



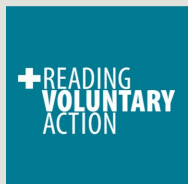
Work
Self-employment
Volunteering



Explore your options and opportunities

October 2019

The Stronger Together partnership is a Building Better Opportunities project which has received £1.3 million of funding from The National Lottery Community Fund and the European Social Fund as part of the 2014–2020 European Structural and Investment Funds Growth Programme in England. For more information visit www.gov.uk/european-growth-funding.



This booklet has been produced by Reading Voluntary Action on behalf of the Stronger Together partnership.

www.rva.org.uk/stronger-together

Reading Borough Council



The lead organisation for Stronger Together is Reading Borough Council (RBC), who manage the programme on behalf of the partnership. Reading Borough Council provide operational leadership across the partnership, ensure compliance to funding requirements, monitor progress of the project overall, and provide regular reports to The National Lottery Community Fund.

Get in touch

Stronger Together Project Manager

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Stronger Together Referral Coordinator

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About Stronger Together

The Stronger Together partnership offers free help to people who need support to get into employment or self-employment, or just move closer to either of these goals.

To be eligible to take part in the project you need to be unemployed or economically inactive, aged 25 or older, and living in Reading or West Berkshire.

Get in touch with one of the partners or the Referral Coordinator today to access a wide range of support – from confidence building and career planning, to training and volunteering, and much more.

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Mapis CIC

Mapis is a dynamic Community Interest Company (CIC) on a mission to help people overcome barriers to gaining meaningful and sustainable employment, or indeed, creating it themselves by setting up their own business or enterprise.

Careers in Retail is an intensive retail, customer service and employability skills training course. Participants gain an insight into what the retail industry is actually about: what kind of skills you can use and the pathways you can find, from marketing and HR to finance and buying.

The Enterprise Bootcamp is an intensive enterprise training programme designed for budding entrepreneurs looking to start their own business. The programme covers ideas, presentation skills, competition, target market, marketing strategy, finances and market analysis. All students receive their own business plan to fill out.

The main skills developed during the course are creativity, communication, confidence, networking and teamwork. Last year's enterprise programme in Whitley (pictured above and on the cover) was a great success, with the students even starting their own CIC to support other aspiring entrepreneurs in the local area.

Suit2Go by Mapis

Suit2Go is a dressing service for unemployed men that gives participants the opportunity to go into a job interview feeling more confident – with a new outfit, carefully selected for them from thousands of corporate donations, as well as styling products, and advice on how to approach the interview.



Participants take part in an exercise which can help them to identify their strengths, and the sorts of jobs they will be happiest in. For some clients, this might be the first opportunity they've had to reflect on what kind of job is right for them – and how their unique set of skills and experience can benefit companies.

Maggie Sikora, Managing Director of Mapis, explains how this approach benefits people who may be very disillusioned by the system: "Last year we saw a client who was so discouraged and disappointed, it was difficult to get him to engage. But now he understands what he's looking for in a job, not just what employers are looking for from him, the improvement in his self-esteem is just incredible ... he's a different person. He is calling me to keep me updated, letting me know what kind of research he's doing. He's so engaged."

Find out more

Get in touch with Peter Sikora or Maggie Sikora by emailing info@mapis.org.uk or phoning 01344 203007.

New Directions

New Directions can offer you tailored, one-to-one support to help you develop your skills, find the right job opportunities, and help you through the application and interview process. We offer an holistic service which enables you to tackle your barriers to work and build your confidence and motivation, working with local organisations to meet your needs. Your adviser will help you identify work placement and volunteering opportunities, training to gain qualifications or employability skills, and suitable job vacancies working with local employers.

Find out more

For more information or to book an appointment with an adviser, contact David Bolam by emailing david.bolam@reading.gov.uk or calling 07976 154184 or 0118 937 3358.

New Directions Case Studies

Paul found out about the BBO project when he attended a session at RBC about volunteering opportunities.

Previously a fabric engineer, chronic foot pain has meant that Paul has been out of work 9 years.



His New Directions adviser, Zeba, helped Paul to access food parcels and supported him in dealing with his financial problems by signposting him to Reading Community Welfare Rights Unit for help with a PIP claim.

With support from Zeba, Paul enrolled on courses to improve his Maths, English and ICT skills. He has also been supporting learners in entry level ICT classes at New Directions. The project was able to pay Paul's travel expenses to allow him to attend the training at New Directions.

Paul is very motivated and would like to progress to more advanced ICT courses and eventually find a role teaching ICT to adults. The project has supported Paul to grow in confidence and positivity, and to take the initiative in working towards his career ambitions.

Jennifer came to the BBO project with wide-ranging interests and wanted to enrol on all the courses she possibly could. Her adviser, Zeba, helped her to organise her thoughts and narrow things down.

With Zeba's support, Jennifer decided to focus on volunteering placements, as well as working towards a Maths qualification at New Directions.

Jennifer now volunteers in a range of roles, including helping with children's play activities at a nursery school and toddler group, and serving refreshments at a local garden. She is also enrolled on a Maths course. The project has helped her to be focused, and to develop her sense of confidence and satisfaction.



Reading Community Welfare Rights Unit

Reading
Community
Welfare Rights
Unit

Reading Community Welfare Rights Unit has been delivering high-quality welfare benefits advice in and around Reading since 1998. We are independent, impartial, confidential and free. We can advise on whether you are getting the correct benefits and help you apply for them. We can also help you appeal benefit decisions and support you through the process.

Find out more

Email advisor@readingspecialist.co.uk or phone 0118 955 1070, (Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, 10am to 3pm).

For updates on the project

Go to the Stronger Together website
www.rva.org.uk/stronger-together

Go to www.rva.org.uk/stronger-together-subscribe to sign-up to the Stronger Together newsletter



Meet the Stronger Together Referral Coordinator

Hi, I'm Sharon Fitton, the Referral Coordinator for the Stronger Together partnership.



I'm keen to build relationships with employers in Reading and West Berkshire, as well as organisations in the public and private sector who might be interested in referring clients.

If you know of existing groups who would like to hear a talk about the project, or you'd like to find out more about what the partnership can offer you, then please get in touch.

Contact Sharon

Contact Sharon Fitton by emailing sharon.fitton@rva.org.uk or calling 0118 937 2273.

Notes



Reading UK

Reading UK is the economic development company for the greater Reading area, and has been supporting local business growth for over 10 years. As part of the Stronger Together partnership, Reading UK works with employers, changing perceptions of local recruitment, promoting the skills of all members of the community, and encouraging businesses to provide support and employment opportunities for participants.

The Stronger Together Jobs and Skills event took place at the Penta Hotel in April 2019. Part conference and part job fair, the event attracted speakers from Thames Water, Mencap and Balfour Beatty, as well as 25 exhibitors (including Ikea, Tesco, Reed, McDonalds, Armed Forces, Home Instead and Apollo Teaching) with 250 local people attending the job fair. Thanks to our event, 18 top local companies signed up to support the ongoing work of Stronger Together through offers of work experience, mentoring, and supported work opportunities.

There will be another Stronger Together event in Spring 2020, and before that, BBO partners and participants will be taking part in the Reading Job Fest, the biggest recruitment event in the area, which, in 2018, attracted nearly 70 employers and 700 job seekers.

“Great event with so many great employers”

Mencap

“Networking opportunity was very helpful”

Princes Trust

“Good for awareness and diversity in the workplace” *Home Instead*

“I found this very helpful and enjoyed it”

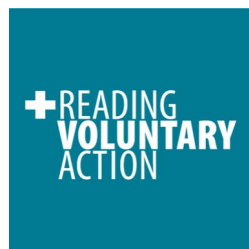
Reed

“Another fantastic event – thanks so much for organising” *Thames Water*



Find out more

If you'd like to know how your business can be part of the Stronger Together family (whether you're already doing good work, or looking to the future) please contact Sue Brackley by emailing sue@livingreading.co.uk or phoning 0118 937 4340.



Reading Voluntary Action

Reading Voluntary Action offer one-to-one support for parents to make the most of opportunities to return to education, training, employment or self-employment.

They also offer support with volunteering as a route into employment and can find volunteering opportunities tailored to participants' interests and skills, or the skills they would like to develop.

Find out more

Support for parents: contact Anna Chapman by emailing anna.chapman@rva.org.uk or calling 0118 937 2273.

Volunteering: contact Steve Hendry by emailing steve.hendry@rva.org.uk or calling 0118 937 2273.

Anna Chapman reflects on working with a client who was passionate about gaining employment in a finance role, despite the barriers they faced.



Client's background

Alex had over twenty years' experience working in finance roles within the charity sector and qualifications in booking administration and accounting. He also had an unspent conviction for fraud and assisting unlawful immigration to a member state, for which he had received a two-year prison sentence. Alex had just finished serving eight months before being released under his local probation office. He was wearing an electronic tag and had a curfew when I first started working with him.

Alex was in debt due to being in prison and not being able to earn or claim benefits. He also lacked confidence as a result of being in prison and his experiences there. He didn't have any recent employment references because he was dismissed from his most recent job. In addition, Alex is a parent to two children.

Creating a Personal Action Plan

I worked with Alex to create a Personal Action Plan which would tackle the barriers to employment he faced.

- We researched charities which provide debt advice and Alex started receiving support.
- I helped Alex to tailor his applications, CV and covering letters to individual vacancies and Alex stopped 'panic applying' for positions.
- I referred Alex to organisations offering information, advice and support about becoming self-employed and Alex attended and completed a few different workshops on self-employment and starting a business.
- Alex started browsing voluntary work as a means to gain current experience and references and improve his employability, confidence and social inclusion.

- I contacted several organisations which give guidance to people with criminal records including Blue Sky, Nacro, Unlock, and Clinks, for details on companies which may be more open to employing an applicant with a criminal conviction.
- I booked Alex places on confidence building and job profiling workshops which Alex attended, gave him information about using LinkedIn for searching and applying for job opportunities, and signposted Alex to a job club and job fairs for information about current vacancies.
- Alex was invited to attend interviews and so I referred him to the Maxis CIC Suit2Go service where he received personalised interview techniques and support.



Success!

Alex found a vacancy for a part-time bookkeeping position working for a charity which provides support and opportunities for people overcoming complex barriers to work. I helped Alex construct a covering letter which included a self-disclosure statement for his criminal conviction which Alex used to apply for this position. Alex was invited to attend an interview and I supplied a personal reference as requested. Alex was offered the job!

The client's name has been changed.

"The programme is great. I've found it really helpful ...it really builds confidence to see what options are there, it opens your eyes to see things that you didn't see before."



The Real Business Club

The Real Business Club (TRBC) offers advice and support to build confidence, motivation and knowledge – including on being self-employed or starting and running a business. TRBC has extensive experience working with people who have a criminal record or a caution or who have complicated lives. TRBC has worked with over 2,000 people to help them start their business and keep them running and growing. We are independent, reliable and skilled. Our experience means nothing shocks us and know that all kinds of people can be successful.

Participants can get advice on all business areas including:

- Managing money, practical tax, making sure you get the legal stuff right.
- Disclosure, debts and keeping to a budget.
- Being a subcontractor for someone else.
- Customers – getting and keeping them.
- Being in a building trade and how to get this right.
- Being clear on what your business idea is and how to sell stuff.
- Making it work even when life is complicated, including in relationships.

Find out more

Email Isabel@therealbusinessclub.co.uk or call 0118 968 0813.

West Berkshire Council

West Berkshire Council's support service offers one-to-one support for vulnerable adults. It includes access to:

Information, advice and guidance in relation to all barriers to employment, including, but not limited to: addiction, mental health, debt, housing/homelessness, offending behaviour/criminal records.

Individual action plans, helping participants on their journey to work, including assistance with job searching, CV and cover letter writing, job application form completion, interview preparation and practise, and volunteering.

Mentoring and support with life skills to improve confidence, self-esteem, stress management and day-to-day living.

Advocacy for individuals who are participating in the project.

Support with meetings that an individual is unable to attend alone including: doctors, psychiatrists, solicitors, attendance at court, rehab panels/visits etc.

"Amazing. Top notch. Without this support I'd have been banged up again or dead. I have never had support like this since being in care as a kid. I trust L as a professional and I have never trusted any of them. My confidence and self-esteem has grown and this is the longest I have been out of prison in nearly 15 years." **December 2018**

A day in the life of Louise, who provides one-to-one employment support for vulnerable adults



Describe a typical working day for you...

Well, my diary is my absolute bible – if it's not in my diary, it doesn't happen! Referrals come from everywhere because there's no other service like this locally. I do all of my client meetings one to one, and it's always in coffee shops because they are neutral spaces. I'm out and about 99% of the time, and my phone is on so that people can contact me if they're in crisis.

With new clients, we start with the project paper work, and our needs assessment goes through trauma, bereavement, debt, housing, addiction, *everything* you can imagine, and from that we draw things out. It might be about giving people an insight into their behaviour and how to manage it, or giving them ideas such as keeping a diary to help them see what they're already achieving day to day, and, crucially, build their confidence and self-esteem.

As well as giving people space to talk about their barriers to work, I also help them deal with practicalities. I support people in Magistrates and Crown Court. I have taken people to forensic psych appointments, and written statements for solicitors to try and keep my clients out of prison. I might help them to engage with drug and alcohol services, make benefit claims, get access to housing or healthcare, sort out child care issues or enrol on and attend adult learning courses.

What's the most challenging part of your job?

It can be very difficult for people to access the help and support they need. For example, homelessness affects many of the people I work with, and the housing register locally has a huge backlog and it's really difficult for people to get into private accommodation. They are facing lists for wayfaring at the local hostel, lists for room referrals, lists for this and that, so actually, how do you get anywhere? It's a massive challenge and until you've done all the base level stuff, they're not going to get into employment.

What's the best part of your job?

Fighting for people, seeing that snippet of 'I did it' and thinking: yes, you did do that! You went to the IT course yourself and look what you've learnt in 8 hours, that's incredible.

It's important that we believe in everyone, regardless of their background. You can't get complacent and think nothing's going to change, because then you're not going to support people to change. You have to think: you've got the power, you're an amazing human, you can do this. If you can give that self-belief to someone, that's invaluable.

I always think there might be one thing you say to somebody and it might not click now, but in ten years' time they might remember it and they'll realise: you know what, I can do this, now's the time.

Find out more

Email Louise.Thornton1@westberks.gov.uk or phone 07880 870387. Professionals can refer to Louise and individuals can also refer themselves.

Giving us feedback

If you're a participant on the Stronger Together project and you would like to let us know about

- a compliment
- a complaint
- or a comment

or you wish to

- raise a whistle blowing claim
- or report fraud

please let us know via one of the methods below.



Talk to the organisation you are working with.



Email bbo.strongertogether@reading.gov.uk



Complete an online complaint form at
www.reading.gov.uk/complaints



Write to the Stronger Together Partnership,
New Directions, 330 Northumberland Avenue,
Reading, RG2 8DH.



Stronger Together can help you to

- Discuss your aspirations for work.
- Find out about the services and support available to you.
- Explore practical solutions which address your concerns and challenges.
- Progress towards and into training, volunteering, work experience placements and employment.

Get in touch today to find out if we can help!

Contact one of the organisations in this booklet directly or email the Stronger Together Referral Coordinator:

sharon.fitton@rva.org.uk

