

Croydon Council signed up to the Disability Confident Scheme that supports employers to realise the benefits of a diverse workforce. They developed a Disability Confident Action Group made up of public, private and voluntary sector organisations, service providers and the DWP with the aim of increasing the number of disabled people in employment by providing a coherent offer to employers.

They ran a series of events for employers and disabled people, the most recent one being a 'reverse jobs fair' where employers approached potential candidates. Twenty employers attended the event and five job offers were made on the day, one of which was an apprenticeship as well as offers of interviews and work experience.

### Values - why is this important?

Disability Confident is a scheme from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) which has replaced Two Ticks symbol. Disability Confident supports employers to make the most of the talents that disabled people can bring to the workplace. More and more businesses are signing up to Disability Confident every week, and there are now over 5,000 employers signed up. The scheme helps employers think differently about disability, and improve how they attract, recruit and retain disabled workers.

Disability Confident helps business to realise the benefits of a diverse workforce which includes disabled people. These include:

- Drawing from the widest pool of talent;
- Securing and retaining high quality staff who are skilled, loyal and hard-working;
- Saving time and money on the costs of recruitment by reducing staff turnover;
- Keeping valuable skills and experience;
- Reducing the levels and costs of sickness absences;
- Improving employee morale and commitment by demonstrating that they treat all employees fairly.

The scheme has 3 levels designed to support employers with employers progressing to become Disability Confident Leaders, acting as a champion with their local and business communities. Croydon Council became a Disability Confident employer in 2015 and is working towards becoming a Disability Confident Leader.

### What are the challenges?

The employment rates for disabled people in the UK is very low (48%) despite the country experiencing the highest levels of employment since comparable records began. People with mental health conditions, learning disabilities and / or autism are even further disadvantaged as their employment rates are much lower, which is resulting in employers missing out on valuable talent (32%, 24% and 32% respectively). Croydon's current rates of employment for these individuals reflects the national picture

### Solution

Croydon Council has a skills and employment plan which set out the agreed priorities for Croydon in terms of raising the skills levels within the borough's communities, creating sustainable employment opportunities and increasing the overall borough employment rate.

Their plan sets out how they aim to achieve this by working in partnership across the public, private and community and voluntary sector to ensure those most marginalised in employment are offered the best support, which includes disabled people.

They are also keen to ensure that they are offering Croydon employers a more coherent offer in providing a strategic framework for the key organisations involved in the delivery of skills and employment services in Croydon, reducing duplication and improving the customer journey of local jobseekers, and easing the burdens of local employers.

Croydon Council established a Disability Confident Action Group (DCAG) in 2015. It is made up of public and voluntary organisations with a stake in supporting disabled people in Croydon towards and into employment, chaired by the Council's Gateway Employment Support Service.

The group developed an action plan to ensure they are co-ordinating their activities, sharing information and working in partnership to provide a coherent offer to employers to support them to employ greater numbers of people living with a disability or long-term health condition in the borough. They ran a series of successful events resulting in an increase of employment rates of disabled people in the borough.

The DCAG organised their first Disability Confident event in May 2015, which was held at Fairfield Halls. It was attended by a number of employers as well as disabled employees to encourage employers to understand the

true benefits of being an inclusive employer, ensuring they were accessing the untapped talents and skills of Croydon residents with a disability.

Personal experiences were shared, and the DWP provided a presentation about Access to Work, highlighting the support that can be provided to employers as well as dispelling myths around to costs associated with recruiting and retaining disabled staff. Pledges were made by employers and these were followed up to ensure they were supported by the partnership to recruit more disabled talent.



*Shaun Lochinger of Interserve along with Julie Brickley and David Aherne addressing delegates at the Disability Confident Event in February 2016*

A second event took place in February 2016 addressing the need to raise the career aspirations of young disabled people. Further pledges were made by employers who attended regarding the changes they would make to their recruitment processes to ensure that they were not missing out on the valuable talent of disabled people.

The next event was an innovative approach to running a Jobs Fair for disabled people called a Reverse Jobs Fair. Instead of potential candidates approaching employers for possible jobs, the process was turned on its head with employers seeking to recruit, approaching potential disabled candidates. Twenty employers attended the event, and five job offers were made on the day, one of which was an apprenticeship, as well as offers of interviews and work experience.



*Emma Shepherd, Mayor Wayne Lawler, Terry Smith, and Cllr Andrew Randle at the opening of the Reverse Jobs Fair.*

The DCAG went on to host three half days of Disability Awareness Training for 250 Council staff and local businesses in July 2017.

They covered the Equality Act, reasonable adjustments, mental health, learning disabilities, autism, visual impairments and Access to Work. This in turn fed into the next Reverse Jobs Fair that they held in November 2017 which prepared employers to have a better understanding of employing disabled people.

A number of events have been planned for later this year including more disability awareness training, another reverse jobs fair and 'Yes we Can' events enabling local businesses to meet up with local job seekers to understand more about their barriers.

The Valuing People's Alliance

