

## Manifesto: Work Campaign 2024

### 1. Why are we working on this?

Following our [Public Assembly](#) ahead of the Mayoral elections in 2021, we combined our separate campaign priorities on the [real living wage](#), [paid work experience](#) and [business support](#) into one 'Work campaign' Action Team.

In 2022, at our [Commonwealth Games Legacy Assembly](#), held weeks before the start of the Games, we announced a two year employment support programme called the [Pathways to Enterprising Futures \(PEF\) project](#) in partnership with Aston University and Ashley Community Housing.

Through working with community advice surgeries held in member schools, [places of worship](#), [voluntary organisations](#) and [community businesses](#) in this project, we identified the following priority issues:

1. The need for more and better pre/entry level ESOL classes so families can navigate local services and access employment;
2. The need for paid work experience for young people that is easy to find online in one place to make your first steps into the job market;
3. The need for entry level jobs that paid no less than the real living wage and offer living hours so that it makes financial sense to work;
4. The need to connect employment support to better advice and advocacy on housing & health issues to build a stable situation for the person and their household so they can stay in work.

In November 2023, at our [10 year Anniversary Assembly](#) we got [a commitment from Mayor of the West Midlands](#), Andy Street, to work with us to build a Community Jobs and Skills compact. This will enable our civil society member organisations to work closely with employers and statutory agencies to secure jobs and skills for low income households we serve, thus creating a community-led movement for work.

### 2. Case studies

Tahani is 17 years old, attends a city college and has been living with her mum and 5 siblings in emergency/temporary accommodation since 2019. Since turning 16, she has made over 30 applications for a part-time job and has not had any success. She would value the opportunity to get paid work experience, not just because she has never worked, but so she could help improve household income as her mum is struggling with the cost of living whilst on universal credit.

Tahani's mum, Haja, does not have any work experience or basic skills qualifications too. She would love the opportunity to work full-time to earn money to look after her kids but

due to pressures of school drop-off & pick-ups (3 different schools) and any clear pathway to entry level jobs she feel she is stuck on Universal Credit.

Abu with his wife and 3 children arrived in the UK from Sudan through refugee community sponsorship in Smethwick. He is very keen to work but is unable to secure a job because he does not speak, read or write English. He does not have any qualifications nor formal work experience. After waiting for some time he is now enrolled on a Pre-Entry ESOL class but feels the two sessions per week are not enough for him to improve his English. He does not get further employment support - help with CVs, applying for a job etc, because he is deemed unlikely to attain a basic skills level qualification or secure a job soon (outputs needed to claim employment support funding).

### 3. Key statistics to reflect the scale of the issue.

*“Around **1 in 10 adults in the region have no formal qualifications**, while just **three-fifths are qualified to at least level 3**, compared with two-thirds nationally. As a result, many businesses report skills shortages, with around half of all vacancies in 2022 classed as ‘hard to fill’ and 35% vacant because of a lack of skills, qualifications or experience among applicants.”*

*“These challenges vary considerably by place and for different groups of people. While some parts of our region are thriving, others are not. **Young people, particularly those with fewest qualifications and with poor mental health, are finding it harder to move into the labour market. Employment and earnings outcomes are poorer for women, for disabled people and for some ethnic minorities** - and compounded further when combined. In turn, this can result in even poorer health outcomes, making it even harder to take advantage of labour market opportunities.”*

*“...according to the census, **231,400 adults aged 16-64 across the WMCA area, of which half are economically active, do not have the benefit of a good education up to level 2**. Many people with low or no qualifications struggle to find employment - and those who do are often restricted to precarious contracts, often low paid, with little potential to progress or move into good work. While the proportion of people with low/no qualifications is reducing, the consequences for those who remain in this position are likely to worsen, with many low skilled roles becoming automated and businesses increasingly requiring higher level skills.”*

Source: [WMCA Employment & Skills Strategy 2024-2027](#)

### 4. Our track record (particularly how we are working locally and regionally to address the issue and develop solutions including co-design, any strong historic wins on related issues)

Birmingham Citizens has [a ten year track record](#) on campaigning for employers across the region to accredit as real living wage employers.

Living Wage accredited businesses headquartered in the West Midlands employ around 220,000 workers nationally, and around 130,000 in the West Midlands.

More than 25,000 workers in the West Midlands have been bought onto the Real Living Wage thanks to accreditation in the past 10 years, which translates to at least an additional £25 million pounds in the pockets of workers across the last year alone (calculated based on annual difference between NLW and RLW)

Our colleagues at the Living Wage Foundation have secured accreditation of over 551 employers in the West Midlands. In 2020, the West Midlands Combined Authority accredited as a real living wage employer. We are however concerned about the numbers of health and care workers in our region, who do not still receive a real living wage.

Our PEF project partnership helped 603 people over 2 years through 1:1 and group support in community advice surgeries, workshops and local jobs fairs. A significant number of the people we saw had no basic skills, were economically inactive and had complex needs related to welfare, health & housing issues. They required intensive help over a long period of time to navigate a range of crisis arising from the pandemic and cost of living pressures.

[Six years ago](#), we teamed up with the Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship (CREME) to develop a community organising approach to ensure business support reaches small ethnic minority business (EMB) owners in disadvantaged areas. In 2021, during the height of the pandemic, an evaluation of our work was undertaken by [NESTA](#). In 2022, CREME launched a major national report, titled '[Time to Change](#)' which calls for ten evidence-based recommendations for developing better policy and support targeting EMBs.

So in April 2024, we are teaming up for a research project with CREME and Coventry University to record the current challenges faced by EMBs by establishing a leadership group of community business owners. And amongst a range of things unpack how employment support via the DWP needs to better connect to business support for those already working long hours for declining incomes relying on some Universal Credit.

5. Our policy recommendations (2-3 headline asks with specifics bullet-pointed below)

We call on the next Mayor of the West Midlands to build a Community Jobs and Skills Compact with us thus creating a community-led movement on work.

The Compact would bring together Civil Society organisations in membership of Citizens UK, Employers, and Statutory Agencies to collaborate via an Action Plan to dismantle barriers to employment and skills development. This will help deliver the new approach identified in WMCA's Employment & Skills Strategy 2024-2027.

We require the compact to focus on the following areas:

1. Improve access to pre-entry ESOL and low level Basic Skills courses for those with no qualifications.
2. Improve access to entry level jobs that pay no less than the real living wage for those with no qualifications and experience.
3. Fund community advice surgeries in schools, places of worship and in voluntary organisations to link 1:1 and group employment support to those who are long term unemployed or economically inactive.
4. Promote all paid work experience placements for young people across the region in one website.
5. Establish better practices for employers to recruit directly from local communities through local Jobs Fairs, Work Placements, Bespoke Training and Mentoring.
6. Promote the West Midlands as a Living Wage region by getting employers to accredit, with a particular focus on health and care workers receiving it.