



## Diversity Task Force

## Disability Inclusive Workplace Quick Guide for Employers



### PERSONAL STORY

#### SMaRT Garage – Bob’s Story

SMaRT Garage, run by the First Step Trust, provides MOT testing, vehicle repair and servicing. Fully qualified technicians with many years’ experience staff the garages and we take pride in our standards of workmanship.

First Step Trust (FST) is an innovative charity with over 25 years’ experience of providing opportunities for people excluded from working life because of mental health conditions, learning disabilities, drug or alcohol and other disadvantages.

Ronnie Wilson is CEO of First Step Trust, told us:

“Bob is an example of what can be achieved no matter how dire the situation may become. He is also a highly skilled and competent mechanic who was facing a life of unemployment. I strongly suggest that other employers in the industry think about taking on a technician who has become disabled or disadvantaged in some way. There are many technicians out there who could add to the productivity of your garage or service centre”.

#### Bob’s Story

A family friend who was a welder said he would ask the garage he worked for occasionally if they needed a trainee, I went for a chat with the garage owner, and he was impressed that I had started the City & Guilds course (C+G MVCS 381) off my own back and offered me a job with a day release once a week to attend the course.

After I had been there a few months I was allowed to help doing repairs, I was suffering anxiety and depression but managed to hide it as I enjoyed the work environment.

I completed C&G part 1 with distinction and enrolled for part 2 but had to do the evening course after work as the garage would not let me do day release. I completed part 2 and 3 and achieved my qualification and left the garage to work for the RAC as a service patrol, this suited me as it was a solitary job and required little social interaction as my mental health was interfering with all parts of my life and I had started to drink heavily.

In 2009 I was referred to FST (First Step Trust). I started off as a volunteer doing a range of things from gardening to decorating and furniture removal. Then Ronnie the CEO told me that FST wanted to open up a garage in Woolwich and asked me to help with designing the layout, purchasing equipment and getting the garage up and running. I applied for a full time paid job as the garage manager and (to my delight) I got it.

Things went well for a number of years and then around 2018 I had another major break down due to a number of difficult situations in my life. In the end I had to leave FST as I needed all my strength to get on top of things. I stayed away for a few months then (following a call from Ronnie) I decided to go offer my support in a different way. I knew I would be dead before I was 50 if I didn't turn things around. It took a few months to get my physical and mental strength back to the point where I could face life and keep away from drugs and alcohol.

My new role has been about coming in to help out with anything FST needs e.g. I have done some tool box talks and other training, I driven FST's recovery vehicles collecting and returning vehicles and given 1 to 1 advice and guidance to trainees.

More recently I have become a member of the FST Board and the person responsible for overseeing the quality aspects of the garage and MOT's. It gives me great pleasure to look back on my achievements when I'm out with my family and grandchildren. I am particularly proud of the fact that despite all the pressures I have not taken to drink or drugs to deal with life. I face it head on.

Mental health problems destroy your self-esteem, self-belief and confidence but they don't wipe out your skills or your ability to do the job when you're well.

The support and a recognition that underneath the surface you're still there, has helped me to get well and given me the motivation to never give up.

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