**Alok Sharma: 'There is still an urgency for us to act' on women’s economic independence**

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Women’s economic independence was in the spotlight today as Employment Minister Alok Sharma met with Reading residents involved in a local employment project.

Run by Oxfam, the Future Skills project supports women with skills-based training and work experience in its charity shops. The project has involved over 200 women across 5 cities, with 8 women having built their experience at the Caversham charity shop.

While there are more women in work than ever before and the gender pay gap is at a record low, Alok Sharma highlighted that there is much more to do to tackle employment inequality. “There is still an urgency for us to act to remove barriers that prohibit women from working and limit their progress. Being able to work and earn a wage is vital for women’s economic independence and a fundamental pillar of gender equality,” he said.

Supporting women into employment is a focus of a number of projects in jobcentres up and down the country. Meanwhile, the government is supporting women once they are in work to increase their hours and progress, helping them improve their circumstances.