Work
Self-employment
Volunteering

Explore your options and opportunities

March 2019
The Stronger Together partnership is a Building Better Opportunities project, funded by the European Social Fund and The National Lottery Community Fund. For more information about Building Better Opportunities, see page 15.

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, 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.

Find out more
Get in touch with the Stronger Together Project Manager Janet Meehan by emailing janet.meehan@reading.gov.uk or phoning 0118 937 2902 or 07968 628919.
About Stronger Together

The Stronger Together partnership offers free help to people aged 25 and older who are living in Reading or West Berkshire and need support to get into employment or self-employment, or just move closer to either of these goals.

Get in touch with one of the partners 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

The Suit2Go service from Mapis offers styling, dressing and employment support for men. Suit2Go specialises in increasing confidence and aspirations, improving transferable soft skills, and career planning and personal development for people who didn't achieve in mainstream education.

Coming soon! Mapis will be offering their retail and customer service training and social enterprise training, for men and women, as part of the Stronger Together project.

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

Mapis is a dynamic 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 social enterprise.
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 a personality test 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 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.'

Suit2Go has been part of Stronger Together from the outset, but now Mapis are adding their expertise in retail and social enterprise training to the project.

Coming soon there will be an event giving participants 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. There will also be social enterprise training for those who may have an idea for a business, looking at how they can draw on existing life skills and community connections to make a start.
New Directions

New Directions can offer you tailored support to help you understand the job market and how to apply for jobs, develop skills to become job ready, and improve your confidence and motivation. We can offer a holistic service, working with other local organisations to meet your needs.

Find out more
For more information or to book an appointment with an adviser, contact Zeba Rao on 07976 154184 or email newdirections@reading.gov.uk.

Newbury College

Newbury College offer English and Maths courses for those who need support with basic skills, English courses for non-native speakers, and work skills courses covering job searching, CV writing, preparing for interviews and interview practice.

Find out more
Get in touch with Jo Houghton by emailing j-houghton@newbury-college.ac.uk or phoning 01635 845239.
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 9551070, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, 10am to 3pm.

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 business to provide support and employment opportunities for participants.
Reading UK are busy organising job events and training and employment opportunities for our Stronger Together partners. The Access to Work jobs fair in 2018 was a big success with over 100 delegates at the business seminar. Over 200 attended the job fair, with 17 employers meeting candidates they would consider for jobs. All of the exhibitors said they would recommend the event and 95% said they had learnt lots about supported employment.

At Pride of Reading 2018, IKEA were awarded the Stronger Together award for best practise in recruitment and employment, in a new category organised by Reading UK.

**Find out more**
Get in touch with Sue Brackley by emailing sue@livingreading.co.uk or phoning 0118 937 4340.
Intensive one-to-one support, individual assessment, vocational profiling and a personal work programme including work preparation and skills.

- In-work support to enable a smooth transition into the job and sustainable employment.
- Work experience, trials and placements allowing people to understand job roles and workplace practices.
- Job matching and finding work, including CV writing and support to complete job applications.
- Travel training to ensure people can access their local communities and get to work.
- Training and support for employers to broaden their understanding of disability and enable them to provide ongoing support to their employee.

Find out more
Get in touch with Selina Ahmed by emailing selina.ahmed@mencap.org.uk or phoning 07931 788938.

“With Mencap’s support I was able to find employment in a job I love that was right for me. After a few months at work I had enough savings to take me and my partner on our first holiday together!” TB
Reading Voluntary Action

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

Find out more
Volunteering: contact Steve Hendry by emailing steve.hendry@rva.org.uk or calling 01189 372 273.
Support for parents: contact Anna Chapman by emailing anna.chapman@rva.org.uk or calling 01189 372 273.

A day in the life of Anna, who offers support for parents
Describe a typical working day for you... I spend my day having one-to-one appointments with parents to improve their confidence, independence and social inclusion. We discuss people’s current situations, existing qualifications and experience, and their aspirations.
Then based on this, I create Personal Action Plans with agreed objectives. I provide tailored, up-to-date information, to help parents to achieve their goals, as well as to encourage, motivate and reassure. I often refer parents to other organisations which offer specialist support. I help with updating CVs, covering and speculative letters, application forms and letters of disclosure (for health issues and other diagnoses and/or criminal records) in addition to completing referral forms, personal references and letters of support.

**What specific challenges can parents face when looking for employment?** There are several! Suitable and affordable childcare is a major one, but also the lack of training and paid vacancies which fit in around school hours and term times. Parents, particularly mothers, are often dealing with gaps in employment, lack of confidence and financial issues.

**How do you think participants benefit from the one-to-one support you are able to give them?** First, by simply being given the space and time to talk – away from their other responsibilities such as the home and their children. Our discussion takes into account their situation as a whole, and even if I am unable to help with a certain issue, I can at least listen and talk it through. Second, working through Personal Action Plans – which break down the issues and goals into manageable steps – gives parents specific and helpful points to focus on and enables them to make progress.

**What's your favourite part of the job?** I enjoy so much about this job. It's a privilege to be able to support another person to progress, and reach their goal or potential or both. It's really rewarding when a client's confidence, independence or employability improves and when they realise that they no longer need or want support.
West Berkshire Council

West Berkshire Council offers the following:

- One-to-one support for vulnerable adults within West Berkshire who are unemployed or economically inactive and aged 25 years and over.
- Information, advice and guidance in relation to all barriers to employment including, but not limited to, addiction, mental health, debt, housing, homelessness, offending behaviour and 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.

Find out more

Professionals can refer to Louise Thornton, Employment Support Advisor/Support Worker, or individuals can self refer. Email Louise.Thornton1@westberks.gov.uk or phone 07880 870 387.
“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. I was a junkie on heroin, crack, alcohol and meth and I am now clean. I no longer commit crime after 90 convictions and nearly 300 charges. Less than a year of working with L and I have turned my life around and she made me believe in myself. No one’s done that before.” RC, December 2018

“Since being signed off work it's been a struggle to get myself on my feet, if I wasn't supported by Louise I'm not sure where I would be today. She's supported me in many ways, helping me sort my debts out and helping me deal with my mental health problems. Although I have a big journey ahead it's took a lot of pressure off me knowing I've got this support to help me through, it helps a lot to be able to speak to someone about your problems I'm very grateful. I'm now looking for work and feel ready." AB, Feb 2019

"I met Louise last year, I've had incredible help and support. I was on the cusp of a nervous breakdown and was feeling suicidal. I was also having a go at my kids talking them not to come near me because I thought I was dragging them down. I feel the help and support I have received has given me hope for the future. Louise has helped me with reading letters, admin, Debt, doctors, medications, Mental health etc. Louise also understood what a debilitating medical condition meant when no-one else would help or listen and was dismissive. Now I am calm, relaxed, happy and I feel really good in myself and I now feel worthy of treating myself." JK, February 2019
Whitley Community Development Association manage a targeted hospitality pathway scheme in South Reading, providing work experience and qualifications.

They partner with hospitality providers in Reading in order to match great employment opportunities with the right candidates, trained with the right skills. The scheme provides:

- A comprehensive introduction to the hospitality sector.
- Help with CV writing and interview skills.
- Formal and informal training and support.
- City and Guilds introduction to customer service award
- Food Hygiene certificate.
- Work experience with Whitley Social Club & Cafe and other local employers.
- In-work mentoring and support.

Find out more
Get in touch with Andy Gilpin, Project Manager, by emailing andybbo@whitley-cda.org or phoning 07717 755251.
About Building Better Opportunities

The National Lottery Community Fund is the largest community funder in the UK – we’re proud to award money raised by National Lottery players to communities across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Since June 2004, we have made over 200,000 grants and awarded over £9 billion to projects that have benefited millions of people. We’re privileged to be able to work with the smallest of local groups right up to UK-wide charities, enabling people and communities to bring their ambitions to life.

This Building Better Opportunities project 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.

The Department for Work and Pensions is the Managing Authority for the England European Social Fund programme. Established by the European Union, the European Social Fund helps local areas stimulate their economic development by investing in projects which will support skills development, employment and job creation, social inclusion and local community regenerations. For more information visit www.gov.uk/european-growth-funding.
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.

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

Get in touch today to find out if we can help!
Contact one of the organisations in this booklet directly or email bbo.strongertosgether@reading.gov.uk.