



## Rob's journey in voluntary and paid work

### Profile

**Rob is in his 40s and has bipolar disorder and ADHD.**

From a young age, he was in and out of hospitals and care homes, labelled as 'the naughty kid'. But throughout this time, playing football provided a sense of belonging and consistency in his life.

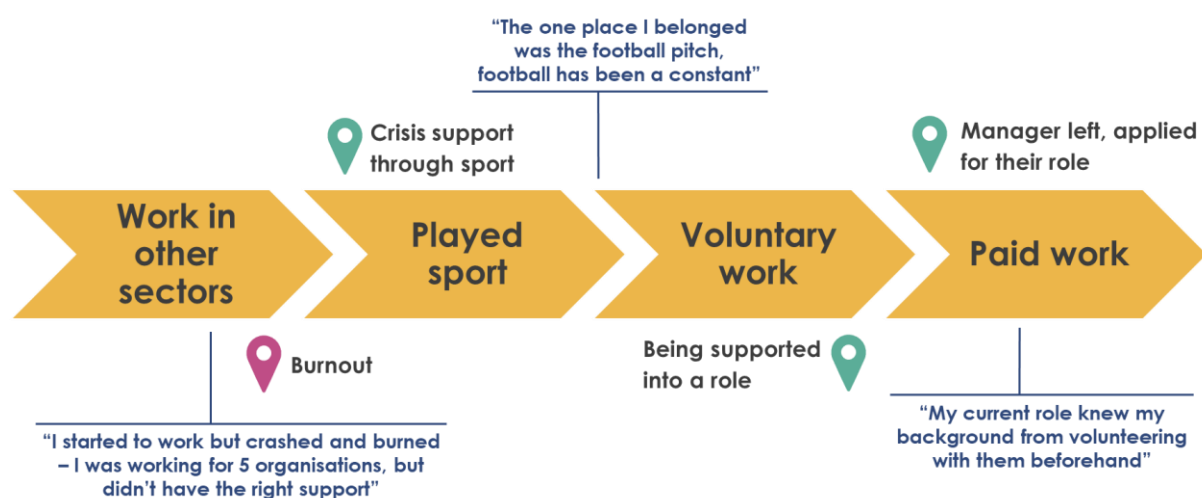
In adulthood, Rob took on multiple roles at once, but this led to burn-out. As part of his recovery from this challenging period, Rob began playing and then volunteering with a football team focussed on peer support. One of these roles evolved into a paid role with a social inclusion football organisation. Through this, Rob met and volunteered with another inclusion-focused charity, and set up a spin-off organisation for disabled people in football, which he runs in a paid capacity. He continues to volunteer to support some of the activities.

Rob did Mental Health First Aid training and coaching disability football training via the Football Association. These are useful in delivering his work, but not, he feels, as important as his own life experience, and the networks developed through his voluntary roles.



**"It's great getting qualifications, but coming into this type of thing, it's about having sympathy, empathy and understanding. The best qualifications have been life!"**

### Rob's journey





## Building networks and experience through volunteering, that lead to paid opportunities

Challenges in Rob's early life and early career, stemming from his mental health condition and neurodiversity, led Rob to play football with a group to support his own mental health.

But the path from there to volunteering, and onto paid employment, wasn't straightforward, reflecting the complexity of many journeys into work and the enablers to this pathway.

For Rob, transitions between roles came about through a combination of **circumstance** (additional funding secured by an organisation he was volunteering for enabled his role to become paid; a paid colleague leaving a role freed up space for him to apply), **support** (encouragement from managers and colleagues in his volunteering roles enabled him to progress), **collaboration** (together with a friend, he established an inclusion football organisation because he saw a need and an opportunity), and, underpinning it all, Rob's ability to use his **lived experience** to understand what others need and how to deliver effective inclusion through sport.



"I've met people when volunteering and built friendships, and together we came up with ideas for new initiatives."

### Barriers

- Lack of support to manage mental health condition and avoid overwork.
- Interview environments incompatible with mental health condition.
- Childhood mistake leading to issues around DBS check, acting as a barrier to some paid opportunities.

### Enablers

- Support and championing from managers and leaders.
- Networking and building up personal connections.
- Mutual support to avoid burn-out.
- Explicitly drawing on own life experiences to demonstrate suitability for roles and to design and deliver effective initiatives to support others.
- Acting on own initiative and collaborating with others to identify and set up sport-based inclusion activities.



"[Employer] was impressed by all my volunteering and lived experience and said how much people like me are needed in the sport sector, [based on] my lived experience."