

Borough Report 2022  
Merton



# Introduction

## Welcome to our Better Working Futures Borough Report 2022 for Merton.

We are pleased to present the latest information on delivery of our employment support to job-seeking residents in the borough.

This year we have seen the programme continue to make a difference in the community. Against performance targets for helping people into employment, we have seen some of our best ever results over recent months.

This performance is set against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions lifting and our team continuing to adjust our support to reflect an ever-changing labour market.

Given many people's experiences of the past two years, the need for joined-up support that addresses employment and health priorities has never been more important.

Across the UK there are now **one million more disabled people in work than five years ago** (ONS, May 2022).

The employment disability gap – the difference in employment rates of disabled and non-disabled people – has narrowed. It is currently 28.2%, down from 33.8% in 2017.

Funding for programmes like Better Working Futures was provided to achieve results like these.

There is clearly still more to do to make work accessible for everybody.

The agility and dedication our team at Reed in Partnership has displayed since I joined as Programme Director for the programme last year means we are well placed to continue playing an important role.

I have also been inspired by so many of the other local support services and community partners in Merton that integrate with what we do here to support local residents.

I hope that this report provides a good overview of the work and impact I believe we are having.

As always, we are very happy to hear from you. If you are ever interested in dropping in to see our programme in action, or have your questions answered, please do feel free to contact me at [chris.paterson@reed.com](mailto:chris.paterson@reed.com)

Best wishes



**Chris Paterson**  
Programme Director



# Programme overview

The Better Working Futures service, our name for the Work and Health Programme, launched in March 2018.

The programme is commissioned by South London Partnership and co-funded by the Department for Work and Pensions and the European Social Fund. It is delivered across the five boroughs of the South London Partnership: Croydon, Kingston upon Thames, Merton, Richmond upon Thames and Sutton.

Better Working Futures provides support to help people find and keep a job. It is available, on a voluntary basis, to those with health conditions or disabilities, and to various groups of vulnerable people who have early entrant access.

It also provides support to those who have been unemployed for over two years. For this group, the programme is compulsory.

Participants have been identified by their Jobcentre Plus Work Coach as needing more intensive support to overcome their barriers to employment and are therefore referred to Better Working Futures.

On referral a designated Employment Adviser is allocated. A personal action plan is developed based on a comprehensive diagnostic of the participant's circumstances, needs and ambitions.

Minimum fortnightly one-to-one meetings take place with the Employment Adviser who organises all the support required by the participant.

A Better Off Calculation takes place to ensure that the participant will be financially better off in work.

Funding is available for help with the cost of travel, childcare and work/interview clothing.



# Seven areas of support



## 1. Mindset

We help participants to get motivated and start thinking positively about employment and their own abilities.



## 2. Employability

Practical skills development for job searching, CV writing and interview skills. Self-employment support is also available.



## 3. Skills and qualifications

Work specific skills development that match local employer needs. Access and funding is provided for accredited training and qualifications. Sector taster sessions are available.



## 4. Personal circumstances

An extensive range of support, confidential advice and advocacy to overcome personal barriers, including housing issues, caring responsibilities, financial issues and previous convictions.





## 5. Health and disability

Our delivery was developed in partnership with Disability Rights, the UK charity run by and for people with lived experience of a disability or health condition. Health and Wellbeing Advisers provide one-to-one and group support to help participants manage a health condition, in and outside of the workplace.



## 6. Employment options

We have links with employers across South London. We work with employers of all sizes and types to source a wide range of appropriate vacancies that match the ambitions of our participants. We support employers to develop their understanding of health conditions and make reasonable adjustments through our role as a Disability Confident Leader.



## 7. In-work support

An In-Work Plan is produced that provides ongoing support once the participant starts employment. A progression review is offered to help increase the participant's salary, hours or review trading for self-employed participants.

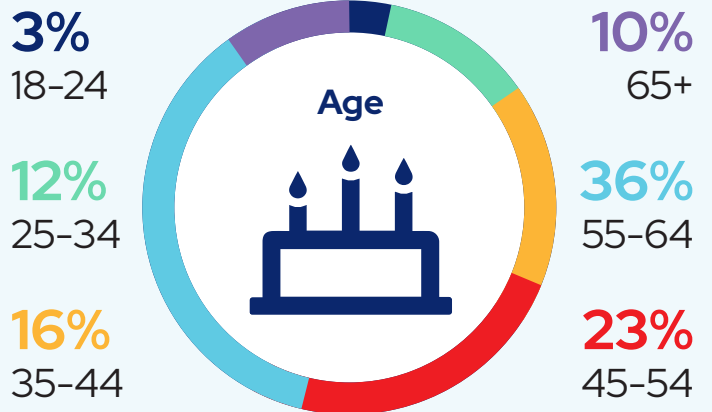
Additionally, a wide range of support through external provision is available. Our Route Planner Tool contains details of local Merton services that can provide coordinated support with specialist interventions for health and lifestyle factors and training options.

# Programme data

## March 2018 - August 2022

### Location

Cricket Green Ward	13%
Pollards Hill Ward	11%
Figge's Marsh Ward	11%
Lavender Fields Ward	8%
St. Helier Ward	7%
Ravensbury Ward	7%
Graveney Ward	6%
Longthornton Ward	5%
Abbey Ward	4%
Colliers Wood Ward	4%
Raynes Park Ward	3%
West Barnes Ward	3%
Trinity Ward	3%
Wimbledon Park Ward	3%
Lower Morden Ward	3%
Merton Park Ward	3%
Cannon Hill Ward	2%
Dundonald Ward	2%
Hillside Ward	2%
Village Ward	1%

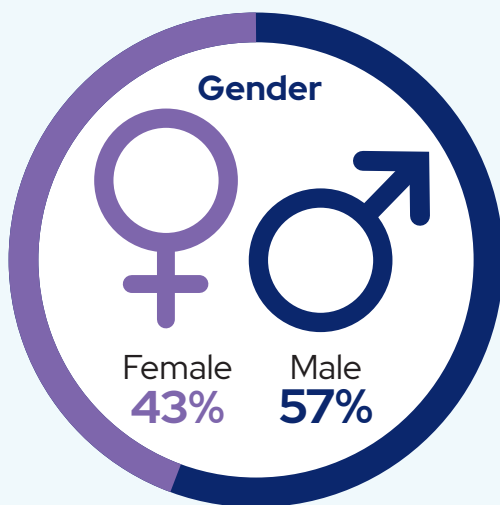


**86%** (54% male, 46% female)  
Disability / Health Condition (Voluntary)

**7%** (61% male, 39% female)  
**Vulnerable Early Entrant Access (Voluntary)**  
Includes people who are: a carer or former carer homeless; a former member of the armed forces or a reservist; the partner of a current or former member of the armed forces; a care leaver; a young person in a gang; a refugee; a victim of domestic violence; have or have had a dependency on drugs or alcohol; an ex-offender

**6%** (79% male, 21% female)  
**Long-Term Unemployed (Mandatory)**  
People who have been unemployed for 24 months or longer

**1%**  
**Autism Spectrum Group**





- 88%** Disability / Health Condition
- 6%** Vulnerable Early Entrant Access
- 6%** Long-Term Unemployed

- White** (British) **57%**
- Black** (African / Caribbean / British) **21%**
- Mixed / Multiple / Other** **13%**
- Asian** (Bangladeshi / Chinese / Indian / Pakistani / British) **9%**



### Most common health barriers to work

- 1** Mental health issues
- 2** General poor health and lifestyle
- 3** Physical health

### Most common barriers to work

- 1** Not knowing how to customise a CV
- 2** Poor interview skills
- 3** Poor travel options

### Most common job goals



### Service performance

Participant starts to date	<b>1,016</b>
Job starts to date	<b>353</b>
Job sustainments to date	<b>172</b>

Sustainments are achieved when the participant has reached a specified level of earnings from employment or has reached 6 months of being in self-employment.

# Benefitting Merton

## Local job starts

**5,727** South London unemployed residents – **1,016** of them in Merton – have had the opportunity to access the programme and make a plan to find employment.

**353**  
Merton  
residents  
helped into  
work

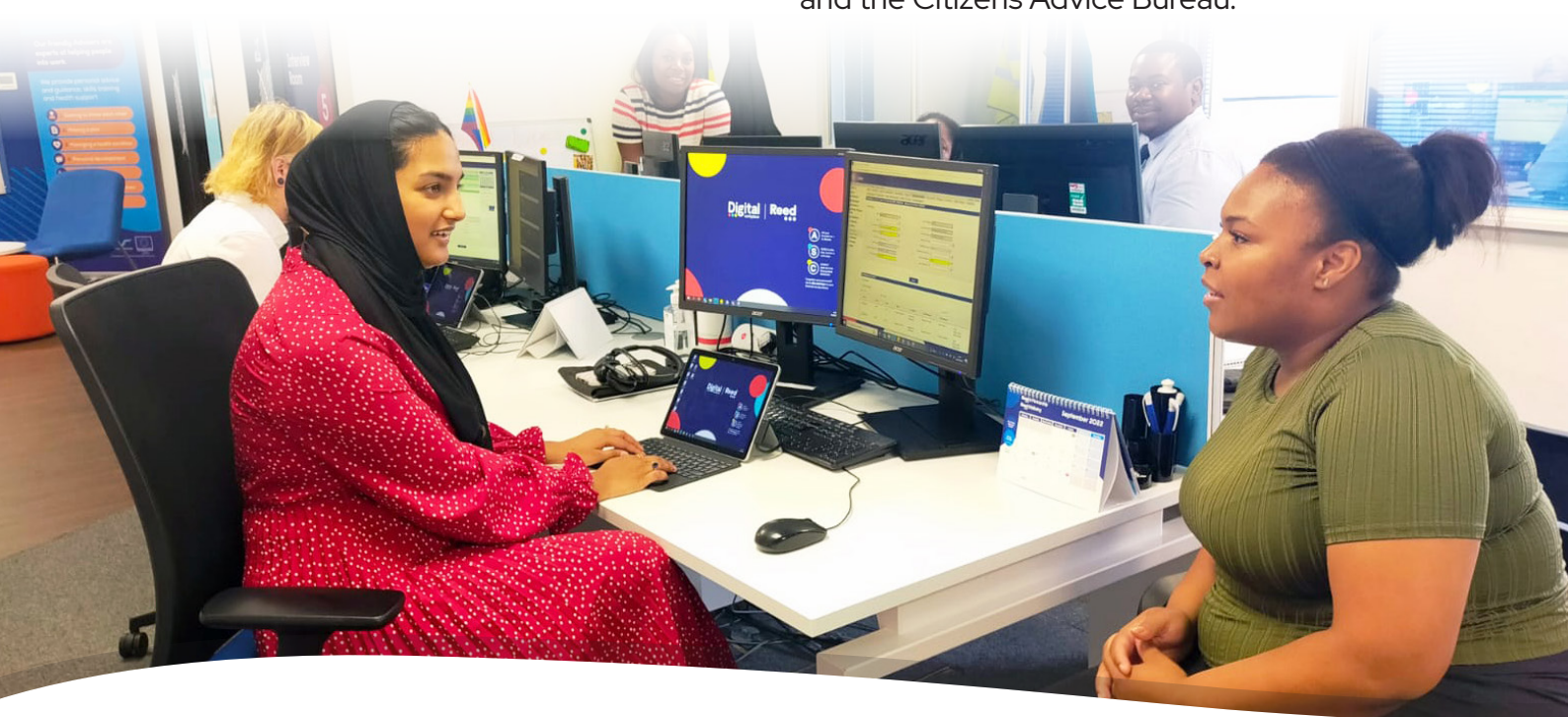
**353** participants from Merton have started working with our help. **60%** of those using the service in Merton come from jobless households, where inter-generational unemployment often increases the number and severity of barriers to finding work. Breaking this cycle is important to the prospects of all household members.

## Generating income

The average wage for jobs started by residents in Merton is **£10.00** and the most common contracted hours are **40 hours** per week. We can see from our data that **172** of participants supported into work have sustained until they have earned **£3,000** in income from their job so far, with many more approaching this figure soon. This shows that the roles participants are supported to access are meaningful, secure work.

However, only 19% of Merton participants start work earning above the London Living Wage. With the current cost of living issues facing people, we are helping participants by working with our key partners such as **Citizens Advice Bureau, Shelter** and **Beam**.

We are also running Cost of Living events for our participants where they can discuss their challenges and concerns with Merton-based representatives from local Housing Authorities, financial wellbeing organisations, foodbanks and the Citizens Advice Bureau.





## Partnerships that break down barriers

In Merton, the top three most common health barriers participants report are mental health issues, general poor health and lifestyle and physical health issues.

Our Health and Wellbeing Advisers provide a range of in-house personal and group support that address these key barriers, including managing anxiety, stress awareness, sleeping well, mindfulness, being more physical active, understanding nutrition and mood management.

We also work in partnership with local health support organisations to complete our service. This includes **IAPT, Croydon Talking Therapies, Chiltern Clinic and Living Well CIC** - who provide our participants with a six-week programme if they have a long-term health condition, such as diabetes, arthritis, chronic pain, depression, HIV or long Covid-19. The programme helps participants learn new skills to manage their condition with a healthcare professional, meet others and share experiences and use their new skills and knowledge to improve their quality of life.

Participants also benefit from our local partnership with **The Nehemiah Project**, an independent charity with five houses in South London where male participants with a history of substance misuse can access a therapeutic programme with keyworker meetings, counselling, psychotherapy, Family Support Service, and supported attendance at AA meetings.

The other most common, non-health related barriers to work among Merton participants are not knowing how to customise a CV, poor interview skills and poor travel options for getting to work.

We help participants overcome these issues through dedicated support from their Employment Adviser, access to CV builders and workshops, and integration with community services. This includes **South Thames College Group** and **Croydon Adult Learning and Training (CALAT)**, who complement our service with additional bespoke CV support, digital skills training and ESOL skills.

Participants in Merton are most likely to want to work in retail, administration or customer service.

To ensure suitable job vacancies and opportunities we have our own Recruitment Managers who are responsible for the Borough of Merton. We also liaise with the local Employment & Skills Lead from the Borough as well as **Back2Work Compete Training**, the pre-employment training provider.

**“We are delighted to work with Better Working Futures. Both organisations are committed to working collaboratively and taking a person-centred approach in supporting our clients.”**

**Living Well**

## Employer relations



Hallmark Care Homes were looking for staff for their Kew House facility including Lifestyle Assistants, Receptionists, Archivists and Care Assistants. The Lifestyle Assistant roles were particularly useful as they appealed to participants with Care experience who may not have been able to return to a Carer role. Our Recruitment Managers placed three participants into these positions, who are still in-post and enjoying their roles. Over all, eight people have been placed into roles at Kew House, and new vacancies are still being sent to us.

Kew House were so impressed with one Better Working Futures participant and created a hybrid Reception/Archive role for them. This was rewarding as the participant had a great skill set and employment history and had overcome anxiety and depression in order to return to the workplace.



We recently began working with financial services company Fidelity International who have been looking for entry-level Client Service Associates to join the team in their Kingswood Office. For ease of access, a free Shuttle collects employees from Sutton Station, other South London stations, to limit the cost-of-living effects which makes them a very attractive employer for our participants. Fidelity International have been impressed by the participants we have sent them so far, with four participants having received offers of employment so far.

## People's stories

**Kirsty** had been employed for years but since having her first child, the challenges she faced as a single parent were difficult for her and she became unemployed. Kirsty was struggling to find the right position to balance working life and her childcare commitments.

With the support of her Employment Adviser, Maida, Kirsty created an action plan to overcome the barriers that she was facing. Kirsty showed great dedication towards her plan, never missed her appointments, and informed her Employment Adviser on every step that she made on her time with the service.

Kirsty's CV was tailored to a few different roles with help from Maida and together they worked on her applications and interview preparation. Like many others during the pandemic, Kirsty struggled to find work whilst she was having to home school her son, but she remained optimistic.

After several months of support, Kirsty informed us that her application for a Referrals Assistant position was successful, and she had been asked to attend an interview. Maida worked with Kirsty to support her through the interview process, and few days after the interview Kirsty was offered the position which she began shortly afterwards.

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**Tharin** was referred to the Better Working Futures service following an accident which caused him to lose the use of his left hand.

The loss of mobility had caused Tharin to lose his confidence as he felt it would hinder his chances of being able to find employment. Tharin was also concerned that he would struggle due to English being his second language, but despite his low confidence, he really wanted to get back into work to gain better financial stability for himself and his family.

Tharin worked with his Employment Adviser to create an action plan so that they could start applying for jobs. His Employment Adviser also placed Tharin on a ESOL Course at Morden College to help improve his language skills.

During his time on the service, Tharin utilised many of the resource available and spent a lot of time improving his interview skills and practicing mock interviews to help him achieve his outcome. Tharin remained positive and always used feedback from his interviews so that he could improve.

With our support Tharin was successful in obtaining a job as a chef and is enjoying his new role. We are continuing to help Tharin through in-work support to ensure that he is able to sustain this employment.

better  
**working**  
futures  
WORK AND HEALTH PROGRAMME

