



**OXFORD
WOOD
RECYCLING**

Impact Report 2022

*Our vision is of a community with no barriers
to employment and zero waste*



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**OXFORD
WOOD
RECYCLING**

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 OxfordWoodRecycling

Company No: 5467959 • Registered Charity No: 1178214

Oxford Wood Recycling is a safe and inspiring place to work and to shop, with a good reputation and a warm atmosphere. We are friendly and knowledgeable and will treat you kindly whoever you are.

Our mission

To care for our environment and transform lives.

Our vision

We live and work in a community where there are no barriers to employment and there is zero waste.

Our values

We value above all, honesty, compassion, equality and diversity.

Introduction

I'm so pleased to introduce our latest Impact Report. Our organisational purpose is simple and in essence unchanged from when we began 17 years ago – to care for our environment and transform lives.

We fulfil our purpose by recovering reusable wood from waste and by supporting individuals facing barriers to finding employment. Sadly, the reason we do this is because now, as 17 years ago, there is a great and demonstrable need for both. Whilst we wait for governments and corporate business to fulfil their promises to cut emissions and invest in renewable energy, it is consumers and small and innovative suppliers who remain the architects and drivers of change. Similarly, no matter how many job vacancies, there are many people who cannot access those jobs. This can be from a lack of the skills, confidence and ability to make an application, or they face rejection from employers who don't recognise neuro-diversity or disability for what it is: merely a difference that makes no difference.

Oxford Wood Recycling (OWR) is a social enterprise and charity. We currently employ 22 people and all surpluses are ploughed back into fulfilling our purpose. Importantly, we are investing in training, personal development and employment support for staff in order to ensure that OWR embodies its values internally as well as externally. Many employees at OWR, past and present, have previously faced barriers to working, and have found here a safe and nurturing environment in which to work.

There have been seismic changes at OWR since our last report in July 2019. Perhaps the most significant changes were driven by a £250,000 loan and grant investment awarded through the Postcode Innovation Trust in early 2020, thanks to the funding raised by players of People's Postcode Lottery. Despite Covid and the effects of the pandemic on health and our ability to trade, we were able to use the investment to recruit people with new skills, and improve our facilities, as well as beginning to modernise our fleet to be leaner and greener. We also completed recruitment of new trustees to our board, resulting in tighter governance with a renewed energy and focus on our charitable purpose, and a determination to focus on developing people.

The investment from The Postcode Lottery enabled us to strengthen our social mission of supporting individuals to gain employment. We were able to evaluate what differentiated OWR as a vehicle for employability, and in October 2021 *Wood to Work* was born. We're proud of our new professional service partnering with Ways into Work and Oxfordshire Employment. *Wood to Work* promises to deliver employment for individuals previously considered to be the furthest away from accessing paid work.

We're delighted to have survived troubled times, whilst maintaining development as a valued local community organisation and resource. Thank you, and happy reading.



Richard Snow
Chief Executive



"A brilliant social enterprise that supports people, community and the environment combined with providing brilliant service and great products!"

OWR Customer

Impact of COVID-19

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, we have all been through changes and our day-to-day operations are significantly different to what they were two years ago. As with other organisations, we have had to think of new ways of running our services to make sure our customers and staff stayed safe and well. From our Wood Shop to waste collections, all areas of our operation were impacted.

We tried to limit the impact of lockdown for our customers by enabling purchases to be made safely. Customers responded brilliantly to our plea to buy gift certificates redeemable when we could open and then introduced social distancing measures, carefully managing customer numbers at our Wood Shop. By increasing email and online sales and deliveries we were able to maintain services during the majority of the pandemic.

It was also important for us to support our staff to ensure their well-being and maintain good team morale.



"My line manager phoned me regularly, once or twice a week, just to see how I was getting on, and if I needed anything."

"One of the biggest positives from lockdown was the support that I got from my line manager and senior management. They were in regular communication with all the staff. They even created a WhatsApp group with competitions for us to come up with ideas for new products and product names."

Pandemic closures



OWR totally closed



Wood Shop closed



In a regular year...



Wood Shop trading



of collections



Reusing and recycling wood waste

OWR creates positive environmental impact through our daily, local wood waste collections.

We operate the service to businesses and households alike. Our collections come from local commercial and residential builders, manufacturing and distribution businesses as well as from householders clearing their sheds and gardens. From the waste collected we reclaim as much as possible and pass on the remainder for recycling, principally for biomass energy production. Reclaimed wood is cleaned up and sold at our Wood Shop in Abingdon. We also sell hardwood planks grown in the UK, and manufacture furniture and smaller items from hardwoods and reclaimed wood.

"Thanks for sorting out our waste timber so quickly, the guys are a pleasure to work with whilst collecting and it saves a fortune in skips as well as the fact that you are helping folks back into full time work. Great service!"

Jason King, Site Manager at Vanderbilt Homes



"OWR are one of the senior organisations in the Community Wood Recycling Network. We highly value their consistent professional service, and especially their readiness to freely share their expertise with the community wood recycling family."

Richard Mehmed
MD. National Community Wood Recycling Network

We are a part of something bigger

The Community Wood Recycling social franchise is a network of social enterprises that collects and reuses waste wood in the most environmentally beneficial way as well as creating jobs and training for disadvantaged people. In 2021, as a national network we:



1. Estimate based on calculations provided by the Community Wood Recycling Network, May 2022 - for every tonne of wood collected and reused, the equivalent of about half a tonne of CO₂ is saved.

2. Based on Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Calculator, May 2022, www.epa.gov/energy/greenhouse-gas-equivalencies-calculator

I used to be a boardwalk

Our 2021 projects

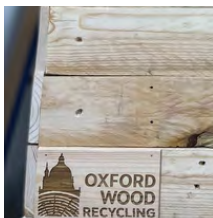


Broad Street Meadow



Who, when and why?

Oxford City Council commissioned us to help turn Broad Street into a green community space for the summer.



What did we use?

We constructed planters from used scaffold boards and planter-benches and benches from pallets clad with pallet wood.



How long did it take to make?

Six weeks.

Who was involved?

Carpentry team at OWR, plus friends and volunteers.

Where are the pieces now?

The meadows were dismantled and the street furniture distributed to community groups and schools in Oxford.





Buckinghamshire New University



Who, when and why?

We were commissioned by Useful Studio to soften the hard lines of Buckinghamshire New University and provide green and sociable outdoor space.

What did we use?

We co-designed and built two types of planters, tables and benches using boardwalk timbers of Ekki (a very hard African timber), reclaimed from the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff. Benches and table frames were fabricated in coated steel by a local welder. The second set were of a similar design but made using locally sourced and grown oak on welded steel frames from a local fabricator.

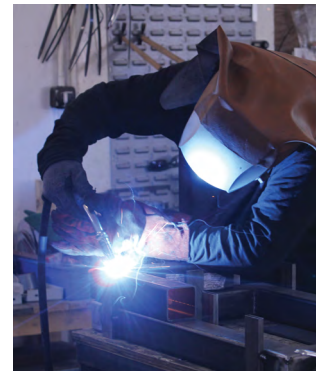
How long did it take to make?

Two sets, each taking four to six weeks.



Who was involved?

It was a team effort! We involved our talented carpenters, Wood Shop staff, OWR friends and volunteers.



Where are the pieces now?

In situ at the University in High Wycombe, on the main concourse and in the Rose Garden.



Supporting people to value wood

The UK is still the second largest net importer of forest products³ globally (including timber) and, according to the most recent data, there are over four million tonnes of waste wood generated in the UK every year.

Latest figures show that there has been a substantial move away from wood going to landfill largely due to better environmental practice, together with the rising demand for biomass energy production. From our beginnings, we are proud to have been a part of the revolution promoting reuse and supporting a move to zero-waste communities, meaning that thousands of tonnes of waste wood is now being removed from the waste stream and low-level recycling nationally and is made available as building materials for our communities to use.

One of our main areas of work is supporting people that engage with us, either as staff, volunteers, customers or neighbours, to move towards more sustainable and conscious use of wood.

"You can go there with confidence knowing that what you get, you will definitely be able to use for the project that you have in mind."

OWR Customer Focus Group attendee

"I find it quite inspiring. And I get quite a lot of ideas on what I can do myself."

OWR Customer Focus Group attendee

"They take time and care to repurpose discarded wood and other materials whilst at the same time creating an environment where people are valued and uplifted."

OWR Customer Survey respondent



We provide advice for people to get to know wood and how to work with it. Our wood collections from local businesses and households ensure that natural resources are repurposed or recycled. Our Wood Shop provides people with an opportunity to purchase ready-made products (such as tables, benches, shelves, and planters) or simply pick up reclaimed timber and responsibly sourced hardwoods at reasonable prices. Our dedicated staff are a source of advice, inspiration and support. They are happy to help anyone who comes to our shop looking to find out more about wood, woodwork or upcycling.

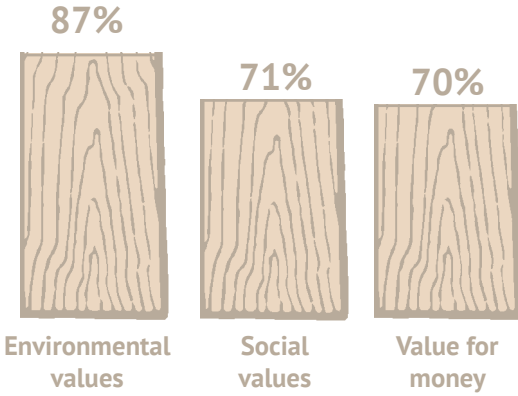
In addition we provide advice and ideas on what to do with wood through our social media channels and website. People who are looking to upskill, gain more confidence and knowledge join our woodworking courses, which provide a basis for them to then start creating their own projects.

3. Forest products include roundwood, sawnwood, wood-based panels, wood pulp and paper and paperboard. Forest research UK, Forestry statistics 2021

We wanted to gain better understanding of the social and environmental impact we have on our community. In order to do that, we carried out a customer survey in December 2021.

You said...

Reasons for using OWR



Awareness of core purposes



100%
of customers are aware of our environmental purpose.



99%
of customers would recommend OWR to others.

How would you describe OWR?

Eco-conscious
Great selection No-frills
HELPFUL Caring Sustainable
First choice INTERESTING QUALITY
Great hardwoods Recycled
Awesome Unique Worthy LOCAL
Treasure trove Ideal Thoughtful
Brilliant Aladdin's cave Professional
Value for money Great choice Amazing
REALLY GOOD WOOD SHOP Friendly
Wood paradise SUPER Uplifting
Worth a look Knowledgeable
No waste ETHICAL GOOD PRICE
Wonderful Valuable
Reclaimed wood

"They're enthusiastic about wood, they're not just doing a job."

OWR Customer focus group attendee



Impact stories



Woodworking courses

Oxford Wood Recycling strives to engage with the wider community and champion the benefits and advantages of reusing reclaimed wood. We are constantly on the lookout for new ways of encouraging people to learn more about wood and the ways in which they can use it. In our 2018 customer survey, one of the suggestions for improvements was the introduction of woodworking and upcycling classes.

In July 2021, thanks to the generous donation from Magnox, we were finally in a position to run our first woodworking course targeted at the young people completing their work placements with us. The course was led by one of our fantastic and knowledgeable volunteers, Brian (read Brian's story on the following

page). His wealth of knowledge, expertise in woodworking and past teaching experience made him the perfect person to deliver the sessions.

The course ran with five attendees, who developed their woodworking skills such as use of saws and other tools, while growing in confidence that they can perform DIY jobs that may crop up at home. Upon the completion of the sessions, each young person was able to take home a footstool that they had made and was awarded a certificate.

Following this success, we will now open the woodworking and upcycling courses to our wider community and supporters.

Apprenticeships

Laura has been an invaluable member of our administration team for the last six years.

She started off as an apprentice, completing her Level 2 NVQ with Abingdon and Witney College.

Luckily for us, after originally pursuing a career in retail, Laura decided to look for a new challenge at OWR: *"I wanted to do something new, so I decided on an apprenticeship because I could get experience on the job."*

Laura was keen to learn, enthusiastic about her new role and enjoyed working as part of our team. After completing her apprenticeship, Laura was offered a full-time position as an administrator. She has gone from strength to strength, developing her social skills (confidence and assertiveness) and employability skills (IT, communication and teamwork).

The most enjoyable part of the role for her was learning about the organisation and building relationships with staff and customers: *"It's good to see what type of different customers we get, building relationships with the accounts contacts, and to learn all about the business."*

The camaraderie and support provided by the whole team helped Laura, especially whilst learning the ropes: *"If I made a mistake, they were very understanding and very supportive. And they helped me make changes or adjustments."*

Laura shares our values – when initially offered two roles, she chose OWR over another employer: *"I'm glad I went for this job because I like it. It's a nice small company – everyone's really friendly and welcoming, and they've got a good ethos, which I like. That's what drew me to OWR – the sort of company that they are and what they're about."*

The future is exciting for Laura. Having recently got married, and looking to move into her own home, she has also started her next qualification, a Level 3 NVQ in Business Administration, which we are proud to be supporting. *"My line manager has been really helpful after I explained my issues to her. With her help, I have been more assertive [at college]."*



Kickstarter work placements

Cameron has been a member of the OWR staff team for over six months now. He originally joined us on a six-month Kickstart placement and has since been offered a year's extension to his contract.

After finishing college (with qualifications in Carpentry, Maths and English), Cameron found it difficult to get into work due to a lack of experience.

"I personally felt my confidence just dropping because I was just getting taken on nowhere and I thought I wouldn't be able to do anything myself."

During his search for employment, he found out about the opportunity at OWR through his local Job Centre. In his first six months at OWR, Cameron was able to experience most roles that we offer, from shop maintenance (cleaning, re-stocking etc) and customer service (shop floor and collections) to some woodworking skills (use of saws and de-nailing wood).

"I've got loads of experience in pretty much every area now."

He soon felt very comfortable in the workplace, thanks to the friendly atmosphere and supportive staff team: *"Everyone was always just so supportive of me. Say I'm struggling, all I have to do is ask for help and someone will come help me with it."*

Cameron is now interested in starting a carpentry apprenticeship and, since starting at OWR, his confidence has improved alongside his general happiness, physical fitness and his relationship with his brother.

"I'm just a lot happier myself. I can actually provide for myself and just do what I want to."



Volunteering

Brian volunteers at OWR once a week, for three hours. Coming from a varied background, his experience in the education sector, including some special needs, and running woodworking courses at colleges has been hugely beneficial for our work placement team members. He wanted to be involved with what we do at OWR as he felt it would be a good way for him to help out his local community: *"I thought, well, that might be a nice thing to do. Working with people with autism and different disabilities, I'm just going to do something positive."*

From a young age Brian enjoyed working with wood, making model aircraft and go-karts. Since then he has dedicated much of his life to spreading his passion for woodworking to others who may enjoy it. Originally a customer of OWR, he used to purchase interesting pieces of wood from our store to use in his night-classes: *"I was told that there's a place in Abingdon that recycles wood. So I used to just go in - I'd take one of the pieces, put it in the back of the car and away I went."*

Brian now runs our woodworking courses for five or six people at a time. He relishes the challenge of teaching new skills to our team members and finds it rewarding when they come away with something new: *"When they come up to work with me, I try to improve their hand tool woodworking skills. I also introduce them to the use of jigs for drilling and assembly, which helps to make repeat operations with accuracy. All students will get better at different things as they learn at their own pace. It can be challenging, but it can also be, you know, quite rewarding. I always feel good if they've achieved something, even if it's something quite small, whatever it happens to be."*

When not teaching useful skills to our team members, Brian also spends his time with us making items for sale on the shop floor, eg. bird boxes, planters and novelty shelves: *"Well I'm doing my own thing, but whatever I make is for OWR, stick it in a sales bay and hope somebody buys it."*



Providing supported employment and employability

A recent report by The Health Foundation shows that rates of unemployment in the UK differ depending on a person's age and level of qualification.

While the overall unemployment rate was estimated to be 5.1% (in January 2021), the rate was much higher for young people aged 18-24 (14%) and people with lower qualifications (7.8%). One of the recommendations was the creation of personalised interventions which support people to secure good quality work and provide skills training to target underlying barriers to employment.

OWR works in the local community to support individuals – often young people – facing barriers to enter the labour market due to issues like neuro-diversity, disability or low/no qualifications. We offer placements through the Kickstart programme which not only provide workplace experience, but also offer support in gaining new skills, challenging any barriers and developing the confidence needed to succeed in their chosen careers.

Through their involvement with us, individuals have the chance to increase their skillset and gain work experience that will develop their careers and remain in the job market.

**In 2021,
11 of our
employees
faced barriers
to working**



**and between
them carried out**

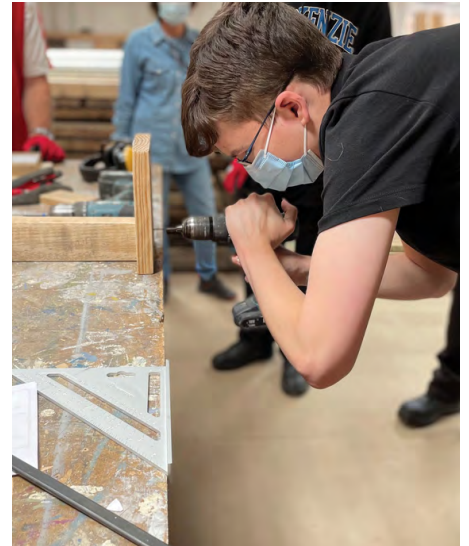
11,300

**hours of
paid work**

Each individual engaging with us brought a unique set of opportunities and challenges due to their ill-health, disability or neuro-diversity. They benefited from support provided by their colleagues and OWR to assist them in meeting their goals in their various roles.

In 2021, despite the impact of COVID-19, our invaluable volunteer and work placement team gained 21 new members and provided us with over 2,500 hours of their time, which was essential to keeping our services running smoothly. They covered roles in all areas of OWR, including: warehousing, administration, marketing, stock preparation, woodworking, customer service and wood collections.

We are very proud of the togetherness and camaraderie in our team, and we support and encourage this wherever possible. In November 2021, as part of continuous organisational development, an annual staff survey positioned OWR as higher than average in both public and private sectors for staff happiness, both at and away from work. We also scored highly for 'purpose' and 'flexibility' and naturally we noted and acted on areas for improvement.



"They taught me everything I know, they were very patient and calm in teaching me new tasks, repeating it until I got it right and I understood."



Through their experiences with OWR, our team members often reported improvement in the following areas of their lives:

Self-confidence

"I wasn't confident at all when I started. I was scared to ask people things and to speak up. But now I ask more questions or speak to someone if I've got a problem. And I never used to do that."

Interpersonal skills and relationships

"I think being here has helped me to get used to being with customers, working with them and therefore talking to strangers."

Employability

"I still email my college now, and when I told them about moving on to a permanent role they were like 'We didn't expect that' because I used to be very bad in reacting to customers."

Physical wellbeing

"Ever since I've been coming here, where it involves heavy lifting, it has built up my endurance and also my strength."

Mental wellbeing

"My happiness has changed quite a lot as I used to be quite down. But ever since I've got into work and also been earning money I'm just a lot happier that I can provide for myself and do what I want to do."

Structure and routine

"I'm straight out of bed, to get ready to go back to work, back into the routine."

Sense of fulfilment

"I ask him if he has enjoyed himself, he gives a thumbs up and that just peaks my day."



Quotes: OWR Employee and Volunteer Evaluation 2021-2022

Wood to Work

The future of employability at OWR

One of the main areas of focus for OWR is the social aspect of helping people into work. We use a holistic approach to help people address underlying challenges that might be preventing them from finding employment. This means that each person's journey with us may be different, requiring various types and levels of support:

"Our aspirations are that we can see a genuine difference in people. It could be as mundane as encouraging somebody to walk here from their home. It could be a report from a parent or a family member that someone's motivations have changed. That's the sort of thing we're working to achieve."

Wood to Work is about helping those that are furthest from employment to 'break the cycle' that keeps them unemployed. In partnership with Ways into Work and Oxfordshire Employment we now have an employment coach to facilitate this goal: *"We want to work with around 20 people a year and we aspire to get at least 50% of them into paid employment."*

This new Wood to Work initiative provides work placements for individuals facing barriers to employment. After joining the programme, they receive support in identifying their strengths, desired career path and areas of development. By working together with the OWR team, they have an opportunity to experience a range of different tasks and are supported, mentored and buddied-up to aid them on their journey. The length of the placement will vary depending on an individual's needs and can range from a few weeks to a few months.

Work placements also introduce potential employment options – attending meetings with local employers alongside our employment coach, or through community engagement.

The end goals for each individual vary – some may move straight into employment or internship, others may undertake further training. Whatever the final goal, we feel supported by our partner organisations to help make this happen: *"The senior employment coach may be involved in trying to help a person access support like Speech & Language Therapy or Talking Space. That isn't directly about work, but more facilitative."*

"Wood to Work is about the next steps. It's about developing confidence so individuals can do different things. It's about introducing them to as much variety as possible."



"I feel like we've turned a corner in the organisation with Wood to Work. It's a huge leap forward for us. I'm most proud of the way we've knuckled down and got to grips with the opportunity that we built up and is now in front of us."

Richard Snow, Chief Executive, Oxford Wood Recycling



"An amazing place with great values and really friendly and helpful staff."

OWR Customer Focus Group attendee



Thank you

The support we receive from our local community and partners makes our work possible. Thank you for being our heroes.



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Community
Wood
Recycling



Winner of Best Sustainable
Business in Bucks/Oxon 2022