

The HS2 construction firms getting people off the streets and into sustainable jobs

July 20, 2020



It has been described as the first programme of its kind to be led by the construction industry, working in partnership with HS2 Ltd, to deliver long-lasting benefits for local people for generations to come.

The Empowering Communities social legacy programme was revealed last week, bringing together the strengths of major construction companies Costain, Skanska, STRABAG, Mace, Dragados and Arup.

The programme aims to create jobs for those experiencing worklessness and homelessness, help young people develop new STEM skills and access apprenticeships, and support community projects.

Louise Dailly, head of legacy for the Costain Skanska joint venture, has spoken to [railbusinessdaily.com](https://www.railbusinessdaily.com) about the scheme and the difference it is already making.

“This joined-up approach enables us to deliver more together than we could individually, boosting outcomes for local people and laying the foundations for innovative and powerful outcomes that the community can continue long after we leave the area,” she said.

“Empowering Communities works closely with vulnerable groups, including refugees, people with previous conviction and young people who have been in care.

“By targeting harder to reach groups alongside wider goals to support skills, employment and education, homelessness, young people and equality diversity and inclusion, Empowering Communities really can offer everyone an opportunity to succeed.”

The programme has also created jobs for more than 200 previously unemployed people and supported nine homeless people into work on the HS2 project.

The partner organisations are working with local charities and community groups such as Buses for Homeless (B4H), a social enterprise which aims to get homeless people off the street and into full time sustainable employment and accommodation.

Louise said: “The nine people we’ve taken on are now working full time on HS2 work – that is what we want to continue doing, working with charities that are doing fantastic work and being able to offer those sustainable jobs at the end, supporting people in getting a better life. It is about targeting the hard to reach people.

“The people we’ve brought on so far have brought a really great skillset and for us it is brilliant to have this pipeline of people we are supporting. All the staff have really embraced it and there is the extra support available if it is needed.

“It has been working incredibly well so far. One of the homeless men was saying he’s just got his first pay cheque for three years and he is over the moon. But it is also proving a real benefit to the project having him working on site.

“Working together we can support a huge number of homeless people back into work which is fantastic. It is something that is happening in London, but similar schemes could happen in any major city.”

The programme is also inspiring the next generation of workers, giving them first-hand experience of being involved on a major project. Empowering Communities has provided Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) education support to over 11,000 young people across seven London boroughs.

Louise said: “We are working with young people in a comprehensive educational school engagement programme, really staying with the students on their educational journey, working with them and offering those apprenticeships at the end of it.

“Another key area for us is local employment. How do we support those who have traditionally faced barriers when trying to get employment. This could be ex-offenders, survivors of modern slavery or people looking to return into the industry.

“There are lots of programmes we are supporting. This also includes supporting young people leaving care, offering that relationship and support to help them get into employment.

“The last area we are working in is with local community projects. We want to be able to leave a lasting legacy in an area.

“It’s about working with communities that maybe currently have projects underway and being able to offer our knowledge and expertise. It could be helping to create a garden, through to mentoring a charity.

“We can make such a huge difference and that is what we intend to do as part of Empowering Communities. We have the strength of so many major construction companies joining forces to commit to this, to make sure we make a real difference in the area.”

Photo credit: HS2 Ltd/ www.johnzammit.co.uk Absolute Photography Ltd.