

17th August 2010

Zebra signs the way to success

Zebra Access, a non-profit company, has supported deaf people from the Black Country into employment by delivering a course entirely in British Sign Language.

Zebra Access benefited from a community grant worth almost £12,000 from the West Midlands Councils' and Skills Funding Agency's regional European Social Fund programme, to help deliver the course.

The course involved confidence building, the development of CVs, role-play interviews and learners were taken to the local job centre to meet with the disability employment adviser.

Matthew Shaw, from Wolverhampton, was struggling to find a job when he heard about the employment course being offered by Zebra Access. The 24 year-old, who is deaf, was keen to take any training that might boost his chances of finding employment.

"I found the course really useful because it was tailored specifically for British Sign Language users. Many people are unaware that British Sign Language is an entirely separate language to English, so many deaf people struggle with reading and writing. Zebra Access provided assistance with CV writing, application forms and explained what rights and benefits we are entitled to, and how to apply for them."

After the completion of the course, Matthew was offered a job at Zebra's sister organisation Zebra Uno, a media company. Matthew is currently completing his six-month probation as a technical assistant where he is in charge of setting up the lighting and camera equipment, whilst learning about film editing.

Marilyn Bueno del Carpio, director at Zebra and tutor of the project, said: "Many people are unaware of the language barriers that deaf people have to contend with. At Zebra, we help individuals access interpreters, advise them on ways into work, talk them through disability benefits and help them apply for tax credits.

“Having two deaf trainers who are successful business people shows the learners that they too can succeed in whatever area they wish, and Zebra are here to support them through this process.”

Participants were interviewed at the beginning and upon completion of the 12-week course to assess their needs, and chart their progress.

The participants who took part in Zebra’s training have all since progressed to employment or further training.

Councillor Philip Atkins, chairman of the West Midlands Councils, said: “A lack of confidence and low self-esteem are common barriers for many individuals seeking employment, progression to further learning, or even promotion from their current role. Projects supported by the European Social Fund in the West Midlands have helped more than 55,000 people to boost their confidence through a wide range of training and personal development programmes, helping each individual to successfully achieve their goals.”

ENDS

For more information about the region’s ESF co-financing programme, please call Laura Reid, Bailey Lamburn or Michaela Maryon on 0121 456 3199 or email esfpr@smarts.co.uk.

Notes to editors

European Social Fund 2007 – 13

The European Social Fund (ESF) was set up to improve employment opportunities in the European Union and so help raise standards of living. It aims to help people fulfil their potential by giving them better skills and better job prospects.

The ESF programme forms part of the wider European Structural Funds programme running from 2007 to 2013, through which the UK will receive an anticipated £8bn of European funding.

In the West Midlands, the Skills Funding Agency, the West Midlands Councils and Jobcentre Plus are working with partners to deliver a wide range of projects designed to promote regional employment and skills objectives.

The Skills Funding Agency and the West Midlands Councils have over £200m to invest in:

- Improving the employability of inactive and unemployed people
- Tackling the barriers faced by young people not in education, employment or training
- Assisting offenders into work, education or training
- Providing small grants to the third sector to support the aims of ESF
- Supporting people experiencing redundancy to retrain and find new jobs
- Raising the qualifications and skills of workers to improve their job prospects and productivity

Government Office West Midlands

go-wm.gov.uk/gowm/EuroFund/StructuralFunds2007-2013/?a=42496

Jobcentre Plus

www.direct.gov.uk/en/employment/jobseekers

Skills Funding Agency

<http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/>

West Midlands Councils

<http://www.wmleadersboard.gov.uk/esf>