



KJLLoxpo

The true meaning of inclusion: Bijoux's story

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What is the true meaning of "inclusion"? Why does it matter? For our project we did not aim to change as many lives as possible but to make the biggest possible difference in the life of someone, by just giving her the means to rise her head. This is the story of how looking beyond the surface and giving opportunities can generate positive change. This is the story of Bijou.

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Section 1: What you achieved

- What results are you getting and what has the feedback been?
- How are you measuring the benefits?
- How are you sustaining the momentum/ outcomes?

Our project was born when a social worker of our town told us about this woman named Bijoux. At the time, Bijoux was in a very hard-to-escape situation: a victim of domestic violence, unemployed and now single mother of three. She was in need of a job to regain her independence and safety, but it was a nearly impossible task as a foreign black woman and mother of a little girl and two autistic boys to take care of on her own. She was struggling to find an employment, as many entrepreneurs would not take such a risk when the job market was full of easier alternatives. However our CEO agreed to meet her, and immediately saw something beneath the appearance: a great strength, will-power and a fierce desire to prove herself and to change her life. She decided not only to go against the tide and to hire her, but also realized that just salary would not make the difference. Community would. For this reason she called a meeting and set up a project that involved all of us to help this woman get her life back.

It was a huge success: by providing her with stable employment, our company not only ensured financial independence but also significantly improved her quality of life. Bijoux has expressed immense gratitude for the support she received, emphasizing the positive impact on her and her children's lives, and local support agencies highlighted our approach as a model for **effective** social inclusion.

We could measure the benefits by many metrics, but the most striking difference is just in the overall comparison of the before and after in her daily life in many aspects:

- Economic Independence: She now earns a stable income, owns a home, and has a car.
- Well-being and Safety: Bijoux and her children are now safe and constantly monitored and supported
- Social Integration and Status: she now has a valid residence permit and truly is a part of the local community

To sustain this outcomes, we focus in the first place on giving her continuous support but we also ensure that the positive outcomes achieved also serve as a foundation for future initiatives. For this reason, together with Bijoux, we keep on working with local support agencies and we strive not only to grow as a business but to also seize the chance to make a lasting impact in our community.

Section 2: Why you did it

- Why are you doing what you are doing and what did you hope to achieve?
- How does this initiative support the strategic direction and values of your organisation?

Our decision to support Bijoux arose from a deep-seated commitment to social responsibility and the belief that everyone deserves an opportunity to live a safe, independent, and dignified life. Recognizing the severe challenges Bijoux faced—domestic violence, unemployment, and lack of support—we aimed to provide comprehensive assistance to help her rebuild her life. Our goals were to ensure her safety, facilitate her economic independence, and integrate her into the community and workforce, ultimately transforming her life trajectory. By focusing our efforts on her, we aimed to create a ripple effect, demonstrating the profound impact that companies and organizations can have in people's lives.

This initiative is a direct reflection of our organization's core values and strategic direction. Our company is built on principles of equality, diversity, and inclusion. We believe in creating opportunities for those who are marginalized and in fostering a supportive, inclusive community both within and outside the workplace. This project aligns with our vision of being a catalyst for positive change in society. By helping Bijoux, we not only transformed her life but also showcased our commitment to these values in a tangible and impactful way.

There is a profound sense of passion and pride within our team for this initiative. Each member of our organization was fueled by the belief that our efforts could change the course of her life and this meant helping her learn the skills necessary to grow, both in her job as well as in her personal life, but also giving concrete help when needed. This could be in small things as giving her a ride or helping fill-in bureaucratic forms, as well as helping her get a mortgage or buying a car.

Stakeholders, including local support agencies, employees, and community members, have been actively engaged and supportive of this initiative. We held regular meetings and communicated our goals clearly, ensuring that everyone involved understood the objectives and the importance of their roles. This collective understanding and commitment have been vital in driving the initiative forward. Our stakeholders shared our vision and worked collaboratively to provide the necessary support and resources.

Finally the passion, pride, and drive of our team, combined with the active engagement of stakeholders, ensured the success of this project. Through this initiative, we have not only transformed Bijoux's life but also reinforced our commitment to making a positive, lasting impact in our community.

Section 3: How you did it

- How did you go about achieving the results you did?
- How did you structure your way of working?
- How did you go about involving stakeholders, gaining their buy in and support?
- How did the team pull together to achieve an excellent outcome?

To support Bijoux, we implemented a multifaceted approach that began with understanding her specific needs and challenges. Bijoux, a single mother of three and a victim of domestic violence, required comprehensive assistance to rebuild her life. Our goal was to ensure her safety while still helping her navigate her family situation, facilitate economic independence, and integrate her into the community and workforce. We collaborated closely with local support agencies to create a robust support system for Bijoux. Ongoing monitoring and regular check-ins allowed us to promptly address any emerging issues.

First, we conducted an assessment of Bijoux's situation, identifying her immediate needs and long-term goals through consultations with social workers and local support agencies. We then focused on securing employment for Bijoux by starting with a paid internship to ease her into the workforce and build her confidence and allowing a flexible schedule for her to conciliate work and childcare.

Transportation and housing were critical points to work on. Our team independently chose to gift Bijoux a bicycle and to teach her how to ride it during lunch break so that she could come to work on her own while she was waiting

and studying to get a driver's license and a car. Simultaneously, we assisted her in finding suitable housing and securing a mortgage. In fact, many banks had previously refused to give her one because of her situation, but with the mediation and help from our CEO and the credibility that our company gained throughout the years our bank of choice finally decided to give her trust and to accept the mortgage. These efforts were crucial in enabling her to become independent and mobile.

Stakeholder involvement was integral to our success. From the outset, we engaged stakeholders by presenting our plan and outlining how their support would be essential. This included local agencies, the regional sanitary department, and our employees. We organized meetings to discuss the initiative, gather input, and ensure everyone was on board. Regular feedback sessions with the support agencies allowed us to adapt our approach as needed, ensuring open lines of communication and a sense of shared responsibility.

Teamwork was a cornerstone of our initiative. Employees from various departments— management, HR, R&D and production —worked together and made Bijoux really feel welcome and supported. Each member brought unique skills and perspectives, contributing to a holistic support system for Bijoux. The whole team's empathy and commitment were evident in their actions, from major ones like finally getting her to have a house of her own, to the smaller ones, like giving her a lift when she needed one or designing her children's birthday party invitations and printing them.

Our initiative to support Bijoux was executed with meticulous attention to detail and strategic planning. By involving many stakeholders, fostering teamwork, and proactively managing risks, together with her we achieved remarkable outcomes.

Bijoux is now an example of how confidence, faith and hard work, combined with a safe and supporting environment, really can make dreams come true.

Section 4: What you learnt

- How was learning captured, actioned and shared to benefit others?

Throughout our initiative to support Bijoux, we focused on scheduling monthly discussions with her and with the local support agencies to coordinate the work.

We prioritized addressing issues as they arose, as the situation was ever-changing. Regular progress reviews allowed us to identify and discuss problems promptly. For example, challenges such as delays in housing or difficulties with transportation were tackled through collaborative problem-solving. This proactive approach ensured that issues were resolved quickly, even if sometimes they led to some creative solutions.

The lessons learned led to meaningful changes in both our hearts and our processes. For instance, after seeing Bijoux's struggles to balance childcare and work we recognized the utility of a more flexible schedule for other employees and adjusted our policies accordingly, so that many of them now have get to work later or get out earlier if they need to drive or pick up their kids from school. We also started another specific project to have company nurseries in the future in order to support present and future mothers and fathers equally.

The knowledge gained from this initiative benefitted not only Bijoux's project but it also helped to expand our mindset to embrace the many different needs of the different people that come together to form our company.

Our initiative to support Bijoux was so much more than a project: it was an opportunity for all of us to come in touch with a reality that's so different from ours and to appreciate what we all sometimes take for granted: a workplace, a car, a home, our friends and colleagues. It also humbled us and made us realize how much prejudice still affects job onboarding worldwide.

Her impeccable work record with us and her success story inspired us to share this experience with others and speak up in public events, to encourage every entrepreneur to give a chance to someone in need.

Bijoux is the proof that a candidate is so much more than a gender, a skin color, a CV, a situation and that a company is not only a workplace but it should also be a community.

Real inclusion to us means going beyond appearances and making real efforts to create not only jobs and profits, but an environment where seeds can grow into flowers, for every one of us has different colours and in every garden the beauty is found in diversity.

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