

Employment that lifts people out of poverty: discussion 1 - Community Voice group of local residents

A group of local residents from Community Voice set out to paint a picture of what people face when seeking, gaining and keeping employment in Clackmannanshire today, based on their own experience of living here.

Here's what we learned.

The motivation to take up opportunities and collect skills, abilities and qualifications is often defined in early years. Some have early life experiences that result in greater confidence and social skills, but many don't. Some young people have role models that can inspire future employment, but many don't.

We become part of an **education system** which appears to be focussed on academic achievement, putting schools, teachers, students, parents under pressure.

Even unskilled work can now demand qualifications that don't work for everyone, which means that, for some, skills and talents can remain undiscovered.

Then we transition into the **job seeking world** - from school, college or University - and it's a complex system to navigate.

- Firstly, we need relevant work opportunities to actually pursue. These feel rare and unachievable for many.
- We encounter application forms and interviews that don't enable us to show our true selves
- It feels as though we already need to be skilled, but for many, this pre-work experience is difficult to gain.
- We need to 'fit in' and overcome unconscious assumptions and biases that all employers have but only some aim to recognise and reduce.
- The benefits system can make this process yet more complex and, potentially, impossible.

Even if we emerge from this with an **offer** of employment, we still need more in place to **accept an offer and thrive in that work**.

These include:

- The ability to get to and from a workplace - but if public transport is limited, and the cost of running a car is out of the reach this can be a major barrier, particular for those in rural areas.
- Affordable, flexible childcare that fits with work patterns.
- Good health and resilience to work in environments that might not suit our bodies, mental health or neurodiversity.

- Confidence and inner resources to withstand possible hostile work environments.

So, in order to be considered for employment, to be offered work and to accept and sustain that opportunity, there are numerous aspects of 'employability' many of which are out of our hands, even if we're 'qualified'.

Providing employment that lifts people out of poverty isn't just about creating more jobs. We need to consider education and opportunities that start in our early years and continue throughout life, supporting local people to take up local opportunities that build a strong local economy.

The future we want

As a group, we also imagined an alternative future for Clackmannanshire, where local work supports a local economy which in turn means that Clackmannanshire's communities thrive and people are happier. We've described below what Clackmannanshire would need to look and feel like to achieve this. These aren't suggested solutions, they're eventual outcomes that we're hoping can emerge from the work we choose to fund:

We hope for a future Clackmannanshire that feels like a more equal society, where searching for employment is less of an ordeal and people thrive, in every sense, through working.

All young people are taught life skills that can support them to take opportunities from an early age, building confidence and resilience as foundations, particularly aimed at those who require more educational support.

All senior school students work with mentors to become career-ready, with paid internships built into the curriculum as standard. This ensures that all young people leave school with a CV, a reference based on real experience and additional adults in their life that can provide guidance.

Students now demonstrate their skills in different ways - conversational exams are an alternative for those who find written work a challenge.

Better knowledge about differences has increased tolerance while biases are acknowledged and removed, leading to more equal opportunities and a more content workforce. Job seeking and job progression is competitive not combative.

Routes to employment are clearer, fairer, less complex and more accessible, as are opportunities for starting a business. Job application forms and benefit systems are easier to navigate, the rules regarding in-work benefits are clearer and the use of AI is transparent and equitable.

This has resulted in many more locally-owned businesses, generating local opportunities that fit with the needs of a local workforce and keeping wealth circulating inside the county.

More investment is provided by public bodies, again keeping wealth in the county.

Universal Basic Income ensures that people no longer feel under pressure to stay in work that is detrimental to their health and wellbeing. Importantly, they can afford to take time out to develop skills and build on their education.

Short-form courses at new learning centres now enable everyone to learn at a level and at a time that works for them, throughout their life. More people have second chances at learning and finding their direction.

Childcare is no longer the barrier it was in the past for many parents returning to work or maintaining their role. It has become more affordable, flexing to fit with changing work patterns.

Equally, extra-curricular activities are now more accessible and affordable, providing opportunities for all young people to access leisure, culture and develop new skills for the future.

Housing and employment initiatives now collaborate with large local employers to ensure that employees can afford to live locally. Public services staff use local services and become experienced voices in future local redesign. Transport, education and other local services are now able to respond appropriately to the local population size and needs, avoiding pressure on essential services.

Clackmannanshire is now seen as one of the most popular regions to live in Scotland. Its focus on supporting a local

economy built on fair, sustainable and nurturing work enables local business, people and families to thrive.