



XMA and Sunnyside Rural Trust

Leading the way to Disability Confident





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At XMA, our values are at the heart of everything we do. We welcome and celebrate diversity and do not exclude any group, for any reason. We seek to understand other perspectives and celebrate collaboration, new ways of working and the strengths of the group. We are compassionate and empathetic to all.

Our vision is:

“to leave a legacy of inclusion that continuously improves people’s lives”.

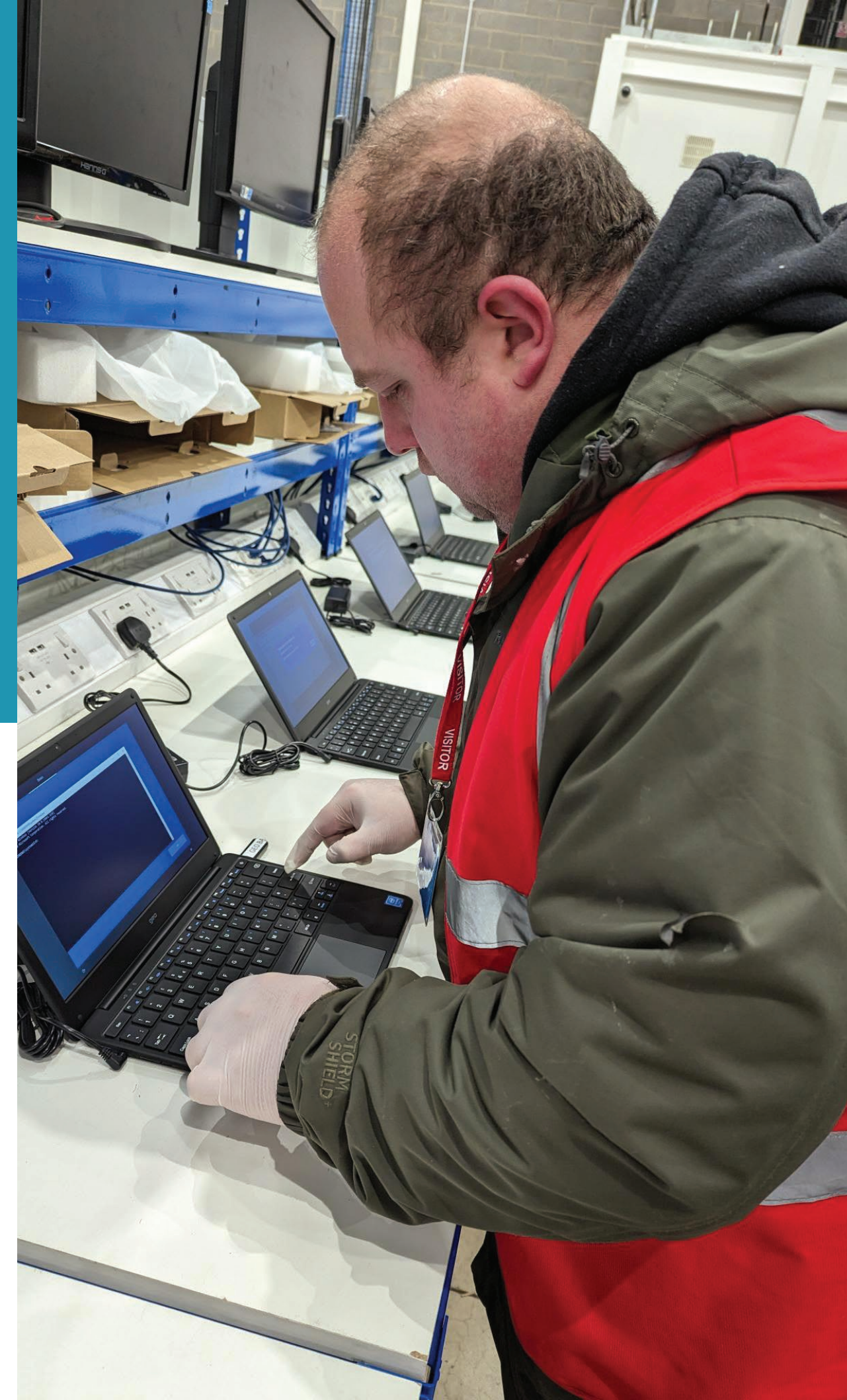
Of the **7.7 million** people of working age in the UK with a disability or long-term health condition, only half are working, a disproportionate amount when compared with the **82%** of non-disabled people who work. XMA view this as a large pool of untapped and talented people who have the potential to benefit business but who face significant barriers to employment.

This is why XMA developed an ambitious Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) strategy in 2022, giving centre stage to tackling inequality to drive forwards key outcomes in employability, with a particular focus on reducing the disability employment gap.

Our disability confident journey has been rewarded so far with **Level 2 status** as ‘Disability Confident Committed’. The aim is to become a Disability Confident Leader in 2023, taking up the reins to help others tread this path.

XMA are **reducing the Disability Employment Gap** by creating a pipeline of employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

We are developing projects which include people with disabilities in day-to-day business operations in commercially viable ways.



Working in partnership

There have been three main initiatives so far; developing an Inclusion Network of partner organisations, training XMA managers in Disability Confidence and running paid projects of real-world work experience for people with disabilities in our warehouse facilities.

1 Insight events to build an Inclusion Network.

Inspired by the Watford Chamber of Commerce, XMA hosted a series of Insight events bringing together charities to form an Inclusion Network. This first step was designed to find out what people with disabilities need to make work successful for them. XMA invited half a dozen charities to attend an initial kick-off event, to explain both their business and their aim to contribute by becoming a 'Go to' organisation, able to assist others with Disability Confidence activities. The network provides a forum to learn about and explore the valuable insights offered by both partner organisations and people with disabilities who attended. Meetings are held quarterly, providing an ongoing forum for exchange of information.

An initial Disability Confidence and Collaboration event in July 2022 included disabled colleagues from Step2Skills. XMA gained insight into their perspectives on the challenges of work and employment, including their difficulties in accessing job opportunities and suitable IT equipment, producing CVs and submitting applications in the required timeframe.



The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) attended this event and are assisting with XMA's Disability Confidence programme, including developing a strategy for inclusive recruitment.

XMA were able to create a specific online portal for DWP staff and the Service Users they coach across UK job centres. This enables them to log in and order IT equipment with assistive technology, using virtual credit cards to purchase IT equipment at least £20 cheaper per device of those historically being purchased via online retailers. Through this solution, we have been able to provide wider access to job opportunities online along with sizable savings for the Job Centre and Public Purse.

XMA's Inclusion Network partners

Watford Workshop provides support and skills training for people with learning, physical, sensory disabilities and mental health difficulties, by providing training for people on assembly lines and helping them to subsequently move into mainstream employment. People with disabilities achieving great results.



Step2Skills is Hertfordshire's adult community learning and employment support service.



Mission EmployAble provides opportunities to help people with learning disabilities lead fulfilling lives.



Blue Tangerine is a federation of schools which promote the abilities in disability.



Sunnyside Rural Trust is a thriving charity and social enterprise offering training and work experience for 150 vulnerable people.



2 Disability Confidence training for line managers

Sunnyside Rural Trust led a series of disability awareness sessions to explore the myths around disability confidence and equip managers with the skills and knowledge to move forward. This training has been attended by **80** of XMA's managers.



"I was so impressed with the attitude, motivation, and knowledge already at XMA. It was an absolute pleasure to spend time discussing a topic that's so important. It is refreshing to work with a company like XMA that is doing things for the right reasons. We were able to outline where this work will help in recruiting the best from the widest pool of people, how to progress on the disability confident scheme journey and how this will support the overall company with their ESG goals. This is a really innovative company and we look forward to working with them in the future."

Keely Siddiqui Charlick,
CEO of Sunnyside Rural Trust)



3 Designing a laptop refurbishment project

In partnership with Sunnyside Rural Trust, XMA developed a work experience programme based out of our warehouse facilities. Sunnyside Rural Trust are a thriving charity and social enterprise offering training and work experience for **150** vulnerable people. They offer training for people with disabilities to acquire skills in rural activities such as beekeeping, looking after chickens, growing a wide range of plants and produce, landscaping and garden maintenance. In this project, the working environment was quite different, both in terms of being indoors and in a more structured workplace environment.

"We do outside contracts, but they are usually gardening and horticultural contracts. It's been really well received by the trainees. They've actually really enjoyed it, which was really interesting because we weren't 100% sure how it would work out because it was so different and we are used to working outside, and it's a very structured task."

Emma Power, COO, Sunnyside Rural Trust





The laptop refurbishment project

- **31** people with disabilities, worked 20 days, of varying duration
- **4** distinct tasks completed in pairs at separate workstations
- Reasonable adjustments including designated rest areas, extra breaks and social activities during a 1-hour lunchbreak
- **5137** laptops were made ready for re-sale, exceeding the target number of **5000**

Safeguarding

Sunnyside conducted a thorough risk assessment before any trainees arrived on site to ensure the environment was as safe and accommodating of their needs as possible. XMA were pleased to provide a designated space for trainees to take breaks and rest, or even lie down for a short power nap. Careful attention was given to working arrangements for each day to maximise everyone's engagement.

XMA's Warehouse Manager, welcomed trainees to XMA and delivered a formal warehouse health and safety induction. During working hours, Sunnyside's Deputy Manager took responsibility for supervising the trainees while they worked and during lunchbreaks, and arranged any support for participants needing one-to-one supervision.

Throughout the project XMA and Sunnyside worked in partnership, developing a relationship of trust, with frequent communication at daily briefings and reviews. Concerns were raised and addressed as they arose, and each learnt from the other. The XMA team learnt a lot from the Sunnyside project workers about how to support and manage people with learning disabilities, by taking a flexible and responsive approach.

Piloting

An initial 3-day pilot was an important step. It was possible to test working arrangements in practice – who worked well together, how tasks were approached, how long a day was manageable. Building in an element of choice and control in the shape of the working day was key to engaging the Sunnyside trainees.

The pilot established that a feasible number of checks to complete per day is **250**. The process incorporated **4** distinct tasks which were completed at separate workstations in pairs so that trainees could work together to complete each task efficiently. Each device was turned on, tested, cleaned and repackaged. Any devices with scratches or faults were segregated.

Two features of the task stood out as beneficial to trainees:

- It was a clearly defined task, with support around each element of the task, including written documents and a practical explanation delivered by XMA staff.
- The repetitiveness of the task, so when trainees returned, they were doing the same thing again.

The pilot was used to design the project to accommodate both those who wanted a shortened day and those who wanted to take on a greater level of responsibility.

XMA had a batch of **5000** laptops which needed to be tested and refurbished to make good for re-sale. The project evolved from XMA's requirement, through detailed consideration of what would, and what wouldn't, be suitable for Sunnyside trainees, to reach a shared understanding of how to offer a safe and enriching experience, which both XMA and Sunnyside would benefit from. Mutual sharing of information and experience were key, as was drawing up clear areas of responsibility.

The value of a project like this has been in giving the trainees:

- A new experience
- An experience of a structured workplace environment
- Ideas about somewhere else they could work
- Confidence-building

A successful warehouse team

The project demonstrated that it is possible to provide a worthwhile experience, in which people with disabilities feel safe, productive and valued. These flexible changes were small but significant, such as shorter working days and provision of a safe space to take a short break to regain composure after becoming upset or overwhelmed. Concerns around safety were allayed through open and honest discussion of the challenges. XMA staff adjusted their mind sets, seeing that alternative working patterns such as short additional breaks posed no real obstacle to work being completed at a reasonable pace.

XMA now have a commercially viable means of including people with disabilities in their warehouse operations team, in appropriate ways which will be used as a foundation for developing further opportunities. Our first cohort of trainees expressed their appreciation of the paid work experience with resoundingly positive feedback. They felt safe and enjoyed the work.

Lunchbreak activities such as pool tables in our social space also went down a storm. The consensus was that they would certainly return to more work experience opportunities.



"The XMA and Sunnyside project has been an outstanding success...We have welcomed over 30 vulnerable people to our St Albans site, all of whom have been focused, methodical and dedicated to completing their tasks and the project overall."

Darren Howe,
XMA Operations and ESG Director



"I actually enjoyed all of it and I want to go back again. I liked doing the memory stick. I just liked the whole experience."

Nicola - Trainee



"I really enjoyed the project and hope to be able to go back one day. I felt very safe and secure at XMA because of the swipe in and out process."

Joe - Trainee



"It was fun to do something different. The canteen was neat and tidy and very cool looking with the pool table and all that. I would go again."

Tyler - Trainee



"This was an incredible opportunity for the trainees to gain more work-based skills in a completely different environment, working alongside other people external to our organisation. Not only was it a new environment for the trainees, but there were workplace systems in place that needed to be followed, such as the health and safety of a warehouse, which can be quite intimidating to some. The work we set out to do involved focussing and listening as part of a production line setup; there was a lot of moving quickly from one job to the next and the trainees adapted very well to this."

Zoe McGee, Project Manager at Sunnyside Rural Trust



XMA's partnerships have played a key role in our journey towards Disability Confidence. We could not have achieved all we have without the support of Sunnyside Rural Trust, who were able to bring their knowledge, resources and experience of working with people with disabilities.

What's next on our journey?

- To develop a continuous programme, with a pipeline of talent into the business, extending to permanent employment. We are now ready and prepared to employ a disabled trainee to take on a stock count exercise in our warehouse which will include investigating any issues identified.
- To develop our Disability Confident Leader programme in which we share with our partners, supply chain and other corporate organisations all of our best practice tips and tricks to help them on their Disability Confidence journey.

"The team from Sunnyside have been an absolute joy to work with.... Post project I feel so much more confident and would have no hesitation employing someone with a disability and integrating them into my current workforce"

Lee Devonshire, Head of Warehouse and Logistics at XMA



Want to talk to us about being a Disability Confident Employer? Get in touch.

www.xma.co.uk
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@WeareXMA



XMA-Ltd