



32-year-old Cosmo Born took part in the programme last year. His mum contacted WE Work for Everyone when Cosmo, who has Social Anxiety Disorder, was experiencing high levels of anxiety, low self-esteem and social difficulties in a previous job.



WE Work For Everyone

Tamsin Bond introduces a programme which helps over 16s with learning difficulties find paid work

WE Work for Everyone (the WE refers to West of England) is a thriving and relatively new programme which exists to help anyone over 16 who is unemployed and has a learning difficulty, learning disability or autism to find a way into paid work.

Set up by Bristol City Council at the start of 2021, it offers a free employment support service, covering Bath and North-East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire.

Its team of Employment Navigators work with participants on a one-to-one basis over a 12 month period, from initial 'meet and greet' sessions to detailed careers advice, help with job-hunting, CVs, filling in forms, letter writing, interview preparation, workplace support and anything else in between. There's no 'one size fits all' approach, but rather a dedicated focus on an individual's needs.

What makes it unique is that WE Work for Everyone does not require participants to have a

formal diagnosis in order to access its services. This is a real breath of fresh air for anyone who wants to work and needs guidance but may be unsure whether they are eligible for support.

The programme is all about breaking down barriers, enabling people to make their own way in the working world feeling supported, respected and valued. Navigators help participants take those potentially daunting first steps and, more importantly, help them take the right first steps.

Gavin Salter, an Employment Navigator, explained, "It's common for participants to begin the process feeling anxious about work, whether they're new to the working world or have been unemployed for some time. Some may have had difficult work experiences in the past or worry that there isn't suitable work out there for them. So often, once these initial barriers melt away, participants really blossom and their confidence soars."

Gavin recently caught up with Cosmo in a café in Bath to see how he is getting on. Cosmo said, "WE Work for Everyone makes you feel comfortable, it feels less mainstream. What it does is in the name, it's so welcoming and supportive. My Navigator really helped me decode my CV."

Cosmo went on to choose a course in horticulture and now works as a successful freelance gardener (Cosmo Horticulture – 07850 745524). Business is good and so is his self-esteem. Plus, he is now keen to promote neurodiversity in the horticultural world. Cosmo's advice is, "Go for it. Take advantage of the help on offer."

Parents, carers, guardians or friends of anyone who could benefit from the programme can get in touch. Potential participants can also be referred by a tutor or a job centre or get in touch themselves.

The navigators at WE Work For Everyone are always happy to talk through your particular circumstances, explain the process and answer any questions. ■

For more information about WE Work for Everyone, visit their website at www.weworkforeveryone.org. You can also email weworkforeveryone@bristol.gov.uk or phone 0117 9223330.