

## Mile in My Shoes: Chris' story

*Estimated reading time: 6 minutes*

My name is Chris McCauley. I work for Employment Plus, which is part of The Salvation Army's bigger employability network, as such... I work as an Employment Development Coordinator.

Employment brings lots of extra benefits. It brings a sense of fulfilment, it brings a sense of achievement, it brings structure, it brings worth... All these things contribute towards a person feeling good about themselves, about feeling part of society. Feeling that they're giving back to society and – that they can then use that extra wealth as such, to then go and lead a life where they can enjoy it and feel – feel fulfilled.

Within the... Employment Plus delivery model as such, we cover four criteria. Wellbeing, life skills, training, employability, and then we, we then move to the in-work support. When we have people that come to us, who want to work with us long term, we explore all of those different areas. So, the fact is, we are referred people over who usually are looking for work. But in the process of looking for work, when we do explore the bigger package with that individual, we do find that there's other elements that they're dealing with. That can be from, as far as addiction to relationship problems, to difficulties with... using computer skills. It can be so ranging, in terms of what – what that person is struggling with.

We all hear, most recently, mental health. Mental health is a huge thing that is very difficult for, a lot of the time, for us to sit down and immediately have the answer. But... we make sure that we work with other organisations and we... do a lot of signposting and we make sure that the support is not just internal, it's a package wrapped around the person, so that their chances of employment increase massively... We need to work together as a community to bring people out of poverty, and then into work.

An older gentleman I was dealing with in Forfar, who had come into our service, had been referred... Who had been out of work, he'd been made redundant about five or six years prior to arriving with us. And his – his hopes for finding work, by his words, were very slim. He came into us not knowing how to approach the market. He didn't have a CV. Couldn't access the computer. Didn't know how to navigate it, hadn't been given the resources. And for us, it was – it was a case of going right back to the bare bones of what he was struggling with. And that's where we go through our whole diagnostic program of identifying the barriers. And for this particular gentleman, giving him the understanding of how to access the market was the first thing.

And he came in every Tuesday and every Thursday to our service for one hour. And it started with pressing the button on the computer, to being able to send an email, to being able to – even simple things – saying hello to a distant relative across Facebook. Which that – that person needed to work... with me for a long time. And I say a long time in the sense that, it

was probably about six or seven months before they felt more empowered to then take the transition into applying for work. And through introducing them to volunteering, through persevering and doing applications, providing the evidence in the CVs, providing the evidence in the applications, engaging more with community work, the person secured work, at the age of 64. Things have completely changed for that person for a positive. And he's still there to this day, so it's great to see.

So, I'm originally from Belfast. Came over here in... 2001 I think it was, with the intention to have a slightly different career and have ended in employability. It's a slightly strange route that I came into it. I arrived in Dundee with large hopes of becoming an architect. And very quickly realised that to help fund that course I needed to go and get some part-time work. Within a period of a few months... I'd realised there was a position working within The Salvation Army in the hostels and... applied for the job and to my surprise I got it as a relief worker.

I worked there pretty much every weekend to help support the architecture course... I completed the architecture course, and I then left the Salvation Army completely for a couple of years to pursue that career. But very quickly I realised that the work that I had been doing within The Salvation Army was more rewarding. It was something that was missing within the architecture rule and I wasn't happy, it was very simple as that. So, I felt the need to return almost. And I see that there was an opportunity with Employment Plus and I jumped at the opportunity to apply for that. And here we are five, six years later. It's been an interesting journey to say the least.

A lot of the people I'm dealing with are struggling... financially. We're living in a world now where people are making decisions... to eat their breakfast or not eat their breakfast, to stretch that money out. A lot of the people that I deal with are long-term unemployed. There's various reasons why they may be long-term unemployed. Sometimes it is the case that they've had family. They are bringing up their family and then they come to us having realised they now need to return to the, to the workforce, as such. So, it's – it's about looking at that bigger picture of trying to find a route for that person back in.

When we have someone who is long-term unemployed, we always look at potential routes into volunteering to reskill them, to give them the training through ourselves. A lot of the time, for me certainly, it's about trying to reintroduce a sense of structure, a working structure to the week. Sometimes the volunteering provides that. But sometimes it's about trying to reintroduce them to other elements of the community, things that they can go, and they can do, they can feel a bit more fulfilled in their days. Do stuff that they feel that they're achieving things. And when they're starting to do those type of things, there's more tendency that they will be inclined to want to take the next step to then apply for work.

Some people would suggest that getting people into work... should be the ultimate... joyous point. Just, don't get me wrong to a degree, it is nice to see somebody transition and being able to stand on their own two feet. What I do really enjoy is seeing people coming in and having achieved something for the first time. Having been able to change their CV to suit a

job or being able to access the computer or finding out a bit of something that has been holding them back. So actually, addressing each of the barriers. When somebody achieves a barrier it's one step closer. And it feels like you're breaking down the wall with that person and that person is – they are going on that journey, it's not just... we have got them into a job and that's the big excitement. It's seeing that transition throughout their period of time with us. It's about empowering people, supporting them and making them feel worth. We're there to help people and help people move on in their lives. Which is, yeah, it's a great feeling.

When I finish work, I go back, and I spend time with my wife and child. But my wife knows me to be the person who's always busy. And anybody that knows me, either as a friend or on a professional level, knows that, when it comes to the weekend, I will be doing something. We do deal with a lot of people very day. And sometimes when you're trying to unwind from that, it's not simple.

So rather than saying, 'Oh, that was a busy day.' I have a tendency of saying, 'Now, what else do I need to do in my own life to keep myself... moving forward?' As I'm trying to get everyone to address their barriers, I'm trying to also address mine in terms of, 'I've got a very messy garden and I've got all these other things,' and sometimes you can't achieve that all in one weekend, so you're doing it in the evenings. So yeah, sometimes I do need my wife just to turn around and say, 'Just stop. Just relax. Watch a TV show with me. Calm down. You don't need to do everything today.' *[Laughs]*.