Independent and Work Ready Community Interest Company (CIC) was set up as a non-for-profit website [www.independentandworkready.co.uk](http://www.independentandworkready.co.uk) in June 2019 to help young people understand adult life topics in relation to Disability. The website was developed by Karen Yates who has Cerebral Palsy and Dyslexia and wanted others to know their options for adult life, disability and have vital information in accessible formats in one place related to masses of easy to navigate categories like Health, Education, Workplace, Interests, Life in General and much more. Karen was motivated by her own lived experience of not always knowing in her youth, answers to direct questions and being able to find up to date trusted clear information. The site signposts to lots of resources from trusted sites and is aimed for people of all ages. It is peer lead with those involved having lived disability experiences and professional Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) experience in different education and community settings.

When COVID 19 hit and the country went into lockdown Karen and others involved had been exploring the possibility of a face to face service in Buckinghamshire but it was soon apparent this was not workable, but also due to COVID 19, the need for a virtual service to promote independence, work skills and social support for those with various health and disability needs had never been more needed especially as many were at increased COVID risk. Following a successful National Lottery application, the chance emerged to further develop IWR as a support service and not just a static useful information site.

Karen Yates and Natalia Cave (Tally) provide day to day support to help individuals get more work ready and independent through virtual online supported work experience. A large part of this virtual work is supporting the further development of the website as a community resource that is made more relevant and accessible with participant contributions on the website topics, but also the development of a creative area with artwork, drawings, competitions, videos, articles and more. Participants can complete structured work experience that is very varied. Some participants submit work for others to see on the website to showcase skills, abilities and creativity.

IWR have developed an online shop that sells products that participants create following product design work briefs. Tasks reflect participant interests but can involve making a notebook, a bag, a hat, socks, water bottles, cups and mugs, art puzzle cubes and much more. Lots of the tasks involve basic art or photography but you do not need to be creative to participate, however if you have these skills that’s great too. IWR want all abilities to contribute, know options and opportunities and want them to have a voice. Tasks are fully differentiated with, if needed, easy read instructions and Zoom support sessions to help with following the briefs. IWR has participants from Special Educational Needs (SEN) and mainstream schools and colleges completing their work experience and the shop is growing with proceeds supporting the service, although participants get copies of any products they design.

Other participants work more flexibly on their personal interests like writing articles, submitting art or creative writing. We help participants to support each other using their own personal skill sets. Some participants review software for IWR or test websites. IWR is increasingly becoming an online social space for ALL abilities.

Karen and Tally have lots of SEN experience especially with Moderate Learning Disabilities and Autism. They want to help individuals grow their confidence, self-awareness and skills, provide a platform to show work is a viable option that should be explored and that quality products result from participant efforts, while also providing a large information site and social space.

Opportunities for meaningful work experience, real time employer encounters and project creative tasks especially for SEND are so limited even before COVID, but this placement gives meaningful work experience with measurable outcomes, tangible products, space to explore and demonstrate skills/interests in a peer lead way. The aim is an online supportive environment for peer learning and an interesting shop of creative high-quality affordable products and wide-ranging growing options. Even post COVID, intentions are to continue to offer placements to those with disabilities, SEN and health issues, participants learn employment skills, self-employment, creative and digital skills as well as current skills like remote working while potentially connecting people UK wide. Long-term, Karen and Tally would like to, alongside the online service, occasionally do events post COVID to sell products with participants and develop customer service skills especially in Buckinghamshire.