

If it works Wilmott Dixon... it can work anywhere

Established in 1852, Wilmott Dixon is a privately owned company and is one of the biggest construction and property organisations in the UK. For the past ten years, the organisation has run an 'Opening Doors programme' providing employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

We speak to Leigh Garbutt, Regional Customer & Community Manager at Willmott Dixon Partnerships, about her organisation's experience of employing people with disabilities.



We started our Opening Doors programme ten years ago, as we realised that young people were struggling to get into work when leaving school. In the first year, we took on 91 young people and soon realised that we needed to do the same for people with disabilities who were also struggling to enter world of work.

Our programme has worked really well and we have taken on 5 people with disabilities. The joy that these particular employees have brought to our organisation has really outweighed any potential financial barriers. It's so lovely to take on a young person who genuinely wants to learn and who really wants to be there. We've found that those people with disabilities work so hard, as they feel like they have a purpose by working.

As well as taking on members of staff in our company, we also run programmes with local schools and local authorities. In fact, we've just finished a community project working at a Special Needs school in Rotherham where we gave 8 students there work experience. This project involved our young apprentices building and decorating a new part of the school, which will now be used to teach students how to live independently.

I realise that some employers may have concerns about the costs and potential barriers, but in my opinion, there are only barriers if you as a company are making them. We have had to adapt a workstation for one of our employees who couldn't use her hands, but the amount of work she puts in and her ambition has certainly overridden any of those one-off financial costs.

If I had any advice to organisations that have been hesitant to take on anyone with a disability, I would say, let them have a go first. Maybe give them some work experience and see how it goes. Taking on people with disabilities certainly works for Wilmott Dixon, so if it can work here it can work anywhere. And in all honesty, from my experience you will get more out of taking on someone with a disability than they will, it's just so rewarding.

Opportunity Sheffield aims to help businesses in Sheffield who want to recruit, train and develop local talent - especially those with disabilities. It also supports people who may need additional help into employment.

If you are an employer and you want practical help and advice to recruit and retain disabled talent now or in the future, then please register your details at www.sheffield.gov.uk/employdisabled talent and we'll be in touch. Or you can phone 0114 2760039.

Alternatively you can phone our Employment and Skills team on 0114 2296168 or email opportunity@sheffield.gov.uk for information.