

Tell us about your organisation –

We are a charity that supports adults with learning disabilities. We set up in 2013 with our Out of the Box community café. The community café is here to provide work skills, training, experience and support to our members who are adults with disabilities, to get real life experience. We currently support up to 56 members within the café, from the ages of 17 and up.

We run OTB choices, which is a service that offers activities around arts and crafts, wellbeing and other skills. These run 5 days a week and supports 20-30 members Monday to Friday. They develop life skills, get creative, learn how to live independently and develop communication skills, whereas the café helps to develop work skills as well..

We also run OTB work, when members have got to a certain point and feel more work ready, we go out and look for employers that might be able to offer work experience or paid work and help them get into work. We offer interview skills, CV workshops, boundaries and provide assistive support with that employer to get them into work.

Why was the organisation founded –

Back in 2013 there was a need within the local community for something quite purposeful and meaningful for adults with different abilities to be doing, we initially launched with the café as a place to gain some experience and develop community links, as well as have the experience of work and the idea that they can move on in life. The key goal was to work within Ilkley and local areas, and the people within those communities. There was nothing like this at the time locally so we were very unique.

Members come in on a day placement and become part of a community, they get to know our customers, and they are very capable of work so we want to give them this opportunity to access work and their community in a way they otherwise might not be able to.

How has that changed if at all? –

There has been much more demand since we started, because there is much more of an identification of the need for these people to be in work. People want to come through the café and through the Choices programme, they want to learn more about being independent, learning new skills and moving away from the heavily supported living. We also have much younger members coming through the café, it starts with the café and we move them through our work programmes. They have much higher aspirations and want to achieve, and are capable so we give them the opportunity.

What are you most proud of about your organisation –

We are most proud of our members and their achievements, what they are able to do and achieve with a little support. We have 8 members who have moved into employment with local employers, their journeys from the café with very little skill, to employed and paid work.

We also have lots of volunteers who show great commitment to OTB, we have around 70 and we couldn't operate them. We are so lucky to have them!

What is your greatest challenge in the industry and how could others help you overcome it –

We try to offer such a variety of services for our members, e.g. creative, social, work, community, life skills, independence – we are a bit of a family and they do sessions across service. Some are with us for quite a long period of time. It's definitely a community hub.

Our greatest challenge is partly volunteers, we are always in need of more volunteers and more help. To develop we need new people to come in and help with our services, we are incredibly proud of those we do have but could always use more.

Have you received any support from Community Action along the way?

We've accessed lots of training, volunteers and staff access that. We tap into the Ilkley Office a lot with Mary, she helps with catering, networking and running different events with them. She will promote us and tell us about things that are happening so we link in with volunteer events such as the Ilkley and District Volunteer Awards. Our staff and volunteers do catering for community events.

Do you have anything you would like to let others know about?

The OTB works initiative – we're always on the lookout for OTB works, looking for businesses and local employers to get more involved with us to help us get our members into paid work or work experience.

In the spring we are hoping to launch more of a health and wellbeing aspect to the OTB works project, such as relationships, girls and men's groups, sex education, sports and fitness groups and more of this kind of programme.