

PARTNERSHIPS

working together

Two medium-sized enterprises have jointly helped one homeless man to rebuild his life

Farah Shirwa came to Britain in 2000, fleeing civil war and oppression in Somalia and determined to create a better life for himself. He found employment in a factory and moved into a flat with a friend. Then the factory relocated, making Shirwa redundant. Unable to pay his rent, he became homeless and moved into the Snow Hill Hostel in Birmingham.

As part of the resettlement programme at the hostel, Shirwa was told about the Business Action on Homelessness programme run by Business in the Community, which puts businesses in touch with homeless people to give them work experience, training and help with developing their life skills and confidence.

Shirwa was able to obtain a place on the programme's 'Ready to Go' scheme, a two-day personal development project that gave him the confidence to successfully apply for a work placement at Welconstruct Group, a Birmingham-based office and workplace equipment company.

During the two-week placement, Shirwa was supported by a company 'buddy' at Welconstruct and by site visits from his social services key worker and the Business Action on Homelessness team. His tenure at the company went well and was extended for a further five weeks.

As part of the post-placement support, Shirwa was introduced to a job coach, Mark Parsons of Industrial Refrigeration Systems, a Bicester-based company that had decided to become involved in the programme after having been told about it by one of its customers, the confectionery business Cadbury Trebor Bassett. Parsons first met Shirwa at

the Welconstruct head office, where Shirwa had completed a fork-lift training course and was now looking for work in that field. However, potential employers were demanding 'experienced' fork-lift operators, and Shirwa did not have the necessary track record.

Fortunately, through a chance conversation with Hygiene Services, another Midlands company involved in Business Action on Homelessness, Parsons discovered that the company was looking for cleaning staff to work in the Cadbury Trebor Bassett distribution warehouse at Minworth.

Shirwa contacted Hygiene Services and was offered a job – and has worked for the firm ever since. 'He's proved to be a good example of how successful local businesses can be in helping people with a variety of problems that inhibit their ability to integrate into the community,' says Welconstruct group services manager Bob Mander. 'Collectively, using our networks, and with the resources provided by the programme, we can really make a difference.'

'this shows how local businesses in a network can help individuals with a variety of problems'

■ This is an edited version of one of a series of case studies relating to Business in the Community programmes published on Bitc's website at www.bitc.org.uk/resources/case_studies/index.html

■ working together: Farah Shirwa (centre) with Bob Mander (left) and Mark Parsons



BUSINESS ACTION ON HOMELESSNESS

This is a good example of a number of local agencies and companies coming together and co-ordinating their work to help an individual. It is refreshing to hear of such a successful example of how this can be achieved.

Features of particular interest are:

- each organization in the chain is thinking outside their own 'individual' box
- no matter how much you plan or try to cover all eventualities, sometimes the best outcome is down to a chance conversation

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