued to maintain strong and effective partnerships with other providers; referral partners across the sector; and public sector agencies and continue to make some inroads into building contacts and connections across the commercial and private sector.

Plans for future periods

The current uncertainty generated by the Covid-19 pandemic has made planning, at least in the short term, challenging. We aim to ensure that we can optimise our reach across Milton Keynes to ensure that we meet current and forthcoming needs as well as supporting our existing clients. Our energies will be focused on ensuring that the partnership project is effective and adaptive in order to meet the needs of our clients, particularly in the light of the current economic climate.

In as much as it is possible to make any plans, we continue to work towards our long-standing aim of developing a partnership which would be beneficial for our clients and help improve the sustainability of our charity. We are a small operation and unless we scale up our operations then we remain vulnerable. The current funding climate has in recent times, shifted away from employability provision (although the levels of need remain the same) and we believe that developing such a partnership will make us more effective and efficient. Our partnership with Citizens Advice MK will enable us to test out the feasibility of developing a longer-term arrangement beneficial to both parties whilst ensuring we continue to improve client outcomes.

During the lockdown we acquired the lease on the Skills Centre which is located in the Shopping Centre. The lease is for five years and is rent free. The offices are fully furnished, and we have purchased the computer equipment from the previous tenants. We had been looking for alternative premises for some time as our current base at the Point is due to be redeveloped. As soon as circumstances allow, we will be looking to move the bulk of our services to the new offices which will also allow for co-location of additional services to provide a central facility for our clients to access the services they need.

We continue to seek new funding opportunities as they arise and to build and strengthen our existing partnerships across the voluntary and public sector.

We also wish to deliver outreach provision to those areas of Milton Keynes identified where unemployment and child poverty levels are higher than the borough average.

Financial Accounts Review

Year ended 31 March 2020	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total
INCOME & ENDOWMENTS FROM			
Grants	-	73,150	73,150
Donations & Legacies	5,291	-	5,291
Fundraising activities	987	-	987
Investment income/interest	20	-	20
TOTAL INCOME & ENDOWMENTS	6,298	73,150	79,448
EXPENDITURE ON			
Charitable expenditure	1,509	20,236	21,745
Support costs	829	69,072	69,901
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	2,338	89,308	91,646
NET BEFORE TRANSFERS	3,960	(16,158)	(12,198)
Transfer between funds	--	--	--
NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS	3,960	(16,158)	(12,198)
Funds brought forward	22,696	43,776	66,472
Funds carried forward	26,656	27,618	54,274

This year we continued to receive funding from the National Lottery Community Fund. We continue to identify relevant funding streams and are looking to diversify our income streams through collaboration in partnership with others, corporate fundraising and sponsorship.

Fundraising and donations

This year Works for Us was able to support other charities and organisations by sharing their facilities, to which these organisations have paid a donation towards overhead costs. We also held a quiz night which was successful and raised funds on the night.

About Us – The Team

The trustees 2019/20	Staff
Alexa Wilkinson - Chair	Marion Cole – Chief Executive
Amanda Carter-Philpott - Vice-chair	Tracy Whitmore – Operational Manager
Chris Wood – Treasurer	Kelly Murdoch – Information Advice & Guidance Services Manager
Sam Bridger	Natasha Evans – Supported Volunteer Co-ordinator - Left May 2019
Yvonne Elliott	Claire Sly – Information Advice & Guidance Adviser started Dec 2019 – Left July 2020
Nikki Goldman	Tracey Watson – Information Advice & Guidance Adviser – started July 2020
Tutors	
Wamedh Abdulkereem	Lisa Bailey
Jay Bassral	Susie Ford
Avril Francome	Arti Kakkad
Roy McDonald	Robert Morrell
Annette Norrish	Mehjabeen Rais
Volunteers	
Glen Brockwell	Debbie Buscaglia
Maggie Clarke	Alex Connon
Stephanie Cousins	Jack Elliott
Jo Farmer	Carol Farrington
Daryl Gillham	Andrew Hall
Michael Hawes	Lesley Henson
Michelle Hopkinson	Michelle Housden
Marnie May	Jackie McCracken
Ian Nicholson	Luba Parsons
Karen Peach	Lizzie Sharp
Abigail Stephenson	Kelly Treadway
Jacqui Watson	Jamie Whitmore

Thank you for your support!

We would like to thank the individuals, organisations, companies and funders who have helped us this year – we really appreciate and value your support.

These have included:

Mirus IT who continue to provide invaluable support to us on an ongoing basis - and especially when IT problems arise.

Evidence Talks - Our thanks to Elizabeth Sheldon, Chief Executive who continues to support us in many ways.

Soroptimists International (Milton Keynes branch) who have funded some research for us this year and also provided us with bags of good quality clothes and outfits contributing to our range of clothes for our Working Wardrobe.

Coaching Forever. Roy McDonald and his colleagues who continue to provide pro bono coaching for our clients on a regular basis.

Isotrak – who have donated computer monitors and other IT equipment.

As always, our thanks to our patron, Dr Ann Limb CBE DL for her continued support.

And finally, a big thank you to all our volunteers who make an invaluable contribution to all the work we do!



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