

To be presented at the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission

### **Who are St Giles Trust?**

St Giles Trust are a national charity, with our Head Office based here in Southwark. We show people there is a way to build a better future, for themselves and those they care about, and help them create this through support, advice and training. We deliver a range of services that support vulnerable groups including young people at risk of criminal exploitation and violence, unemployed, prison leavers and ex-offenders, women and children and families.

In Southwark, we have our social enterprise café, called Brewbird – offering work placements to those who are experiencing – or at risk of – long-term unemployment. We also have the St Giles Pantry next door to our head office in Camberwell, offering a high quality, healthy and sustainably sourced food to those struggling to feed themselves and their families. People using the Pantry pay a weekly subscription of £3.50 and in return are able to access an abundance of affordable, nutritious food and added support to help them move towards independence.

Peer-led services are at the heart of St Giles. We use past experience to inspire and enable people to improve their lives, change the lives of others and bring benefits to local communities and wider society. Our Peer Advisor Programme offers people who have experienced disadvantage the opportunity to train to a City & Guilds accredited Level 3 Advice and Guidance qualification. At the same time, Peer Advisors undertake supported work placements before progressing to employment.

### **Our Skills & Employment Team**

In Southwark, St Giles Trust currently delivers 4 contracts funded by Southwark Council under their Southwark Works provision. They include the following:

- Lot 1a – support for 16-25 year olds with learning difficulties, mental health, disabilities and care leavers.
- Lot 1b – support for 16-25 year olds who have had experience with the Criminal Justice System.
- Lot 6 – support for adult ex-offenders and those who have had contact with the Criminal Justice System.
- Lot 8 – support for adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Our aim is to support residents to address their wider barriers to employment and move towards work, apprenticeships, education and training. Today's talk will be focusing on our two youth projects.

## **Wider barriers**

In our experience, young people come to us facing a wide range of barriers including mental health, lack of education and skills, learning difficulties, involvement in criminal justice system, homelessness, experience of the care system, finance and debt issues, food poverty and lack of work experience, among many more.

Mental health is a need which has grown massively since the pandemic in 2020. We are now seeing very high numbers of young people coming to us with diagnosed and undiagnosed mental health concerns including high anxiety, depression and psychosis. Many of these young people are on long waiting lists for support, or don't meet the necessary threshold for support.

Homelessness and housing issues are increasingly on the rise. With the cost-of-living crisis, the huge increase in rents, and the rise evictions due to repossessions, housing has become an increasing need for many of our young people and their families. We are also seeing higher numbers of relationship breakdowns, with young people needing to leave their family home.

Impact of the cost-of-living crisis is impacting on huge numbers of young people (and their families). We are making exceptionally high numbers of referrals to both food banks and the St Giles Pantry, as food poverty is extremely prominent. We are also having to make increased applications to grants and crisis funds for household items, clothing, white goods and beds.

## **Our approach**

Our approach puts the person at the centre of the support. We would work with them and tailor our approach to their needs, addressing any barriers either through direct support internally or by referring them to specialist provision within the borough. We would continue to support the individual and, once ready, work alongside them to look at education, training, employment and apprenticeship options. We also work closely with training providers and employers to find courses and employment opportunities that meet the needs of the individuals we are working with. It isn't about getting people into any job, it is about supporting them to move into something that they will enjoy, can make progress and is sustainable.

In addition, we also offer in-work support and support to those in low paid, poor-quality jobs (i.e. minimum wage, minimal hours and insecure contracts) to progress into better roles. We also do a lot of work with employers and providers around reasonable adjustments, ensuring that our young people have equal access to opportunities.

Many of our young people come to us with limited to no work experience and/or skills. So in terms of the jobs they are looking for, many are looking to build their experience and find opportunities that fit around college and/or care commitments. We have a lot of interest in hospitality, coffee shops in particular, and work closely with some local social enterprises

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who help to train, offer paid work placements and interviews for jobs. That said, our young people are often interested in working in construction, admin, childcare, IT and technology.

There is a demand amongst our young people for apprenticeships, but this is a challenging area for us. On the one hand, many of our young people don't have the basic skills required to apply for apprenticeships, and those that do face strong competition from others and are often overlooked for opportunities.

### **What does Southwark do well / what could it to better?**

Southwark Works is very good example of collaborative working, where organisations use their skills set to better support residents with specific and tailored support. In my opinion, Southwark has done this very well and is a positive example to other boroughs. It brings together organisations and providers across the borough, sharing good practice for development and learning. Residents do well from having specialist support tailored to their specific needs.

An area that could be improved is around its definitions of Better Work. Southwark Works have a very specific definition of job progressions, which doesn't always fit with the needs of the residents. We have delivered better work provision in the past with a tri-borough partnership with Lewisham, Southwark and Lambeth and have found that better work is very specific to the individual and their circumstances. For example, better work isn't always about getting higher pay; sometimes it is about having an employer who understands their needs better, offers flexible working and is closer to home to reduce travel and childcare commitments.

### **How could Southwark better work with employers to improve employment?**

It would be good to see more employment and work experience opportunities within Southwark and its contractors. There is a big focus amongst tender processes for LLW employers, but it would be good to see more done around ensuring that contractors and departments within the Council ring fence employment and work placement opportunities for residents, which Southwark Works could then access. It would also be helpful if more could be done to ensure that contractors across the borough are good employers and working towards, at a minimum, the Mayor's Good Work Standards.

### **What could schools be doing to better support?**

Schools play a pivotal role in the development of our young people, but in our experience the career development within schools is woefully lacking. It would be good to see more being done in this area in order to better prepare young people and raise aspirations. In our experience, we are seeing young people leave school with little to no knowledge of their future options or opportunities. We are seeing many that have been negatively impacted by the pandemic in 2020, who are leaving school with high anxiety, limited social skills, no career insight and zero work experience. At St Giles, we are having to do a lot of this basic support and groundwork, but there will be many more young people who are falling through the net without such support and guidance.

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- **Russ to present two anonymised case studies**