

During February we continued the Trading Places programme with a number of key people taking part. February was also the first month where a member of FST paid a respective visit to the BITC head office.

Trading Places is a way for us to increase our efforts to create sustainable work and employment opportunities for people unable to manage mainstream opportunities. We have invited senior executives to work alongside our workforce as colleagues so that they go back to their companies excited at the prospect of doing something sustainable. By us getting commercial work it gives us the means to have control over our future without having to depend on funding it also helps us provide employment opportunities and on the job training for people who have been excluded from the mainstream job market due to mental health or other disadvantages.



Helen Hayes MP for Dulwich and West Norwood

"I thoroughly enjoyed my morning as an apprentice mechanic at the First Step Trust garage in West Norwood learning how to use the tyre machine and removing brake shoes. I was made very welcome by Brett and the team and would encourage anyone to have a go at Trading Places. SMaRT garages play a fantastic role in providing opportunities for people who are unemployed to learn new skills and access employment." – Helen Hayes MP for Dulwich and West Norwood

"I spent an extremely enjoyable afternoon with the team at First Step Trust as part of the Trading Places programme under the watchful eye of manager Brett Meyer, contributing to the restoration of a vintage van called Owen. The powerful impression left with me from spending a few hours at the West Norwood garage is of a highly professional group of people working very effectively together. The volunteers supporting Brett were entirely committed to the task and clearly benefiting hugely from the experience. There was a real sense of purpose about the place and the volunteers have demands made on them and in return give a great deal back. I was greatly inspired by the whole set up – empowering and not patronising." – Jeremy Swain Chief Executive Thames Reach



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Graham Randles Managing Director New Economic Foundation (NEF) Consulting



Helen Payne Associate Director, Commissioning, Jobs and Growth Lambeth Council

"The kitchen was a model of calm efficiency and Sean was an excellent tutor. As Luigi says, the Parmesan biscuits are contagious! It is clear, having spent a little time there this morning what a good environment Abbevilles provides and what an excellent reintroduction to work, for the staff." – Helen Payne Associate Director, Commissioning, Jobs and Growth Lambeth Council

"I really enjoyed my time taking part in Trading Places at Abbeville's I was hugely impressed by everyone working in the kitchen, a really supportive environment where everyone has an important role in producing the most amazing food. So impressed. Many thanks for sharing your talents with me - we made the best cheese biscuits ever! Many thanks." - Aisling Duffy Chief Executive Certitude



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Stephen Finn Chief Executive Oxleas NHS

It was a privilege to be invited to 'Trading Places' and spend a day with the inspirational men and women of the SMaRT Garage in Woolwich. Thanks to the patient guidance of the mechanics I was able to play a small part in the restoration of an engine and help 'Get Owen Goin'. This experience gave me a real insight into the pride and satisfaction that comes from working in a positive environment, doing meaningful and worthwhile work, whilst learning new skills. In my view, the aims and values of First Step Trust are second to none. They set the benchmark for successful social enterprise and for promoting social responsibility." - Stephen Finn Chief Executive Oxleas NHS



Rachel Karn Assistant Director, Adult Social Care Commissioning at Royal Borough of Greenwich

I learned more than how to remove a wheel nut during my Trading Places experience. At FST's Smart Garage I heard at first hand about the impact that learning a skill and having employment is making on people's wellbeing and recovery. It was a privilege and a pleasure to visit and I met some great people. This is important work and provides a valuable resource for the borough. - Rachel Karn Assistant Director, Adult Social Care Commissioning at Royal Borough of Greenwich



Jan Garrett Employment & Training Support Worker First Step Trust

"I felt honoured to be asked to join Mike, Nuno, Caroline and Jane with their busy diaries, but ultimately I was very proud of myself to find that I could put into place the skills that I have learned at First Step Trust to cope with full time work. It was great to be in a working environment outside of FST and found that actually, in comparison I had learned that I could once again retain my dignity and self esteem that I thought had been lost with my diagnosis of bipolar over 10 years before." - Jan Garrett Employment & Training Support Worker First Step Trust