



About First Step Trust (FST)

FST is an innovative charity with over 25 years experience of providing opportunities for people excluded from working life because of mental health conditions, learning disabilities, drug or alcohol and other disadvantages.

FST provides within the various social enterprises it runs, work experience, on the job training and salaried employment to some of the most vulnerable and socially excluded members of our community. A number of our salaried staff team have been recruited from the shop floor.

More than 95% of those we work with have been unemployed for one or more years, 50% up to 10 years and 17% have never worked at all.

Our approach is about supporting workforce members to utilise the skills and experience they have to hand whilst learning new ones. They are encouraged to share their experience and coping strategies with their colleagues.

FST is not a soft or 'sheltered' option. Our role is to support workforce members to deal with the pressures and responsibilities of real work in a range of commercial settings. We deliver this opportunity through our social enterprise model (SMaRT).

We recognise that there are many factors affecting the decision to look for paid employment. Some workforce members are concerned about the loss of security provided by the welfare benefits system. Others are concerned that the issues they

have to deal with in their daily lives will confound their efforts to hold down a job. For others it is a combination of these and other factors.

FST does not provide clinical support. We believe that statutory agencies (e.g. NHS, Councils) and other voluntary organisations are better placed to deliver this support when required.

We are currently developing new ways of enabling workforce members to demonstrate their skills and on the job experience to potential employers. The long-term aim here is to support more workforce members to move on to open employment when they feel ready to do so.

What we do

In addition to working directly with statutory agencies FST has established a number of social enterprises to provide access to a range of work areas. For example, we have garages selling MOTs and vehicle servicing in Woolwich, Bexley, Lambeth and Salford. We also have a restaurant (Abbevilles) in Clapham.

We are also developing other initiatives aimed at creating a number of flexible employment opportunities to meet the needs of the workforce. For example, we are in the process of refurbishing a classic vehicle (see Owen's story) with a view to hiring it out to generate new income streams. We have also developed Driving Ambition™ a bespoke training programme aimed at assisting workforce members to gain a UK driving licence.



Our Offer

FST offers workforce members:

- Personalised work placements in the automotive trades, catering, finance, administration, marketing and promotions, customer service, and gardening
- On the job training guidance leading to accredited qualifications.
- Access to our Driving Ambition™ programme
- Involvement in developing the organisation at various levels from the shop floor as a work colleague through to membership of the FST board.

Jane's story

Jane joined FST when she was referred to us by her support worker. Jane was in the last stages of the discharge process from a medium secure unit and felt that she would like to do something practical. Jane had never worked before and struggled to engage with FST for the first few months.

Jane's attendance was sporadic and her approach to dealing with life situations had been shaped by many years in institutions and the care system. Jane continued to fight the desire to "pack it all in" and after a few months began to "find new ways of dealing with things".

Having access to pressures and responsibilities of working life helped Jane to re-evaluate who she was and what she had to offer. "I knew that other people were depending on me getting into work on time. I also knew that I had to deal with the negative thoughts that I sometimes had."

Over the next couple of years Jane attended the local college gaining a Level 1 and a Level 2 IMI Motor Vehicle Technician qualifications.

Jane then left FST to take up a job with a pan London transport company where she studied for her Level 3 IMI Light Vehicle Mechanics qualification.

At the time of writing Jane is now working for a national transport company as a commercial vehicle technician.

Jane spent a long time in the 'mental health system'. She needed to re-engage with the wider community on an equal footing as a person with skills and ambitions.

FST has facilitated this by providing access to the pressures and responsibilities of commercial work. "FST has clear and unambiguous expectations. These helped convince Jane that this was different from other situations she had been involved in." Ronnie Wilson MBE, Chief Executive FST.

For further information on First Step Trust please contact

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