

# Smart Works – the charity that helps jobseekers to walk tall

Smart Works is a great name for a great service. The charity based in Annandale Street Lane offers any woman with a job interview the chance of some professional advice on interview techniques – as well as an outfit to wear. Since they opened in 2014 the charity has helped over 1,000 women to interview success.

Reading new MSP Emma Roddick's tweets recently about the expense of starting a new job reminded me of the excellent work which this charity does – at least at the initial interview stage.

It is a small outfit. Beth Reid is the Manager of Smart Works Edinburgh, and works with only one other person – administrator, Caroline Levack. Beth said: "We have eight centres in the UK, with Edinburgh our only Scottish base. We provide interview clothes and coaching to any unemployed women ahead of their job interviews. We can also provide support for the next steps of their employment journey as it gets closer to the interview stage.



Evelyn who was recently kitted out by Smart Works ahead of her job interview.

“We offer a two hour appointment and during that time our clients are fitted with a complete interview outfit from a pair of shoes to a winter coat, as well as accessories, toiletries, a goodie bag of makeup, all for free. We also provide one-to-one interview coaching which is delivered by our experienced volunteers who all have a background in HR and recruitment. They may go over specific questions which might come up, perhaps helping clients to explain a gap in work history for example. A lot of it is about confidence building, important when someone has been out of work for a long time or have faced redundancy.”

Clothes make a difference according to Beth. She said: “If you look the part, you feel the part. You hold your head and shoulders that bit higher.. It is just a barrier to interviews that you just don’t need to think about when you are trying to put your best foot forward. The difference of having a full interview outfit that you feel confident wearing is amazing.”



At this time Smart Works can offer face to face interviews, but it has been operating effectively during lockdown. Local volunteers have manned coaching sessions on Zoom and their staff in London helped by posting out parcels to interviewees. The virtual service meant that for the first time Smart Works could offer their service to any woman anywhere in Scotland.

Both parts of the appointment take place over Zoom and the parcel is then packaged up with a handwritten note from the volunteer who helped with styling and the posted out. Enclosed in the package is an interview pack which is a six page guide containing interview tips and tricks.



The charity has existed since 2014 in Annandale Street Lane,

and while they are hoping to resume in person sessions soon, it is definitely an advantage that they can also offer the service to women outside Edinburgh.

The good quality ready to wear clothes are either donated by professional working women or the charity's retail partners including Burberry, Hobbs, Whistles, M&S, and John Lewis.

Beth explained that the work could not be done without the team of thirty volunteers.

Readers could help by making donations of clothes or by volunteering as a stylist or a coach.

Beth concluded: "We would usually have a calendar full of amazing fundraising events, which is one of the best bits of working at Smart Works. While at the minute all big plans are on hold, we do have our annual cycle fundraiser which takes place in March around International Women's Day and very soon we will hold a Bobbi Brown Masterclass with our partners at Bobbi Brown. It will be a virtual event – we have had one already and it was a great success. It is such a tangible thing giving someone a new outfit. To watch them walking out the door with it is just such a force of good."

