



Your Past Does Not Define Your Future

*What Chile, Denmark and Sweden Can Teach the UK About
Employment, Dignity and Opportunity*

A Churchill Fellowship Report by Sanjeev Rokka

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I am grateful to the government departments, social enterprises, businesses, youth projects and charities I met in Santiago, Copenhagen and Stockholm. I have chosen not to name individuals in this report. This protects the privacy of those conversations and allows the report to focus on the wider lessons that emerged across countries, systems and communities.

I also want to thank the people who spoke openly about poverty, exclusion, employment, social mobility, trauma, opportunity and hope. Some conversations were formal. Some were personal. All of them changed the way I think about work, dignity and what it takes for someone to move from the margins into meaningful employment.

This Fellowship was not just professional research for me. It connected directly to my own life. I know what it feels like to grow up around disadvantage. I know what it feels like when crime is normalised because opportunity feels distant. I know what it feels like when people make assumptions about what your future will become. But I also know that a person's future can change.

That is why this report is called Your Past Does Not Define Your Future.

About the author

My name is Sanjeev Rokka. I am a social entrepreneur and the founder of Reach Your Full Potential Limited, a purpose driven communications company.

My work sits between business, communications, social mobility and lived experience. I have worked across the private, charitable and public sectors, including in communications and youth justice. I previously worked as Strategic Youth Advisory Board Lead at the Ministry of Justice, advising senior leaders on youth justice and reducing reoffending.

My commitment to this work comes from personal experience. I grew up in a low income environment where crime was common and opportunity often felt scarce. Earlier life challenges shaped me, but they did not end my story. Philosophy gave me space to reflect, question myself and rebuild. It helped me understand that people are not fixed. Circumstances can shape a person, but they do not have to define the whole of their life.

Through this Fellowship, I wanted to understand how other countries create fairer routes into work for people held back by circumstance. I wanted to learn how employment pathways can be designed for people who may lack confidence, contacts, qualifications or stability, but who still have talent, ambition and something valuable to offer.

This report brings together what I learned in Chile, Denmark and Sweden. It also sets out how that learning can be applied in the UK through a practical twelve week employment integration pilot.

Executive summary

This report explores how the UK can create better employment pathways for people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

My Churchill Fellowship took me to Santiago, Copenhagen and Stockholm. Across these cities, I met with government departments, social enterprises, businesses, youth projects and charities to understand how different countries support people who face barriers to work.

The central question behind my Fellowship was this: how can we build employment pathways that do not simply move disadvantaged people into any job, but help them build dignity, confidence, skills and long term opportunity?

The UK often talks about employment as the answer to disadvantage. In many ways, it is. Work can provide income, structure, identity, confidence and independence. But employment alone is not always enough. If work is insecure, unsupported, badly paid or disconnected from progression, it may not change someone's future. For people who have experienced poverty, trauma, care, homelessness, exclusion, criminal justice involvement or long term unemployment, the challenge is not only getting into work. The challenge is entering work in a way that is stable, supported and meaningful.

In Chile, I learned about the importance of community, trust and dignity. I saw how local relationships, social enterprises and community organisations can reach people who may not trust formal systems. Chile reminded me that employment support must be close to people's real lives.

In Denmark, I learned about the strength of respected vocational pathways and the importance of employer responsibility. Denmark challenged the idea that practical learning is second best. It showed me how work based learning can become a serious route into skilled employment when employers are properly involved.

In Sweden, I learned about integration, belonging and long term support. Sweden reminded me that entering work is not the same as feeling part of the workplace. People who have been excluded need more than access. They need support to stay, grow and belong.

Across all three countries, one lesson became clear: people do not lack potential. They lack pathways.

This report recommends that the UK develops more practical, employer connected and dignity centred employment pathways for disadvantaged people. These pathways should combine confidence building, skills training, mentoring, real work experience and progression support.

As my own next step, I propose piloting a twelve week employment integration internship through Reach Your Full Potential Limited. The pilot would support people from disadvantaged backgrounds to build communication skills, digital skills, AI skills, confidence, workplace experience and a professional portfolio.

The aim is not charity. The aim is opportunity.

Key findings

1. Employment support must begin with dignity. People are more likely to engage when they feel respected, not managed. Across Chile, Denmark and Sweden, the strongest examples of employment support treated people as individuals with potential, not as problems to fix.
2. Disadvantaged people need pathways, not one off interventions. Short courses and employability workshops can help, but they are not enough on their own. People need structured routes that combine skills, mentoring, real work experience and long term progression.

3. Employers must be part of the solution. Employment integration cannot be left only to charities or government. Businesses need to be active partners. They need to help shape training, offer placements and rethink how they recognise potential.
4. Vocational and practical learning should be respected. Denmark showed me the power of treating vocational pathways as serious routes into skilled employment. The UK still has work to do in challenging the hierarchy that places academic routes above practical ones.
5. Community trust matters. Chile showed me that formal systems alone cannot reach everyone. People who have been excluded often need trusted local relationships before they can engage with training or employment.
6. Support must be long term enough to change identity. Sweden showed me that integration is not only about work. It is about belonging. People need to see themselves as capable of entering mainstream professional life.
7. Lived experience should be treated as an asset. People who have experienced disadvantage often have resilience, emotional intelligence, adaptability and insight. These qualities are valuable in the workplace, especially in communications, community engagement, social enterprise and public service.

Recommendations

1. Create twelve week employment integration pilots for disadvantaged people.
2. Build stronger partnerships between businesses, charities and government.
3. Move from employability workshops to real work pathways.
4. Treat vocational learning as a route to dignity and skilled work.
5. Fund trusted community organisations to act as bridges.
6. Train employers to recognise potential differently.
7. Use AI and digital tools to widen access.
8. Measure long term outcomes, not just job starts.

Introduction

I began this Fellowship because I know what it feels like to be written off.

I know what it feels like to grow up in a place where ambition can feel unrealistic. I know what it feels like when crime is closer than opportunity. I know what it feels like when people make assumptions about who you are, what you are capable of and where you are likely to end up. But I also know that people can change.

My life changed because I was able to reflect, learn and rebuild. Philosophy gave me a way to understand myself. Work gave me structure. Mentoring gave me purpose. Communications gave me a professional path.

That is why employment matters to me. Not just because people need income, but because good work can give people identity, dignity, confidence and direction.

However, I also know that not all work does this. Some employment simply keeps people surviving. Some programmes move people into jobs without giving them real progression. Some systems talk about opportunity while still expecting disadvantaged people to overcome barriers that were not of their making.

This Fellowship gave me the chance to step outside the UK and ask what other countries are doing differently. I travelled to Santiago, Copenhagen and Stockholm to learn from people working across government, social enterprise, business, youth projects and charities. I wanted to understand how they approach employment integration, how they support disadvantaged people, how they involve employers and how their learning could be adapted to the UK.

I did not travel to find a perfect system. No country has solved inequality. No model can simply be copied and pasted into the UK. Chile, Denmark and Sweden each have different histories, economies, cultures and welfare systems. But each place taught me something valuable.

Chile taught me about community, dignity and the power of trusted local relationships. Denmark taught me about practical pathways, vocational respect and employer responsibility. Sweden taught me about integration, long term support and the importance of belonging.

Together, they helped me see what is missing in the UK. We do not only need more employment programmes. We need better bridges between disadvantage and opportunity.

Why this issue matters in the UK

The UK has many people whose talent is never fully seen.

Some grow up in poverty. Some leave care without family support. Some experience homelessness. Some are excluded from school. Some become involved in crime. Some leave prison and want to rebuild, but find that every door is half closed. Some have experienced trauma that affects their confidence, trust and ability to navigate professional spaces.

These experiences do not mean someone lacks potential. But they do mean the route into work is harder.

In many professional sectors, including communications, marketing, digital media, business and public service, people are often expected to arrive already prepared. They are expected to know how to speak in interviews, how to network, how to write emails, how to present themselves, how to understand workplace culture and how to believe they belong.

For someone from a disadvantaged background, these things may not have been taught. They may not have had family members in professional jobs. They may not have had access to unpaid internships. They may not have had a stable home, laptop, quiet space or professional network.

The result is that many people are judged not by their potential, but by their polish.

This is a waste. It is a waste for individuals, who are denied the chance to build meaningful lives. It is a waste for employers, who miss out on talent, resilience and insight. It is a waste for society, which pays the long term cost of exclusion.

My Fellowship convinced me that employment integration should not be seen as a side issue. It should be central to building a more resilient economy. A resilient economy is not only one that grows. It is one that uses the talent of all its people.

What I wanted to learn

I wanted to understand how different countries help people move from disadvantage into work. I was particularly interested in five questions.

1. How do other countries create pathways for people who face barriers to employment?
2. What role do employers play?
3. How do vocational or practical training routes work?

4. How do services build confidence, dignity and trust?

5. What could be adapted into a UK model through my company, Reach Your Full Potential Limited?

I was not looking for a single answer. I was looking for principles. I wanted to come back with learning that could shape a practical pilot: a twelve week employment integration internship for people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

My approach

During my Fellowship, I visited Santiago, Copenhagen and Stockholm. Across these cities, I met with government departments, social enterprises, businesses, youth projects and charities. I explored how different organisations understand employment barriers and how they design support for people who are excluded from opportunity.

I have not named individuals in this report. This allows me to focus on the themes that emerged across conversations rather than attributing particular views to specific people.

My learning came from professional meetings, site visits, informal conversations, observation and reflection. This report is not intended to be a travel diary. It is not a full record of every meeting. It is a summary of the learning that matters most and a proposal for how that learning can be turned into change in the UK.

Learning from Chile

Community, dignity and trust

Santiago was an important place to begin because it showed me employment integration in a context where inequality is visible and where community relationships matter deeply.

What stood out to me in Santiago was not simply policy. It was the role of people and relationships. I met organisations that understood disadvantage not as an abstract category, but as something lived through family, neighbourhood, education, safety, income and identity. Employment was not treated only as a technical problem. It was connected to confidence, dignity, trust and belonging.

One of the strongest lessons from Chile was that people do not always engage with formal systems just because support exists. If someone has grown up around instability, poverty or exclusion, they may not automatically trust government services, institutions or employers. Before a person can move towards employment, they may need to feel seen and respected.

That may sound simple, but it is often missing. In the UK, we sometimes design employment support around systems rather than people. We ask whether someone is job ready, whether they have a CV, whether they can attend an appointment, whether they can meet targets. Those things matter, but they do not always reach the deeper issue.

The deeper issue is often trust. Chile reminded me that trust is not soft. It is infrastructure. If a young person trusts a youth worker, a community organisation or a social enterprise, that relationship can become the bridge into training, confidence and work. Without that bridge, even a well funded programme may fail to reach the people who need it most.

I also learned that dignity has to be built into the design of employment support. People who have experienced disadvantage are often used to being spoken about as problems. They are described as hard to reach, vulnerable, chaotic, risky, low skilled or economically inactive. Some of those terms may be used with good intentions, but they can reduce people to their barriers.

In Santiago, the best examples I saw started from a different place. They began with the person's context, but did not end there. They asked what someone could become with the right support. That is a lesson the UK needs. We need employment support that understands poverty and trauma, but does not trap people inside those labels.

What Chile taught me for the UK

Chile taught me that employment integration must be rooted in real life. A programme for disadvantaged people cannot only be designed in offices. It has to understand the communities people come from, the pressures they face and the reasons they may not trust formal opportunities.

For the UK, this means trusted community organisations should be central to employment pathways. They know the people, the streets, the families and the barriers. They can reach people who may never respond to a formal job advert.

It also means employment support must protect dignity. People should not feel like they are being processed through a system. They should feel like they are being invited into a future.

Finally, it means lived experience should be part of programme design. People who understand disadvantage from the inside can see things that policy alone misses. This directly shapes my proposed twelve week pilot. Recruitment should not rely only on applications and interviews. It should work through trusted networks, community referrals, youth projects, charities and local partners.

Learning from Denmark

Vocational respect and employer responsibility

Copenhagen gave me a very different set of lessons. Where Chile showed me the importance of community trust, Denmark showed me the importance of structure.

What struck me most was that practical learning did not feel like a second class route. In the UK, there is still a hierarchy in how we talk about education. University is often seen as the gold standard. Vocational training, apprenticeships and practical routes are sometimes treated as alternatives for people who are not academic enough.

That attitude is damaging. It limits people who would thrive through practical learning. It also weakens the economy by separating education from the real needs of employers.

In Copenhagen, I saw how important it is when employers are not just asked to receive trained people at the end of a process, but are involved throughout. Strong employment pathways need employers to shape opportunities, offer placements, provide feedback and understand their role in developing talent.

This matters for disadvantaged people because training without employer connection can become another dead end. Someone can complete a course, gain confidence and improve their skills, but if employers are not involved, the bridge into real work may still be missing.

The Danish lesson is that pathways need to be real. They need to connect to actual jobs, actual workplaces and actual labour market demand.

This is especially important for my own sector. Communications, marketing, branding, content creation and digital media are practical fields. People learn by doing. They need to write, design, plan, present, receive feedback and work on real briefs.

A person from a disadvantaged background may not need years of classroom learning before being allowed near professional work. They may need a structured opportunity to practise, improve and prove themselves.

Denmark also made me think differently about employer responsibility. In the UK, businesses are often encouraged to support social mobility through corporate social responsibility, volunteering days or charitable donations. These can be helpful, but they are not enough. Employers need to be part of the training ecosystem. They need to offer real entry points. Not token placements. Not unpaid work experience. Not photo opportunities. Real work. Real feedback. Real progression.

What Denmark taught me for the UK

Denmark taught me that vocational pathways must be respected, structured and employer connected. For the UK, this means we need to stop treating practical learning as a lesser option. We need to build programmes that combine skill development with actual work experience and employer involvement.

For my proposed pilot, this means participants should work on real communications tasks from the beginning. They should not only learn about branding. They should help develop brand concepts. They should not only learn about social media. They should create content calendars. They should not only learn about AI. They should use AI tools to draft, edit, plan and improve their work. They should not only learn about professional communication. They should practise writing emails, presenting ideas and receiving feedback.

The Danish lesson is clear: if the pathway is real, the opportunity becomes real.

Learning from Sweden

Integration, belonging and long term support

Stockholm gave me the third piece of the picture. If Chile taught me about trust, and Denmark taught me about structure, Sweden taught me about integration.

In Stockholm, I was interested in how systems think about inclusion and long term labour market participation. Sweden is often associated with social support and equality, but it still faces challenges around integrating disadvantaged groups into the labour market.

The strongest lesson I took from Sweden was that integration is not just about getting someone into a job. It is about helping someone belong.

That matters because disadvantage often affects identity. If you have spent years being told directly or indirectly that you are a problem, it can be hard to see yourself as a professional. If you have been in prison, care, homelessness, poverty or exclusion, entering a workplace can feel like entering another world.

You may not know the language of that world. You may not know the unwritten rules. You may not know if people are judging you. You may not know how to recover from a mistake. You may not believe you deserve to be there.

This is why employment support must include more than skills. Skills are essential, but they are not the whole answer. People also need confidence, emotional support, mentoring and time to build a new sense of identity.

In Stockholm, I reflected a lot on the difference between access and integration. Access means opening the door. Integration means helping someone walk through it, stay there, grow there and eventually feel that they belong.

The UK often focuses on access. We celebrate the moment someone gets a job. But for people facing deep barriers, the more important question may be what happens after that. Do they stay? Do they progress? Do they feel safe enough to ask questions? Do they have someone to call when things become difficult?

Do they understand workplace expectations? Does the employer understand them? Do they begin to see themselves differently?

Sweden made me think about employment as a journey, not an event.

What Sweden taught me for the UK

Sweden taught me that employment integration needs long term thinking. For the UK, this means programmes should not end the moment someone gets a placement or job. Support should continue through the difficult early stages of work.

For my proposed pilot, this means mentoring must be central. Every participant should have someone who supports their development, not just their attendance. The mentor should help them understand feedback, manage setbacks, build confidence and think about their future.

The Swedish lesson is that social mobility is not only about opportunity. It is about belonging.

The combined lesson

People need bridges

Each country gave me a different lesson. Chile showed me the bridge of trust. Denmark showed me the bridge of practical training. Sweden showed me the bridge of belonging. Together, they helped me see what the UK needs.

We need employment pathways that are trusted enough for people to enter, practical enough to build real skills and supportive enough to help people stay and grow.

Too many programmes focus on only one part of the journey. Some provide emotional support but no real route into work. Some provide training but no employer connection. Some provide jobs but no mentoring. Some provide inspiration but no structure.

People facing disadvantage need all of these things together. That is why my main recommendation is to develop twelve week employment integration pilots that combine confidence, skills, mentoring, workplace experience and progression.

Why businesses must be involved

One of the clearest lessons from my Fellowship is that businesses cannot sit outside this work. If employment integration is left only to charities and government, it will always be incomplete.

Charities understand barriers. Government can provide policy and funding. But businesses control many of the opportunities. They decide who gets hired. They decide what experience matters. They decide whether a person with an unconventional background is seen as a risk or as potential. They decide whether entry level roles are truly accessible. They decide whether social mobility is a slogan or a practice.

This is why employers must be part of the solution from the beginning. But employers also need support. Many businesses may want to help but do not know how. They may worry about saying the wrong thing, taking on risk or not having enough time to support someone properly. Smaller businesses may like the idea of offering opportunities but lack the structure to do it alone.

A good employment integration model should support both sides. It should prepare participants for the workplace and prepare workplaces for participants.

That means employers should receive guidance on recognising potential beyond CVs, offering meaningful tasks, giving clear feedback, understanding trauma and disadvantage, setting expectations without judgement, supporting confidence and creating progression routes.

This does not mean lowering standards. It means building the conditions that allow people to meet standards.

Why communications is a powerful sector for this work

My proposed pilot focuses on communications, branding, digital media, social media, AI and workplace skills. This is partly because it connects to my company, Reach Your Full Potential Limited. But it is also because communications is a powerful sector for people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Communications is about understanding people. It is about language, emotion, trust, identity, persuasion and storytelling.

People who have experienced hardship often understand these things deeply. They know what it feels like to be misunderstood. They know how language can include or exclude. They know how trust is built and broken. They know how people survive when systems fail them.

These insights are valuable. The problem is that people with lived experience are often invited to share their stories, but not trained to shape strategy. They are asked to be examples, but not always given power. They are asked to inspire campaigns, but not always hired to create them.

I want to change that. A person from a disadvantaged background should not only be the subject of a campaign about poverty, youth justice, homelessness or social mobility. They should be able to work on the campaign. They should be able to write the message, design the content, shape the tone, advise the organisation and build a career.

This is why communications matters. It can turn lived experience into professional value.

The role of AI and digital skills

AI will change the labour market. It is already changing how people write, design, research, plan and communicate.

For disadvantaged people, AI could either widen inequality or reduce it. If only people with existing privilege learn how to use these tools well, the gap will grow. But if AI is made accessible through practical training, it can give people a powerful advantage.

AI can help someone improve their writing. It can help them practise interviews. It can help them plan a campaign. It can help them understand a professional brief. It can help them structure ideas. It can help them create content. It can help them build confidence before they enter a workplace.

This does not remove the need for human support. People still need mentors, feedback, relationships and real work experience. But AI can become a learning companion for people who have not had access to traditional forms of support.

This is why AI should be part of employment integration. Not as a gimmick. Not as a replacement for people. But as a practical tool that helps people learn faster, express themselves better and compete in a changing economy.

My proposed UK pilot

The twelve week Employment Integration Internship

Following my Fellowship, I intend to develop a twelve week pilot through Reach Your Full Potential Limited.

The pilot will support people from disadvantaged backgrounds to build confidence, digital skills, communication skills, AI skills, workplace experience and a professional portfolio.

It will be designed for people who may face barriers including poverty, care experience, criminal justice involvement, homelessness, school exclusion, trauma, low confidence, long term unemployment or lack of professional networks.

The programme will not define people by these experiences. It will recognise the barriers while focusing on potential. The aim is to create a practical model that can later be replicated by other businesses and sectors.

Who the pilot is for

The pilot will be open to disadvantaged people broadly, rather than only one group. This matters because disadvantage does not always fit neatly into one category. A person may have experienced poverty, trauma, exclusion, family instability and criminal justice involvement at the same time. Another person may have no criminal record but may still have grown up with no access to professional networks or meaningful opportunity.

The programme will focus on people who have motivation and potential but lack access. Participants may include people from low income backgrounds, young people not in education, employment or training, care leavers, people with experience of youth justice, people leaving prison, people who have experienced homelessness, people who have experienced trauma or family instability, people who lack professional networks and people who have been held back by circumstance.

The message will be simple. You are not here because something is wrong with you. You are here because your potential deserves a pathway.

Structure of the twelve week pilot

The pilot will have four stages.

Stage one: Trust, confidence and assessment

The first stage will focus on building trust. Participants will not be judged only through CVs or formal interviews. Instead, they will be invited to show potential through practical tasks and conversations.

This could include writing a short post about an issue they care about, recording a short video introduction, creating a basic campaign idea, talking about a brand they like or explaining what kind of future they want to build.

The purpose is not to find polished candidates. It is to find potential. This stage will also introduce confidence, communication, expectations and personal goals.

Stage two: Practical skills

The second stage will focus on practical learning. Participants will learn basic branding, social media content creation, copywriting, digital marketing, website content, public relations basics, professional email writing, presentation skills, AI tools, client communication, teamwork and workplace expectations.

The training will be practical. Participants will create things, receive feedback and improve.

Stage three: Real work experience

The third stage will involve real projects. Participants may work on social media posts, content calendars, campaign ideas, brand research, website copy, blog writing, short form video planning, community engagement materials or communications support for charities and small businesses.

The point is to give participants evidence of their ability. By the end of the programme, each person should have a small portfolio that shows what they can do.

Stage four: Progression

The final stage will focus on what happens next. Some participants may move into work. Some may move into apprenticeships. Some may continue training. Some may explore freelance work. Some may need more support before they are ready.

The pilot should not pretend that everyone's journey is the same. The aim is progression, not perfection.

What participants will gain

By the end of the twelve weeks, participants should have greater confidence, improved communication skills, practical digital skills, experience of real work tasks, a professional portfolio, a clearer sense of direction, a mentor relationship and a better understanding of workplace expectations.

They should leave with evidence of what they can do. They should also leave with a stronger belief that they belong in professional spaces.

That belief matters. Without it, opportunity can feel temporary. With it, opportunity can become a foundation.

What employers will gain

Employers who engage with the pilot will gain access to motivated people with untapped potential. They will also gain support to think differently about recruitment, inclusion and social mobility.

Many businesses say they want to make a difference but do not know where to start. This pilot gives them a practical route. They can offer real tasks, mentoring, placements, project briefs or progression opportunities. They do not need to solve everything alone.

The pilot would act as a bridge between employer needs and participant potential.

What funders and public bodies will gain

For funders and public bodies, the pilot offers a practical model that can be tested, measured and improved. It connects social mobility with business need. It supports disadvantaged people while also building skills that matter in the modern economy.

It is small enough to pilot, but strong enough to replicate. If successful, the model could be adapted beyond communications into other sectors. The key principles would remain the same: trust, practical learning, employer involvement, mentoring and progression.

Measuring success

The pilot should not only be measured by how many people complete the twelve weeks. Completion matters, but it is not enough.

Success should include confidence, attendance, skill development, quality of portfolio, participant wellbeing, employer feedback, progression into work or training, retention after placement and longer term movement towards stable employment.

The programme should also capture personal change. Does the participant speak with more confidence? Do they understand their strengths? Can they handle feedback better? Do they see a future for themselves? Do they feel they belong in a professional environment?

These things are harder to measure, but they matter deeply.

Implementation challenges

There will be challenges. Some participants may need support beyond employment training. They may face housing instability, mental health difficulties, financial pressure or family responsibilities. The pilot must not pretend these issues disappear because someone joins a programme.

That is why partnerships with charities, youth projects and local services will be important.

There may also be challenges with employers. Some may be nervous about taking part. Some may need guidance to understand the difference between supporting someone and lowering expectations. Some may need help giving feedback in a way that is clear but not damaging.

There will also be funding challenges. A high quality pilot needs time, coordination, training materials, mentoring, equipment and evaluation. If participants are to be supported properly, the programme cannot be built on goodwill alone.

But these challenges are not reasons to avoid action. They are reasons to design the pilot carefully.

Recommendations in detail

Recommendation one: Create twelve week employment integration pilots for disadvantaged people

The UK should test practical twelve week programmes that help people move from disadvantage towards meaningful work. These pilots should include confidence building, skills training, mentoring, real work projects and progression planning.

They should not be designed as short motivational schemes. They should be designed as bridges into real opportunity.

Recommendation two: Build stronger partnerships between businesses, charities and government

No single sector can solve employment exclusion alone. Charities understand barriers. Government can support policy and funding. Businesses can provide real work opportunities. People with lived experience can make sure programmes are grounded in reality.

The strongest models will bring these groups together.

Recommendation three: Move from employability workshops to real work pathways

Employability workshops can be useful, but they are not enough. People need to practise real tasks, receive real feedback and build real evidence of their ability.

A person is more likely to believe they can work in a sector when they have actually done work connected to that sector.

Recommendation four: Treat vocational learning as a route to dignity and skilled work

The UK should stop treating practical routes as second best. Vocational learning can be powerful when it is respected, structured and connected to employers.

For many disadvantaged people, practical learning may be more accessible and more effective than traditional academic pathways.

Recommendation five: Fund trusted community organisations to act as bridges

People who have been excluded may not immediately trust formal systems. Community organisations, youth projects, charities and people with lived experience often have the relationships needed to reach them.

These organisations should be funded and respected as essential parts of the employment system.

Recommendation six: Train employers to recognise potential differently

Employers need support to look beyond traditional CVs, polished interviews and narrow definitions of experience. They should be encouraged to assess motivation, creativity, resilience, communication potential and willingness to learn.

This does not mean lowering standards. It means widening the way potential is recognised.

Recommendation seven: Use AI and digital tools to widen access

AI and digital tools should be included in employment programmes for disadvantaged people. These tools can help participants improve writing, build portfolios, practise communication, create content and understand modern workplaces.

If used well, AI can reduce barriers rather than deepen them.

Recommendation eight: Measure long term outcomes, not just job starts

Employment programmes should not only celebrate the moment someone gets a job. They should track whether people stay, progress, grow in confidence and move towards better futures.

The real measure of success is not whether someone enters work for a moment. It is whether work becomes a route to stability, dignity and possibility.

What I plan to do next

My next step is to develop the twelve week Employment Integration Internship through Reach Your Full Potential Limited. I will begin by designing the programme structure, training materials and participant journey. I will then seek partnerships with charities, youth projects, employers, public bodies and funders who share the aim of creating fairer routes into work.

The pilot will begin small. That is important. A small pilot can be tested properly. It can be improved. It can stay close to the people it is meant to support.

My aim is to create a model that is practical, honest and replicable. If it works, I want other businesses to see that they can do something similar.

Not every company can change national policy. But many companies can create one doorway. Many companies can offer one placement, one mentor, one project, one chance. If enough organisations do that with structure and care, the system begins to change.

Conclusion

This Fellowship has strengthened something I already believed. People do not lack potential. They lack pathways.

In Chile, I saw the importance of community and trust. In Denmark, I saw the power of respected practical learning. In Sweden, I saw the need for belonging and long term support.

Each country showed me something different, but together they pointed towards the same conclusion. If we want disadvantaged people to move into meaningful work, we need to build bridges that are strong enough to carry them there.

Those bridges must begin with dignity. They must be connected to real employers. They must teach practical skills. They must include mentoring. They must recognise lived experience as an asset. They must continue beyond the first moment of opportunity.

The UK does not need to copy Chile, Denmark or Sweden. But it can learn from them. It can learn that community matters. It can learn that vocational pathways deserve respect. It can learn that integration is about belonging, not just access. It can learn that employment support should not be about managing people at the margins, but helping them move into the centre of economic life.

My own life has taught me that your past does not define your future. But I also know that personal determination is not enough. People need opportunity. They need someone to open a door. They need a pathway that allows them to walk through it with dignity.

This report is my call for that pathway. Not just for one person. Not just for one company. But for every person who has been held back by circumstance and still has something powerful to give.

Appendix one

Proposed twelve week pilot outline

Week one: Trust, confidence and introduction to the programme

Participants are introduced to the programme, the team, the expectations and the purpose of the pilot. The focus is on confidence, trust and understanding each person's goals.

Week two: Communication and personal story

Participants explore communication, confidence and how to speak about themselves professionally without being defined by their past.

Week three: Introduction to branding

Participants learn what branding is, why it matters and how organisations use identity, values and tone of voice.

Week four: Writing for different audiences

Participants practise writing social media posts, short articles, website copy and professional emails.

Week five: Social media and content creation

Participants learn how to create content plans, understand audiences and use social media with purpose.

Week six: Digital marketing and campaign thinking

Participants learn how campaigns are planned, how messages are shaped and how digital tools can support outreach.

Week seven: AI for work and creativity

Participants learn how to use AI tools to support writing, research, planning, editing and idea development.

Week eight: Professional skills and workplace culture

Participants practise meetings, presentations, feedback, deadlines, teamwork and client communication.

Week nine: Real project work

Participants begin working on a live or simulated communications project.

Week ten: Portfolio development

Participants gather their best work into a simple portfolio that shows their skills and progress.

Week eleven: Progression planning

Participants explore next steps, including jobs, apprenticeships, further training, volunteering, freelance work or continued mentoring.

Week twelve: Final presentation and reflection

Participants present their work, reflect on their progress and agree a next step plan.

Appendix two

Principles for employer partners

1. See potential, not just polish.
2. Offer meaningful tasks, not token experience.
3. Give clear and respectful feedback.
4. Understand that confidence may grow slowly.
5. Be honest about standards while offering support to meet them.
6. Recognise lived experience as a source of insight.
7. Work with support organisations rather than trying to do everything alone.
8. Think about progression from the beginning.

Appendix three

Principles for programme design

1. Start with dignity.
2. Build trust before expecting transformation.
3. Use practical learning from the beginning.
4. Connect training to real work.
5. Include employers early.
6. Make mentoring central.

7. Use AI and digital tools responsibly.
8. Measure confidence, skills and progression.
9. Avoid tokenism.
10. Keep improving the model through participant feedback.