

Kirklees Employment Service Social Value Commitment

As part of Richmond Fellowship's Social Value Commitment, Kirklees Employment Service were given £250 which the service could use to support local charities.

As a Team we decided that we would like to make a donation of useful items to charities that are supporting people with the current difficulties a donation of useful items to charities that are supporting people with the current difficulties of financial situations.

We reached out to our local Homeless Support Team to see if there was anything they needed to support with their work over winter, and they gratefully gave us some ideas of what would help.

We used part of our £250 to create 4 packs each made up of a large rucksacks, camping mat, sleeping bag, basic toiletries, some energy bars, and we wrapped up some chocolate as a Christmas gift as well.

We were lucky enough for the deputy manager, Robert, and a key worker, Louise, to join us for our Team Meeting where they could tell us about the amazing work they do - often walking round Kirklees in the early hours of the morning offering outreach to those who need it. We heard how our donations would be really helpful for individuals who were waiting to be placed in accommodation, or perhaps not quite ready to accept support, as not only does it keep them a little warmer, but builds up trust with the workers. Robert said: 'Our team really appreciates the donations and we look forward to supporting each other in the future'.

We had also been doing some work with our local 'The Bread and Butter Thing' by attending sessions to let volunteers and customers know how we can support them. We wanted to give some additional support and used our remaining donation fund to supply them with a range of blankets to give out to those accessing the service. The feedback from the service was: 'Many of our members struggle to make ends meet, forcing them to make difficult choices around heating and eating. The thermal blankets, donated by the Richmond Fellowship, have been gladly received as they will help us enable people to stay warm this winter.

This is the second year Kirklees Employment Service have been given the chance to make donations, and the whole team really appreciates being able to help out the local community.



The team give the donations to Robert and Louise of the Homeless Support Team



The team ready to get going!

The second part of our social value commitment was the allowance for the Team to complete a day volunteering within the local area.

After discussions about what to do we settled on getting out into the fresh Yorkshire air and helping with cleaning up the local canal.

The day started with -5 temperatures, but it was sunny and crisp - the perfect winters day to be out and about. Raring to go, the Kirklees Employment service team, and Regional Manager Daniel O'Donoghue met at the Standedge Tunnel Visitors centre, the home of the longest, highest elevation, canal tunnel in Britain, at 3.24 miles and in a great setting at the foot of the moorland in Marsden village, West Yorkshire. We were greeted with a glorious sunny but freezing cold day. We were joined by one of the customers we support, and a group of students from Kirklees college were also giving their to help too.

Gordon, the volunteer manager, and Andy, his colleague, kindly arranged for us to have a hot mug of coffee to fix us up for the morning, and gave us our safety talk which included water safety instructions. We then got kitted out into life jackets...just in case. Our task for the day was to help with clearing and widening the towpath which has narrowed due to vegetation growth and banking slips. We all had great fun trying to master the electric wheelbarrow - and there was varying degrees of success in operating it.



A regional managers work is never done - Danny helping Steve into his life jacket

We set ourselves a goal of making it to a small bridge in the distance, but even as the temperature rose to -3, we had to gradually start removing layers. It's fair to say we were all a little out of practice with such hard graft after working from home and in the office for so long, and our bridge target was more a pipe dream.

As we shovelled, pulled, lifted, and swept the towpath we had chance to listen to Andy who had so much knowledge to share about the canal. We learnt the the canal is made differently in certain sections because different teams of contractors were used and they had their own techniques. We also learnt about why the canal was built and it's uses over the years. The stories certainly kept our minds busy as we worked. Ziona, one of our employment advisers said: 'It was hard graft but good fun working together. We helped our community in a small way and bonded as a team'.

After a couple of hours, we broke for some lunch and walked back to the impressive setting of the visitors' centre (if you ever get the chance visit this place). Everyone fuelled up on sandwiches, biscuits, flap jack and mince pies - kindly provided by our hosts. Service Manager, Steven Blinston, reflected on the day so far and said 'What a wonderful way for us to spend time together as a team and support such a fantastic, and beautiful, local service. It was amazing that Danny came up to join us and support the service, and we definitely weren't complaining about the extra pair of hands! All the team felt so refreshed after spending time in the crisp air, so it was a great way to promote our own wellbeing whilst giving back.

As a team we really appreciate the opportunity Richmond Fellowship gives us to complete social value opportunities.

With full stomachs we returned to work - though perhaps a little slower than we had been this morning. We had chance to speak with Gordon and Andy, and the students who were volunteering form the local college too, about our service and the support we offer. Excitingly this is potentially leading to more joint work with the canal! The students were also interested in our support, especially as one had just gone through a job interview! It was really good to be able to spread word about the support we can offer. The towpath was becoming much busier at this point as dog walkers, cyclists, and parents were enjoying strolls and it was lovely to greet them as they went past and know that were were making the area much more user friendly for them. Everyone who went past gave us a proper northern hello, and thanked us for our efforts.

Danny, who travelled up form the south to join us, said:

What a great way to spend the day with a wonderful team! We could see the difference we made along the towpath, improving access in a section already being used by pushchair & wheelchair users whilst we were working. The FE College students were great fun to work with, even if it made competition for the chocolate biscuits a bit tight, and the weather was perfect - crisp and cold. Well done the Kirklees Team! And hopefully you had a lovely early Christmas meal afterwards with colleagues who had a different set of volunteering tasks they were working on. The spirit of Christmas and the spirit of RF all rolled into one!!

As a team we managed to clear a good 50m of the canal - which given the extent of the hard work, and the ground frost we were battling, felt like a good victory for us. We took the opportunity to celebrate afterwards by having our well earned Team Christmas Meal!



Alison and Ziona keeping warm at lunch

Richard working hard as Steve and Danny...supervise?



Two of the Team were unable to join us on the canal clearing due to the nature of the task being slightly more physical than we thought it would be! However, this just meant we could spread our services out even further!

Hannah will be looking to do some volunteering next year, but Karl has volunteered at The Welcome Centre in Huddersfield. The Welcome Centre are the largest independent foodbank in the UK and provide support to families within Kirklees. Last year they gave out 23,398 crisis packs, of which 14,254 were food banks. However they also provide budgeting support, access to grants, digital support, reading a literacy support, signposting and emotional support. Karl was really looking forward to being able to give some support to the The Welcome Centre, especially at what is such a busy time of year for them.

Karl attended the warehouse nice and early so he could get a good start on the task ahead. He was warmly welcomed by the team of volunteers and taken through to their kitchen area. Armed with a good cup of coffee Karl was set to decanting food into packs that people in need would later come to collect. The volunteers that Karl was working with were amazing with their dedication (and speed!) at decanting and putting packs together. Karl said 'I really enjoyed working with the other volunteers to provide much needed essential for those who use the service. Although it is sad that so much support is needed at the moment, it felt really good to contribute so that The Welcome Centre can keep running smoothly. I really enjoyed speaking to all the volunteers and finding out what motivates them'.

Karl was also able to discuss what support we offer with the volunteers, which includes our Food and Household Budgeting course, so we are hoping that we will be able to form some links in the future so we can work in partnership with the amazing work The Welcome Centre do.