

Jobs lifeline for adults is 'game changer' for firm

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Business Staff

Vulnerable West Midland adults who had never worked in their lives have been thrown a lifeline - thanks to a chance meeting between two business leaders.

People with moderate learning disabilities have been given a vital foot on the employment ladder after years of struggling to find work thanks to a partnership between the Chelmsley Wood-based Colebridge Trust and Rugby-based car parts firm Automotive Insulations.

The key breakthrough for the jobless came when Jim Griffin, managing director of the Rugby firm, offered the trust manual finishing work on car part insulation materials following a chance conversation with Colebridge's operations and enterprise manager Charles Rapson.

Both men met for the first time at a networking event as part of a Goldman Sachs work initiative in conjunction with Aston University - and the meeting reaped huge dividends for both the trust and the car parts firm.

Mr Rapson said: "It was coming to the Goldman Sachs programme that opened my eyes. I started to think not what we couldn't do, but what we could do. If I had not met Jim I would still be there in an operation which could have closed



Jim Griffin and Charles Rapson

because the funding had gone. When I was on the course and started listening to Jim, I got what he did. My background is in the car industry - I was the last Austin apprentice at British Leyland - and I had worked at Longbridge for years.

"He was outsourcing part of his operation and he came to me one day and said 'how can we help you out?'"

The result was Mr Griffin offered Mr Rapson cutting operations which could not be automated - enabling the Chelmsley Wood trust to provide work for disadvantaged adults for the first time in their lives.

"Jim had the work that I needed and I had the resources to do that work. We had the space and the people. This has been the game changer for us.

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"We are now talking with Solihull Council about them supporting a developing and sustainable enterprise that is going to provide employment. The council was really motivated by this idea - it has had all sorts of spin-off effects. We will now get more work from the council which will underpin other work.

"We were on a downward spiral and we are now on a virtuous cycle," said Charles, who was 48 and working at MG Rover when the car firm closed in April 2005.

"I have found my feet working with the trust. Jim and I did not know that social enterprises existed. This has changed my ideas of what is important.

"I had a very well paid job where money was the main driver. But there are far more important things in the world. This

has given me a real sense of perspective, looking at the people who are working for Jim.

"None of them had ever had a job in their lives before. It is the first paid job for people, some in their mid-30s to mid-50s."

Mr Griffin, whose firm designs and manufactures acoustic insulation parts for the automotive industry, including Jaguar Land Rover, Bentley and Aston Martin, said: "Goldman Sachs changed my mindset.

"In 2008, we dropped down to a £3.2 million turnover and we are now looking at £11 million within the next 12 months. We will hit £15 million to £16 million in the next two years.

"In the last 12 months, we have taken on 30 to 40 people - we have doubled our workforce as we have increased our turnover. We have increased our product range, we have got patents, we are continually trying to innovate.

"The Goldman Sachs programme has made me enjoy my business again. I have changed my management style. I used to be very direct and tried to run every department my way - now I share the business plans with my team.

"It has been a catalyst and has speeded up what we have been doing. We wanted to get our turnover to £20 million - now we want to get it to £50 million."

The Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses programme aims to boost local economic growth and job creation through practical business education.