

## WorkFit Employment Programme

**Our aim** – To create the conditions that all people with Down's syndrome need to live full and rewarding lives.

**Our mission** – Supporting people who have Down's syndrome to live full and rewarding lives.

**Who we are** – We are the only organisation in this country focusing solely on all aspects of living successfully with Down's syndrome. Since 1970, we have grown from being a local parent support group into a national charity with over 20,000 members, a national office in Teddington, Middlesex, and offices in Exeter and Northern Ireland. Despite this, the organisation is run by less than 50 staff (many of them part time). We also work closely with over 130 local support groups throughout the UK.

### What is Down's syndrome?

Down's syndrome is caused by the presence of an extra chromosome in a baby's cells. Around 1 in every 1000 babies born in the UK will have Down's syndrome and there are approximately 40,000 people in the UK with the condition. People with Down's syndrome have a learning disability which will affect their ability to learn, however it does not mean they cannot learn.

### Who we are

WorkFit is designed to increase the opportunities for people with Down's syndrome to access employment opportunities. WorkFit currently has over 1,000 candidates registered across England and Wales with a range of skills and abilities. We believe that everyone with Down's syndrome can work if they want to and are supported to do so. Our dedicated and knowledgeable team of Employment Development Officers (EDOs) support candidates and employers to achieve success. All are experienced Supported Employment practitioners who are committed to the success of the programme and provide a range of support to candidates and employers.



### Why was it started?

WorkFit was launched in December, 2011 to support people with Down's syndrome into employment opportunities in response to research that showed that only 6% of the adults with Down's syndrome and other learning disabilities in the UK were in paid work. People with Down's syndrome are often overlooked in the jobs market as their skills and abilities may be underestimated, however, research has shown that they are a dedicated and enthusiastic pool of talented individuals who can be consistently productive if they are in the right job and have the right level of support, and that has led to the development of the WorkFit programme.



### What we do

At WorkFit we match candidates with Down's syndrome with supportive and inclusive employers and support both parties at all stages of the process.

A key element of the success of WorkFit placements is the training and preparation provided to employers prior to a WorkFit candidate joining their organisation. This training equips existing staff with the knowledge and resources to support someone who has Down's syndrome in the workplace.

Also the flexibility around the type of opportunities on offer allows both candidates and employers to access the programme in a way that suits their needs. A range of formats are supported including work experience, volunteering, supported internships, supported apprenticeships and paid work.

## Supporting Delivery

**Marketing** – Another key part of the WorkFit programme is our website: <http://www.dsworkfit.org.uk> which offers an online platform for candidates to look for roles and access resources. Similarly, employers can register and access anonymised information about the candidates looking for work. We also have a strong presence on social media ([Twitter](#), [YouTube](#), and [Facebook](#)) to keep our followers updated with news and success stories.

**Education** – Our employers receive in-depth training about how to support someone with Down's syndrome in the workplace. This is supplemented with a range of resources as well as ongoing support and refresher training for the organisation as needed.

**Conferences** – To celebrate the hard work and achievements of our candidates and to acknowledge the support of their employers, WorkFit host free regional conferences for all stakeholders to attend to share and celebrate success.



## Benefits for Candidates

Our independent research<sup>1</sup> shows that

- ❖ More people with Down's syndrome are now in work - WorkFit has supported a significant number of people with Down's syndrome into work or work-related roles
- ❖ People enjoy their jobs – they are doing work that interests them and which fits their skill-set and aptitudes
- ❖ People are less isolated - they have increased their circle of friends and contacts through work, some people have developed additional friendships and participate in social activities outside of work as result of interaction with colleagues
- ❖ People have more community involvement as a result of activities undertaken during the working day, some of which involve interaction with the public and going outside the workplace to interact with other members of the local community
- ❖ Some people know more about the work options available to them and are beginning to think and plan their future careers
- ❖ People in work continue to be confident about doing their existing job and working with current colleagues
- ❖ For most people involved in WorkFit, work-related support from other agencies has been very minimal, and for some people, WorkFit has been the only source of employment advice and support they have received to date.



<sup>1</sup> Davies, A. and Beyer, S. (2017)

## Benefits for Employers

Our independent research shows that employers benefit from

- ❖ Improved understanding of the needs of their customers with learning disabilities
- ❖ Being able to recruit from a diverse pool of motivated jobseekers to support the development of a local workforce that comes with values that fit their business needs
- ❖ Enhanced image and external reputation with a workforce that reflects the diversity of their local community
- ❖ Positive change to workplace culture and practice including development opportunities for staff, enhanced levels of engagement from existing staff, effective team building and improved staff morale
- ❖ Reduced recruitment costs with a supported job matching and selection process
- ❖ Fulfilling corporate social responsibility desires and being seen as an “employer of choice”
- ❖ Diversity-improved services and products to attract the “purple pound” – the spending power of disabled people

## Future aims

**Increase participation** – Our aim going forward is to increase the opportunities for people who have Down’s syndrome to access employment opportunities and navigate a successful and fulfilling career pathway.

**Increase engagement with employers and other organisations** – We want to work more with other organisations to increase the opportunities for people with Down’s syndrome to access opportunities. This includes expanding our work with schools and colleges, statutory bodies and other supported employment initiatives. We also want to work more closely with local Down's syndrome support groups.

## Summary

Independent evaluation of WorkFit confirms that the programme project continues to deliver significant impacts for people who have Down’s syndrome, their families, employers and co-workers/employees. WorkFit offers an effective, scalable and evidence-based model for actively supporting people with Down’s syndrome into work-related roles and encouraging them and their families to consider paid work as a realistic and feasible option.



The Down's Syndrome Association provides information and support on all aspects of living with Down's syndrome. We also work to champion the rights of people with Down's syndrome, by campaigning for change and challenging discrimination. A wide range of Down's Syndrome Association publications can be downloaded free of charge from our website.

### Down’s Syndrome Association

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