Real-life stories

Don't miss out on the talent that disabled people and people with long-term health conditions have to offer.

Department for Work and Pensions
Don't miss out on the talent that disabled people and people with long-term health conditions have to offer.

The **Employability** campaign challenges employer attitudes towards the recruitment and retention of disabled people and those with long-term health conditions.

Research tells us that some employers make negative assumptions about the capabilities of disabled people and what they can bring to the workplace. But such fears are often unfounded.

**Employability** emphasises the skills and talents disabled workers and those with long-term health conditions can bring to the workplace. Practical advice and real-life examples of how disabled workers can benefit business helps to build managers confidence in recruiting and retaining disabled workers.

Read our **Employability** real-life stories, and discover what talent you may be missing out on.
Contents

Construction and property
Kevin Wainwright – Administrator/Bookkeeper................................................... 5

Education and training
Beverley Davies – Development Officer............................................................. 8
Jeanette Weston – Cleaner .............................................................................. 11
Louise Whittaker – Administration Assistant.................................................... 14
Bianca Raven – Team Administrator ................................................................ 17
Steve Ratchford – Connexions Assistant ......................................................... 20
Shirley Jones – Domestic Assistant .................................................................. 23

Health and care
Sheena Watts – Nursery Assistant................................................................... 26
Sarah Whiteley – Care Assistant...................................................................... 29
Holly Johnson – Nursery Assistant................................................................... 32

Hospitality
Thomas Hitchinson – Groundsman .................................................................. 35
Allisha Collins – Conference Administrator..................................................... 38
Ian Hollingsworth – Catering Assistant............................................................ 41
Stephen Batchelor – Kitchen Porter .................................................................. 44

Legal and financial
Sarah Haller – Solicitor..................................................................................... 47

Manufacturing
Shane McDermott – Production Assistant........................................................ 50
Peter – Auto-CAD Engineer ............................................................................ 52
Media and IT
Daniel Davies – Technologist................................................................. 55
Neil Shepherd – Software Developer ................................................... 58
Max Zadow – Senior Trainer/Producer............................................... 61

Retail and local services
Christine Dryden – Laundry Assistant .............................................. 65
Stephen Carter – Trainee Team Leader............................................. 68
Peter Skuse – Wine Pricing and Sourcing Manager......................... 71

Sport and leisure
Sharon Stephenson – Administration Executive............................. 74

Other business areas
Colin Jones – Security Officer......................................................... 77
James Edwards – Operations Manager........................................... 80
Gordon Jeffs – Security Guard......................................................... 83
Kevin Wainwright – Administrator/Bookkeeper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employee</th>
<th>Kevin Wainwright</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job</td>
<td>Administrator/Bookkeeper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Company</td>
<td>Citylets, Liverpool</td>
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“I feel more confident because of work and I feel like I’m living a normal life.”

Kevin Wainwright, has much to celebrate. In 2005, he received a new heart and pair of kidneys in a major double transplant operation. The operation was a success and gave Kevin a new lease of life in more ways than one. Until then, he’d spent over a decade unable to work because of his poor health. Kevin said: “I got used to doing the cleaning and cooking at home and taking my little girl to school, but I felt brain dead for many years.”

Fit and ready

When in 2007 he felt ready and fit enough to go back to work Kevin, 46, sought help from Working Links. The agency works across the country with disabled people and people with health problems to help them get back to work. Staff at Working Links, helped Kevin improve his CV writing skills, his job searching techniques and also learn how to ‘sell’ himself to employers. Kevin used his networking skills to find a job and was eventually offered a post as an Administrator/Bookkeeper with letting agency Citylets in Liverpool. His main responsibilities include basic accounts, processing invoices and conducting audit trails. Kevin currently works part time hours but hopes to gradually build up to working full time hours.
Employer’s story

Manager and Accountant Paul Bullock interviewed Kevin for the post at Citylets but was looking for more than just a candidate who had the right skills. He explains: “Kevin didn’t come with the exact skill base we required but he had the right attitude and we knew we could develop his skills.” Kevin’s enthusiasm and his aspirations for the future also impressed him. "The fact that he’d enrolled on a college course in accounting before he’d even applied for the job proved that he had a sense of commitment” says Paul. Paul knew about Kevin’s health problems before the interview and it was discussed when they met during the interview but Paul did not believe it was a barrier to his being employed and no physical adjustments had to be made for Kevin at work.

Same level of productivity

Paul is keen to treat all his staff the same. He monitors Kevin’s workload as he does for all of his staff and expects the same level of productivity from Kevin as he does from other employees. Paul says that Kevin is best qualified to talk about any impact his health may have on his work. He said: “Kevin wants to prove himself at work and as a consequence he is self-managing when it comes to any health issues.”

Message to other employers

“Don’t feel scared about inviting a disabled person for an interview. If you don’t, you don’t know what you might be turning away.”

John Bullock, Accountant/Manager.
Employee's story

Kevin is gradually getting back to living the life he had before he became ill. He particularly enjoys the mental stimulation of his job which he started in July 2007. Kevin is also developing new skills in public speaking as a result of his charity work. He is actively involved with ‘New Start’, a charity set up to fund transplants and to assist in funding the development of a transplant centre.

Kevin is studying hard on a three year Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) course and is looking forward to eventually qualifying as an Accountant. He said “After feeling brain dead for so long, I feel like I've woken up.”
Beverley Davies – Development Officer

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<th>Employee</th>
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<td>Job</td>
<td>Development Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Company</td>
<td>School of Sign Language, Blackburn</td>
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</tbody>
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“Being deaf doesn’t stop me trying new things and I love a challenge. That’s why I took on the risk of studying for another qualification, so that I could get a better job.”

“It feels like a dream come true”. That’s what 39 year old Beverley Davies said about her job as a Development Officer for the School of Sign Language in Blackburn. The school is a small company with about seven permanent employees and a team of freelance workers and volunteer workers.

Ideal match

Beverley, who is profoundly deaf, had various jobs in both the public and private sector before she took a PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate in Education) qualification and found a job that was the ideal match for her skills and interests. She said: “I took the PGCE qualification because I wanted to improve myself and knew I could do better as far as employment was concerned.” As a Development Officer, Beverley works on the training side of the business.

Beverley has faced barriers because of her deafness so feels very passionate about her work with local organisations breaking down some of those barriers. She delivers workshops to schools, churches, community centres and prisons and trains children and adults to use sign language. This she says, enables them to be better equipped to communicate with the deaf community.
Real-life stories – Education and training

Employer’s story

Beverley was the first person to be employed by the School of Sign Language which was set up by founder and Managing Director Debbie Reynolds in 2006. Debbie herself is hearing impaired and understands the barriers and the discrimination faced by deaf people. She also recognises that some employers have missed opportunities to employ deaf people who have skills, abilities and the personal qualities to contribute to the success of a business.

As an employer, Debbie recognised Beverley’s skills particularly in relation to training other people. Debbie also recognised Beverley’s potential to grow with the business. She said: “When I first employed her, Beverley worked mainly with children but then as her confidence grew she started to work with adults in prisons and other organisations.” Beverley shadows more experienced tutors as part of her professional development and will eventually start delivering training to companies.

Award winner

In 2007, Debbie was the silver winner in the Barclays Trading Places Awards. The awards, whose supporters include Jobcentre Plus, were launched as a national celebration of men and women who have triumphed over the odds to set up thriving businesses and positively changed their lives in the process. As an employer, Debbie has given Beverley an opportunity that has ‘positively changed’ her life.

Message to other employers

“Employers need to be more open minded and to give people a chance. If they work with somebody who’s deaf, they’ll be able to see what they can do. Until they’ve actually had the experience of working with a deaf or disabled person, they won’t know what they’re able to do.”

Debbie Reynolds, Managing Director.
Employee's story

Beverley worked hard to gain her qualifications and also gained valuable experience through voluntary work. She is making good progress in her job and taking on increased responsibility. She works both with hearing and deaf colleagues and communicates using a variety of methods such as sign language or the assistance of an interpreter. A multi-function alerting device is used in the main office to ensure that Beverley and other hearing impaired staff, workers or clients can be alerted to telephone and door bell rings, smoke and fire alarms.

Risen to the challenge

Beverley’s job as a Development Officer requires travel across the region but Beverley does not have a driving license. Although she has never before had the confidence to learn to drive, she has now risen to the challenge however and is taking driving lessons. Managing Director Debbie Reynolds, was able to obtain some funding to pay for Beverley’s driving lessons from the Employment Impact Scheme which is jointly funded by the European Social Fund and Jobcentre Plus.

From a personal perspective, Beverley believes that the biggest personal gain she has experienced since she started her job at the School for Sign Language is her growth in confidence. In addition, she draws a great deal of satisfaction from having a job that she believes can and will make a difference to other people’s lives. She said: “I feel so proud, really proud and so much more confident because of my job.”
Jeanette Weston – Cleaner

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“A lot of people do get discouraged. There is work out there so keep trying. I found a job.”

When Jeanette Weston started working as a Cleaner at Direct Training it was her first job for eleven years – she’s glad to be back: “I enjoy work. It’s good having friends and meeting people. I see people here all the time, the students and everyone else.”

Jeanette has epilepsy and one of the main triggers that brings on a seizure is getting too hot or too cold: “In conditions similar to this I’m fine. If it goes above a certain temperature or below a certain temperature I can just go like that,” she says, snapping her fingers.

Her epilepsy doesn’t cause Jeanette any problems in doing her job however, because she takes care to regulate her own temperature by altering her clothing according to how hot or cold the room is.

Employer’s story

Direct Training is a small business which provides training in areas such as basic skills and customer care. Janet Brants, Centre Manager, had no worries about employing Jeanette as she had previously attended a training course at the centre – Janet knew she was reliable and hard working. “I thought she was an ideal candidate, so I called her up to let her know the job was going.”

Jeanette came in for an interview and was successful. The company didn’t have to make any adjustments to allow her to do the job.
Given the nature of their business, which involves training people for work, it’s a definite advantage to Direct Training to employ disabled people: “We like disabled employees to go back into class and let trainees with disabilities know that there’s a way out of the cycle of unemployment.”

As someone who spends a lot of time talking to employers and knows what they need, Janet feels strongly that many businesses are missing out on a pool of untapped potential by not employing disabled people. The company is careful to make sure its own recruitment and selection is fair so they don’t miss out – “we make sure everyone gets an equal chance.”

**Message to other employers**

“Employers often don’t realise that they can get a lot of support. They don’t know that the Disability Employment Advisor [from the local Jobcentre] is there to help them.”

Janet Brants, Centre Manager, Direct Training

**Employee’s story**

When Jeanette developed epilepsy at the age of 39 she had a job in a kitchen – obviously it was impossible to control her temperature in that environment and she had to leave. She’s applied for many other jobs over the years and got nowhere:

“I have been to interviews where employers wouldn’t take me on. They didn’t give me the chance to say what my condition is and how I manage it.”

It’s especially frustrating for Jeanette as her wide experience should mean that many jobs are open to her – she’s worked in hotels, restaurants, supermarkets and a casino. She feels employers are put off by her condition, however, and don’t see her abilities.

In particular she feels that employers lack understanding of epilepsy: “I think it’s because they don’t know what to do or how to treat you with that condition.”
New start

After her previous rejections, Jeanette’s self-esteem has been boosted by being selected for the job at Direct Training. She has always wanted to work and after her period of unemployment finds that having a job “makes a big difference. I’ve been brought up to be independent and I’m not happy just sitting at home.”

Getting back into a routine and doing her job well has raised Jeanette’s confidence. She’s looking for a second part-time job and hopes that employers will now focus on her ability to do the job rather than being worried about her epilepsy.
Louise Whittaker – Administration Assistant

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“People don’t realise how difficult it is to get back if you’ve been down at the bottom. It takes a lot of effort. If it’s a physical disability people often see it but they can’t see a mental disability – but it’s just as important for people to get back into work.”

As a former teacher, Louise Whittaker enjoys working in a training company: “I do like the educational environment, and the people contact is great.”

Louise’s job at Direct Training in Bradford involves a lot of paperwork as well as some reception duties and meeting and greeting. She’s experienced stress and recurrent depression over the years, so the job offers about the right level of challenge for her at the moment: “There are plenty of chances to be involved and help people out, but not so much pressure as being in the classroom.”

Louise was on the ‘Horizons’ course at Direct Training, arranged through Jobcentre Plus, when the vacancy for her role came up and she decided to apply.
**Employer’s story**

Direct Training is a family-run company with 37 staff, providing training in areas such as basic skills and customer care. Clients include a major bank along with Jobcentre Plus and other agencies.

Les Adams, Quality and Development Manager, says that everybody gets a fair play when it comes to working at Direct Training. “It just happened. The fact that Louise was on the Horizons course meant she was on incapacity benefit, but we don’t look at that as a barrier. We had a position to fit her.”

**Flexible attitude**

Direct Training have not had to make any major adjustments for Louise, aside from changing her working hours so she can leave earlier to avoid the rush hour and make her journey home less stressful, which the company is happy to agree to.

Les uses his own disability as an example of the company’s flexible attitude: “I’m dyslexic, and I’m a top banana in the company. I can’t spell for toffee but I’ve learnt all these support mechanisms.” Because quality is important to the company, Les has access to proofreaders in each of Direct Training’s centres. “When it comes to confidential company business the MD acts as my proof reader. The whole issue of my disability is just thought of as the norm and a regular process within the company.”

**Message to other employers**

“Disabled people are just as good as anyone else - sometimes better, because they want to show what they can do, they’re determined to achieve.”

Les Adams, Quality and Development Manager, Direct Training.
Employee’s story

Louise started her career in banking before going back to college to do a teaching qualification. In January 2007, Louise took on three part-time jobs – two teaching posts and one admin role: “I thought that one way of handling the problems I’d had in the past was not to work full time. I liked them all but I had to keep switching heads - switching from one thing to another to another to another. I ended up getting quite stressed and poorly again.” By April she had to stop working.

When Louise did try to find an alternative role, her qualifications and experience made her seem a poor match for many of the posts. She describes “jumping through all the necessary hoops and second interviews only to be told that I was overqualified. But surely I wouldn’t have gone for it unless I was interested.”

Improved self-worth

Although she can find interviews difficult, Louise’s application for the vacancy at Direct Training was successful and she was offered the job. “I was just asked to pop in and have a chat. I think if you’re liable to get a bit stressed about things it’s helpful if you haven’t got time to get stressed. It was quite informal really and OK.”

Getting back to work has made a massive difference to Louise. “Before, I was just kind of existing financially. It’s silly things like being able to buy people Christmas presents.” But what’s even more important, says Louise, is that having a job has lifted her spirits and done wonders for her sense of self-worth and self-esteem.
Bianca Raven – Team Administrator

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“Working has made me more independent, more confident about myself.”

Bianca Raven had thirteen unsuccessful job interviews after leaving Wakefield College and despite a very thorough job search, she was unemployed for nine months. Bianca, who has cerebral palsy, feels that her disability put her at a disadvantage with employers: “You could see in their faces; as soon as I mentioned the possibility of needing to use a wheelchair or a pair of crutches, they sort of lost interest.”

As a result of these setbacks Bianca says that she began to lose confidence: “It’s always at the back of your mind: did they not employ me because I’ve got a disability? You start to get disheartened – no matter how hard you try to put it out of your mind, it’s always there.”

However, in April 2006, Bianca started work at Equal Ability, based in Wakefield that provides training and consultancy on disability issues. Bianca was initially on a year’s contract, and when that came to an end she became a permanent employee.
Employer's story

Equal Ability’s Managing Director, Sue Maynard-Campbell MBE, was impressed when she interviewed Bianca: “She was a good communicator and she’s obviously got a good education.” Bianca didn’t get the job she’d applied for, but joined the company as Team Administrator. “We used the Job Introduction Scheme (JIS) through Jobcentre Plus to assist for the first thirteen weeks.

Best person for the job

Equal Ability has only four members of staff, but draws on a wide network of freelancers for particular projects. Everyone who works there has a disability, which Sue says is not deliberate – they select the best person for the job, regardless of any impairment. However, having disabled employees has definite benefits in their line of business. “It brings to it the personal experience of disabled people, and also the perspective of disabled people in problem solving and things of that nature.”

The company uses Jobcentre Plus to fill vacancies. “We’re a small enterprise and we can’t afford huge advertising costs, so that’s a pragmatic decision.”

As a wheelchair user and someone who knows a lot about disability issues, Sue has absolutely no concerns about employing disabled people. However, she emphasises the need for honest and frank discussion: “If people are open about the issues then you can work round them – unless they’re a central element of the job.”

Message to other employers

“You do have to put some effort into [employing disabled people], and you have to be open to thinking of different ways of doing things. If you engage with disabled people they are perhaps more likely to stay.”

Sue Maynard-Campbell, Managing Director, Equal Ability CIC.
Employee’s story

When she took up her job at Equal Ability, Bianca didn’t know what equipment would help her, or that funding might be available to help to pay for it. But the Access to Work scheme through Jobcentre Plus has been a big help, paying for a taxi to and from work each day, and for some computer equipment – a cushioned mousepad and keyboard, and a speech-to-text converter attached to her computer and to the phones.

Flexible working

Bianca also needed some changes to her hours to allow her to attend physiotherapy, and after a risk assessment they concluded that she should not be alone in the office for long, and should not open or close the blinds. These adjustments didn’t cause a problem: Bianca reduced the hours she works and another employee is happy to work for longer.

Bianca enjoys her job – she likes being busy and working has given her increased confidence and independence.

She advises other disabled people to keep trying and not lose confidence. “There will be someone out there eventually that will employ you.”
**Steve Ratchford – Connexions Assistant**

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<td>Job</td>
<td>Connexions Assistant</td>
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“Employers must realise that a disabled person is a person. They need to look at the person and not the disability.”

Connexions Assistant, Steve Ratchford, of Northenden in Manchester, has the self-belief to know that he can work as productively and successfully as any other employee. But he is also realistic about his limitations and the fact that he does need some help from his employer to do his job.

Steve, who was born with mild cerebral palsy, has come a long way since he was told that he would never be able to do office work. One of the effects of his health condition is that he cannot write quickly or very clearly and long before people used computers to process or record words, the belief held by many employers was that good handwriting was essential for any type of office work.

**Encouraging views**

“You’ll never be able to work in an office because your handwriting is not good enough” were the immortal words of one trainer early on in Steve’s working life. However, when he started work as an Information Assistant with the Library Service, he received far more encouraging views from his manager at the time who said, “All we’re interested in is what you can do and not what you can’t”. And these are the words which have helped to shape Steve’s own self-confidence in his abilities and potential as a talented employee.
Employer's story

In a sector where a key function is to raise aspirations of young people who fall into the NEET group (not in employment, education or training), aspiration raising is important not only for ‘clients’ but also for employees and that, according to Manager Linda Willson, includes disabled employees.

The company approach to supporting disabled staff is to be employee-led. Rather than impose support on disabled employees, managers invite them to suggest how best they feel they can be supported. “We try to avoid making assumptions or being led by labels” says Linda. Disabled employees are treated as individuals as opposed to a separate ‘group’. Changes are made to equipment or working practices as necessary and as appropriate.

Costs are not prohibitive says Linda and the cost of supporting disabled employees is seen as negligible. Some staff in the company use Dictaphones to help record notes, others have adapted keyboards but these are seen as minor adjustments which enable valued staff members to do their jobs.

Seeing the person first

The focus adopted by the company is seeing the person first and foremost, not the disability. In practice this means as an employer, they try to be flexible about physical adjustments, purchasing equipment and making small changes to working practices in order to enable employees such as Steve, reach their full potential.

Although travelling can be an issue due to accessibility, Steve has been able to make regular visits to a careers class attended by children who have a range of disabilities. The company has no deliberate strategy to use any of the disabled employees as role models but the benefits of having disabled employees has not gone unnoticed. “Being able to present role models of disabled employees can be of help to young people who are disabled and looking for work” says Linda.
**Message to other employers**

“Employers shouldn’t have a knee jerk reaction to a disability. There are certain tasks disabled people will not be able to do but employers should not be afraid to ask how a disability will affect a person. In our company, support for disabled people is company wide and not just the role of a manager. It involves HR, IT and our Safety Advisor.”

Linda Willson, Manager, Connexions, Wythenshawe, Manchester

**Employee’s story**

For the last fifteen years, Steve has worked in various roles which involve dealing with enquiries and with people. In his current position as a Connexions Assistant, Steve handles enquiries from employers who want to advertise vacancies and from people looking for jobs.

Although much of the work involves verbal communication, it also includes an element of written communication too because information about vacancies or employment needs have to be recorded. Steve has a simple method for recording details from employers who want to place vacancies. “If I’m on desk duty and somebody rings up with a vacancy, I give them the option of speaking to a colleague or of my calling them back at a later time. That gives me the opportunity to call employers back from my own computer which has the recording software installed. I also have a tracker ball mouse on my computer which makes it easier for me to navigate around the screen”.

**Something which needs to be managed**

In addition to having cerebral palsy, Steve also has difficulty with his mobility as a result of arthritis in his knees, and he has back problems. However, he sees this as something which needs to be managed rather than as a barrier. When he carries out his duties, the work of re-stocking and classifying information for the display shelves involves a lot of standing which he can’t easily do. Therefore, for half a day a week he has the support of another member of staff who helps him with the physical aspects of the role.

Steve recognises his own boundaries but doesn’t want pity or to be treated as a ‘special case’. From his own experience of being unemployed for seven years after leaving school and from prejudiced comments during his life, he knows that there are certain issues and challenges disabled people may face. But his approach in life is to “always think the best of yourself and maintain a positive attitude”.

27.02.08 – www.dwp.gov.uk/employability
Shirley Jones – Domestic Assistant

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<th>Employee</th>
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<td>Job</td>
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“On benefits, it felt like I was in hell, now it feels like I’m in heaven.”

As far as Shirley Jones is concerned work is not about money. For 45 year old Shirley, who works as a Domestic Assistant at the North Liverpool Regeneration Company (NLRCO), work means more than that. For Shirley, having a job is about self-respect and doing something worthwhile with her life. “Being on benefits, I felt like I was being watched all the time but now I feel free” she says.

Shirley’s determination has paid off

After leaving school, Shirely spent many years stuck in dead end training schemes but was always keen to work. She eventually found permanent employment and was employed in one job as a kitchen porter for about ten years. However, Shirley’s circumstances changed and she found herself back on the job market. But it hasn’t been easy. “I’d apply for jobs but would never get them. When I asked for feedback about my interviews, I was told that my dress was perfect, that my answers were great but that I just wasn’t suitable” says Shirley. “I feel I’ve been discriminated against and I’ve had a few knock backs but I’ve been encouraged to keep trying”. Although she admits that it’s been ‘a hard slog’, Shirley’s determination to get back to work paid off and she is now working in a job she enjoys.
Employer’s story

For project manager, Nicola Kelly, employing Shirley was neither a risk nor a problem. “We knew Shirley as a trainee and were fully aware of her support needs so it wasn’t a problem to employ her. Take Shirley’s problems away and she is just the same as other employees” says Nicola who believes that everybody has ‘baggage’ of some kind. “Non-disabled people need support too” she says. As a community based organisation NLRCO networks with other agencies to promote its ‘widening participation’ agenda. This strategy also applies to the recruitment and selection of new employees.

Nicola knew that Shirley would need extra help with paperwork and would also need a more in-depth induction than other non-disabled employees. This support has been provided without cost being an issue. As an organisation that regularly provides training for groups within the community, NLRCO is committed to meeting the needs of trainees who are disabled and will provide whatever support they need to complete a course. The same principle applies to employees. Nicola said, “We’re used to making changes for trainees. For example we provide bigger keyboards for trainees who have visual impairments. To do the same for employees is really not a problem”.

Message to other employers

“Employers should be more open minded and think about what might need to be changed in order to support disabled people. Employers should ask themselves ‘why exactly can’t we employ a disabled person’?”

Nicola Kelly, Project Manager, NLRCO.
**Employee’s story**

Shirley has a range of disabilities which include learning difficulties and dyslexia. Many years ago, she also had her spleen removed, a condition which can affect the immune system. Nevertheless, Shirley is very positive about both working and learning. To date, she has completed courses in business administration, customer care and first aid. She is also currently enrolled on a business start-up course and has thought about setting up her own business. “I love making cards, so I might do something with that one day” she says. In the meantime, Shirley is happy to continue in her new job which she started in May 2007. As a domestic assistant, Shirley has her own ‘patch’ to clean but also works as part of a team at NLRCO. In addition to the self-respect she feels from having a job, Shirley believes that employment has helped in other ways. “I feel more confident when I talk to people” she says.

**Making a success of being employed**

Support from her employer has gone a long way to help Shirley make a success of being employed. Staff at NLRCO were impressed with Shirley’s efforts as a trainee with the company and invited her to apply for a job as a domestic assistant. After a successful interview she was delighted to be offered a permanent job. Shirley doesn’t need any specific support or physical adjustments to help her carry out her duties, but does require help to complete paperwork and forms.

Shirley has personal experience of the barriers faced by disabled people who want to work. She’s been called ‘stupid’ because of her learning difficulties and one employer suggested without any supporting evidence, that she would be ill a lot and would need significant amounts of sick leave because her spleen had been removed. On the positive side however, Shirley is aware that some employers like NLRCO will do their best to be supportive and encouraging to disabled people.
Sheena Watts – Nursery Assistant

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<th>Employee</th>
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“The best thing about the job is the children. You see so many different stages of their development. First word, first step. It’s really good to see that.”

Sheena Watts, Nursery Assistant at Happy Times in Leeds, loves her job. She’s been at the nursery for four years and is key worker for five of the children – assessing their development and behaviour and liaising closely with parents.

Sheena has dyslexia, tinnitus and hearing loss. Although she is articulate, she sometimes has trouble expressing herself – the words can just “come out wrong.”

However, her pragmatic and open approach means that she successfully manages any challenges that come her way and ensures the parents of the children she cares for are aware of her impairments. “I tell the parents that I might not be able to spell some words and to tell me if they think I’m ignoring them as I may not have heard what they said.” Generally the response is positive: “I think the parents are more understanding these days. More people know about disability.”
**Employer's story**

Sharon Catley, Head of Nursery, doesn’t see Sheena as a disabled person but as an individual: “She’s a character; she’s got something to give.”

In 2003, when Sharon was recruiting for the new nursery, the Disability Employment Adviser at Jobcentre Plus introduced her to Sheena. Sharon liked Sheena’s proactive and down-to-earth approach and thought she could be a valuable addition to her team. Sheena’s post was funded for a settling-in period through the New Deal for Disabled People, and she quickly proved she could do the job well.

**Increased confidence**

Sheena sometimes needs a little extra help with the paperwork but Sharon stresses that this extra support is not a big deal. Sheena will ask for help if she needs it but otherwise just gets on with her job. Sharon has watched Sheena’s confidence increase as she has settled into the job and noticed great improvements in her practical abilities such as spelling.

All the staff at Happy Times have learnt ‘Makaton’ sign language – something that makes life easier for Sheena in some situations, but also benefits the nursery as a whole. This includes caring for the children such as a youngster with communication difficulties who started attending the nursery.

**Disability Symbol employer**

The nursery is now a Disability Symbol employer – meaning it agrees to meet certain commitments in employing and retaining disabled people. Recently the company provided a voluntary placement for a profoundly deaf man, who gained a few weeks of valuable work experience that he can use as a stepping stone to finding a permanent job.

Sharon would be happy to employ more disabled people and encourages other companies to do so. There have been definite advantages for the business – meeting disabled employees gives the parents of children with special needs extra confidence in the nursery.
Message to other employers

“Don’t be frightened by the word disability – it’s a huge umbrella. Give it a go. You can’t prejudge the situation.”

Sharon Catley, Head of Nursery, Happy Times (Leeds) Ltd

Employee's story

Sheena had previously applied for many jobs but didn’t get beyond the application form or a telephone call. “People didn’t know how to react. They didn’t know how I could help children. They weren’t sure how I could communicate with children or help them to write if I don’t know how to spell.”

More independence

Inevitably the repeated rejections damaged her confidence but her perseverance paid off in the end. She encourages other disabled people not to give up and to try to communicate what they have to offer. “Talk to the person who’s interviewing and see if you can help them understand what you have to offer.”

Working at Happy Times has made a huge difference to Sheena. “I’ve got a bit more independence instead of staying at home and doing nothing or going on different courses just to get out of the house.”

Sheena always knew that she wanted to work with children. Having achieved that ambition, she’s not standing still – now she’s developing her skills further by taking an NVQ Level 2 in Childcare.
Sarah Whiteley – Care Assistant

**Employee**  Sarah Whiteley

**Job**  Care Assistant

**Company**  Epworth Grange, Bury

“When I wasn’t working, I felt less optimistic about the future. Now I feel more optimistic about my personal future and much happier than when I wasn’t working. At the end of the day, I go home feeling really satisfied.”

Sarah Whiteley has a job that is both challenging and personally rewarding. She works as a Care Assistant at Epworth Grange, a residential home for the elderly in Bury, Lancashire. Sarah admits that at times her job is hard, particularly if residents become ill or when they die. However, she is sensitive to the needs of the people she looks after and gains a lot of personal satisfaction from helping them with tasks they can no longer do for themselves. She says: “I like being the one who’s been able to give residents some dignity. This sometimes means I have to brush their hair or just generally help them to look good with their make-up or jewellery”. Her job is varied and also includes helping out at social events in the home or accompanying residents to church or other events at local venues.

**Clear career goals**

Sarah has a mild learning disability but that has not prevented her from working hard at college to achieve qualifications and to make a success of her job. She takes pride in her work and has very clear career goals. She has already achieved a string of qualifications which include a GNVQ in Health and Social Care, an OCR Business Administration qualification and an RSA Typing certificate.

Employment has made a significant difference to Sarah’s life. “I go out a lot more with my friends and I also have much more independence”. Sarah says that work has also been good for her self-esteem.
**Employer's story**

Managers at Epworth Grange are committed to making their equality and diversity policy more than just words on a page. They want it to make a difference to both their clients and their staff. When Sarah first started to work at the home, fortnightly support sessions were arranged to ensure she received the help and guidance she needed to do her job well.

Following her induction, managers worked with Sarah to create a personal development plan with agreed targets. A Placement Officer from Bury Employment Support and Training (Bury EST) also contributed to Sarah's development plan and provides ongoing support as required. Bury EST provides a recruitment and support service for local residents who have a disability.

**Fair chance**

Beth Adcock, Assistant Manager at Epworth Grange, says that Sarah was not treated any differently from other staff. "She was given a fair chance but that’s how we treat all our staff”. Beth has observed Sarah’s growth in confidence since she started work at the home and is pleased with her progress. She says: “Sarah learns very quickly and she’s really come out of herself since she started working here.”

Managers at Epworth Grange are prepared to give all employees a chance and judge them on performance rather than assumptions of what they can and can’t do. If it becomes apparent that an employee does not have the right skills for the job, they will either be given the necessary support or be advised to use their work experience as a stepping stone to a job which is better suited to their abilities.

The open door policy at the home and the regular support sessions gives both managers and employees the opportunity to raise and resolve any issues that may affect the employee and ensure they have the best possible chance to make the job work for them.

**Message to other employers**

“How can you criticise something if you’ve not given it a go? How will people get a chance if you don’t give them that chance?”

Beth Adcock, Assistant Manager.
Employee's story

Unemployment doesn’t suit Sarah. She enjoys being busy and not just at work. Since the age of eleven, Sarah has been involved in charity work. After leaving school, she experienced a bout of unemployment and didn't like it. She says, “I hated being unemployed and got very depressed about not having a job”. Sarah received help from a Disability Employment Adviser at her local Jobcentre Plus who helped her to explore different job options and to find work that suited her personality and interests. He also recommended further study at college. Sarah says that going to college was a good idea because it helped her to grow in confidence. When she eventually applied for a job at Epworth Grange, she felt that she was the right candidate for the vacancy.

Proved herself

Now happily settled in her job, Sarah feels well supported by her managers and appreciates the chance she was given to prove she had the personality and the skills to be a good Care Assistant. She believes that there are other potential employees like her who may have a disability or health condition who would also welcome the chance to work. Her message to employers is simple. She says: “Think about giving people a chance. Give them a working chance to prove themselves”.

Sarah Whiteley
Holly Johnson – Nursery Assistant

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<th>Employee</th>
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<tr>
<td>Job</td>
<td>Nursery Assistant</td>
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<td>Company</td>
<td>Providence Nursery, Elland</td>
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“Some workers need risk assessing because they’re pregnant. What’s the difference with disabled people? We just need risk assessing.”

Nursery Assistant Holly Johnson, 21, 'jumped around the room' when she was invited for a second interview at Providence Nursery in Elland. She felt trapped in her job as a playworker and didn’t feel she was able to do anything really constructive in her job. She was ready for a change. However, Holly was very realistic about her chances of getting the job. She’d been turned down for jobs before and was actually one of over 30 people invited to attend an interview at the nursery.

She beat 34 other candidates

Holly first saw the advert for the Nursery Assistant vacancy in her local newspaper. She had a few ideas about how to complete the application form but as she always does, checked her writing with her mum. Something about Holly’s application clearly impressed, because not only was she invited for a first interview but for a second interview. When she was offered the job as a Nursery Assistant, she beat 34 other candidates to the post.

Holly doesn't make a big deal of the fact that she has cerebral palsy. She is very honest about her physical limitations and very aware that specific risks may have to be managed when any disabled person is employed. However, Holly is equally aware that other non-disabled employees may sometimes need ‘risk assessing’.
**Employer's story**

As both the owner and manager of Providence Nursery, it is clearly in her interests for Jane Erlank to employ only the best. Working in a sector where the safety and protection of children is crucial to success, recruitment mistakes can be very costly. The recruitment process at the nursery has to therefore be very rigorous. Somehow, Jane has managed to achieve both fairness and rigour when she recruits new staff. “Our approach is to always look for strengths in the people we recruit and that’s what happened when we interviewed Holly.”

Interviews can sometimes be artificial in that they never really give employees the chance to prove that they are the right person for the job. Holly, did however have that chance because at Providence nursery, the interview process includes a ‘walk around’ the nursery. This gives managers the opportunity to observe the behaviour of potential employees and to also monitor their interaction with the children.

**We saw strengths**

Managers liked what they saw when they observed Holly’s interaction with children. Jane says, “We saw strengths in Holly’s ability to interact well with the children. She was fabulous”. New employees are also employed on a three month probationary period initially which gives managers another opportunity to ensure that a person really is the right person for the job.

Jane doesn’t believe that employing a disabled person is an easy challenge. During the interviews, Holly had been very open about her tendency to in her words, ‘trip over fresh air’. Although she speaks very articulately, Holly also raised the issue of her slight speech impairment. The issue of Holly’s balance was a problem that had to be addressed, especially in an environment where the health and safety of children is paramount. However, Jane also realised that it was a problem that could be managed. The solution was for Jane and Holly to work together to carry out a risk assessment and identify strategies for managing any risks. Those strategies clearly worked because Holly passed her probationary period and is now a member of permanent staff.
**Message to other employers**

“Always look for the strengths in people and treat disabled people as individuals. In our case, employing disabled people fits in with our mission and helps to make our business more inclusive and diverse.” Jane Erlank, Providence Nursery, Elland.

**Employee's story**

Holly does not allow her disability to prevent her from doing her job. “You know your own capabilities” she says. Holly’s honesty and openness about which aspects of her work she would find challenging made it much easier for managers to be supportive. No physical adjustments needed to be carried out to help Holly do her job and she doesn't need any special equipment. Her only requirement is to be allowed extra time for certain tasks. Other than that, she works just as effectively and in fact more so as far as Jane is concerned, as some non-disabled members of staff.

**Staff here have been great**

In terms of her satisfaction, Holly has found in her job what she was looking for. She wanted to feel she was doing something constructive at work and in many ways she is doing more than that. “I’m learning about childcare and learning something new every week. I want to get a Level 3 qualification in childcare” Holly says, “Staff here have been great and supportive and for me work has been a positive experience”.

Holly at work
Thomas Hitchinson – Groundsman

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<tr>
<th>Employee</th>
<th>Thomas Hitchinson</th>
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<tr>
<td>Job</td>
<td>Groundsman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Company</td>
<td>Norton Grange Hotel, Rochdale</td>
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“It’s easy to get into a comfort zone when you’re on benefits. I feel much better now that I’m back at work.”

Thomas Hitchinson spent 20 years working for the local council before ill health forced him to give up work. In 2001 Thomas was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. According to the Royal College of Psychiatrists, the condition affects about 1 in every 100 adults at some point in their life. Bipolar disorder is treatable and in Thomas’ case, medication was crucial to his recovery.

After being unable to work for six years, Thomas decided that he was ready to ‘sign off’ from benefits. He felt far too young to be written off as unfit to work and wanted to get back to working outdoors as he had previously done.

Motivation and enthusiasm

Thomas’s quest for work was successful. His years of experience and skill as a gardener were recognised and he was offered a job as Groundsman at Norton Grange hotel in Rochdale. Thomas also had the personal qualities that all employers look for in potential employees – motivation and enthusiasm.

His job involves maintaining the grounds and landscaped gardens of the hotel. Thomas enjoys the freedom of the outdoors and also enjoys the flexibility he has to plan his own schedule of daily work.
Employer's story

As the ‘Disability Champion’ for Norton Grange, Manager Robert Maynock is responsible for ensuring that both disabled staff and clients are treated fairly and equally. He says “In my job I have a customer facing role so my work as Disability Champion fits in well with my main role.” Robert does not directly line manage Thomas but is responsible for ensuring that all disabled staff are treated equally at work.

Raising awareness

It is Robert’s responsibility to raise awareness about disability amongst staff. He does this by organising staff induction and refresher sessions. He says: “Training is important because it helps to break down stereotypes. It also creates opportunities for discussion about disability issues.”

Training sessions are designed to help staff understand and even experience some of the barriers faced by disabled people. For example the refresher session includes practical exercises which allow staff to use crutches or other equipment which restricts their mobility. They are also given a tour of hotel rooms that have accessible features so that they are aware of the needs of disabled clients. “Training in disability is cost effective for us and could be used in other industry sectors” says Robert.

Message to other employers

“In our industry, we’ve got the best chance to make a difference. We meet people from different walks of life and with a range of disabilities. Public facing industries have more interaction with disabled people – it’s down to us to change stereotypes.”

Robert Maynock, Assistant Banqueting Manager.
Employee's story

Norton Grange is set in its own grounds with views of the Pennine Hills and offers the perfect setting for Thomas's job. He believes that his job and work in general has been good for his health. “Work has given me something to do and it's good for my self-esteem” says Thomas, “The job suits me because I like to be out and about.” He likes to be busy in his job and also enjoys the social aspects of being employed such as meeting people.

Quality of life

When he began his job hunt, he was supported by a local agency that works with disabled people to help them get back into work. The agency In2Work, provides information, advice, guidance and support for disabled people and people with health conditions. Staff at the agency helped Thomas complete his application form. Since he started his job in June 2007, Thomas has not needed any specific support at work and since he started working again, both his health and his quality of life have improved significantly.
Allisha Collins – Conference Administrator

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<th>Employee</th>
<th>Allisha Collins</th>
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<tr>
<td>Job</td>
<td>Conference Administrator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Company</td>
<td>Gateway Centre, Liverpool</td>
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“Work has given me more confidence and a better life. I would never go back to not working.”

Many people take the ability to read a novel from cover to cover for granted. Allisha Collins of Birkenhead does not. Allisha who has Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP), a hereditary eye disorder, read her first complete novel after she started work at the Gateway Centre in Liverpool.

Beneficial adjustments

Employment has been good for Allisha: “My job at the conference centre has given me much more confidence. I work on the reception desk and have to be assertive because I have to approach clients rather than wait for them to approach me” says Allisha.

Employer's story

Nigel Byrne, manager at the Gateway Conference Centre, interviewed Allisha for the conference administrator post but didn’t ask her any questions about her visual impairment. He knew that Allisha was partially sighted but was much more interested in whether her personality and skills were right for the job. “We needed someone with bags of personality because the role is very much a customer focused role. Allisha had just the skillset that we were looking for” says Nigel.
Access to Work

Nigel was aware of the Access to Work scheme through Jobcentre Plus and that funding might be available to help with adjustments. Nigel says “After she started to work for the company, I talked to Allisha about her impairment and about what support she would need to do her work”. Nigel also enlisted the help of the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) who carried out a workplace assessment and offered advice about the type of workstation and equipment Allisha needed.

Nigel appreciates that some employers worry about the cost of employing disabled people but he believes that employing non-disabled people also costs money, especially when employers have to pay agency fees to recruit new employees. “If you think you’ve found the right person for the job, you will pay whatever it costs, whether that person is non-disabled or disabled” says Nigel.

Message to other employers

“Keep an open mind. Look at what people can do rather than what they can’t do. If you always look at what people can’t do, then to be fair you’d have to start looking at what non-disabled people can’t do such as mental arithmetic or other things they can’t do”.

Nigel Byrne, Centre Manager.
Employee's story

When looking for work, Allisha was encouraged and supported by a Disability Employment Adviser (DEA) at her local Jobcentre Plus who helped her with job hunting and also to find a place on the RNIB Training Grade Scheme. As a trainee, Allisha was able to develop vocational skills in administrative work.

Allisha is enthusiastic about her work and makes visitors to the Gateway Centre feel welcome.

One of the benefits of her job as a Conference Administrator was discovering a text enlarging machine. The machine is a light weight electronic magnifier which Allisha uses at work to read documents but can also use to read magazines and novels.

Greater awareness

Allisha believes that there needs to be greater awareness about what disabled people can do. She says that raising awareness is not just about helping people today but about helping future generations.

Allisha says “Things have got better since my mum was at school. She had a hard time because of her sight whereas I had a much better time at school. Future generations should have an even better time than me both at school and at work.”
Ian Hollingsworth – Catering Assistant

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<th>Employee</th>
<th>Ian Hollingsworth</th>
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<tr>
<td>Job</td>
<td>Catering Assistant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Company</td>
<td>The Coffee Pot Café, near Wetherby, West Yorkshire</td>
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“When Ian’s not here people ask after him. We have a good following – lots of regular customers – and they all know him. He talks to them all.”

Ian Hollingsworth works at The Coffee Pot Café near Wetherby. First thing in the morning he prepares the pasties and bakes them in the oven. During the day he’s busy greeting customers and is responsible for keeping the restaurant area tidy.

A friendly face

In a way it’s not surprising that Ian knows many of The Coffee Pot’s regulars – he’s been working there for fourteen years. But it’s also because he makes an effort to be friendly: “Shane comes in, he’s a regular customer – I always shake his hand and say ‘Nice to see you Shane, how are you?’”

Employer's story

Barbara Jakeman, the café Supervisor, is full of praise for Ian’s attention to detail and hard work, “If he’s out in the restaurant on a lunch time, we know it will be done right – all the chairs are pushed in and all the tables cleaned properly. When he goes on holiday we really miss him” she says.

Ian has a learning disability and Barbara explains that they have made some adjustments for him at work but these have been minimal and not incurred any cost. For example, he doesn’t operate the till but the team there work well together and its give-and-take with other staff members too, who cover each other where necessary to help out.

Barbara comments that Ian is so helpful they have to be careful not to take advantage of his good nature. When they’re short staffed they try not to phone him, as Ian will always agree to come in – even when he really needs a break!
Training new staff

The café is family run, with about twenty employees. Ian talks warmly about the jokes he shares with colleagues and a recent visit from the manager’s wife and children. Barbara says that Ian gets on well with everyone who works at the café – which includes students working at the weekends and men from the nearby prison. The Coffee Pot also takes other disabled people on work placements.

Ian is also the best person to train new staff in the tasks he does so well, such as preparing the pasties. “He’ll show them exactly what to do, how long to cook them for, where to get the eggwash. He’s brilliant, he really is” says Barbara.

The specialist recruitment agency Remploy placed Ian at The Coffee Pot and he doesn’t require any additional support to do his job.

Message to other employers

Commenting about employing disabled people: “Just go ahead with it. We’ve never, ever had a problem. We’re 100 per cent behind it.”

Barbara Jakeman, Supervisor, The Coffee Pot Café
Employee’s story

Ian, who’s 36, went into catering after leaving school and has never been out of a job. After working in various restaurants he went to Dr B’s, a café in Harrogate that trains young people, to gain some qualifications.

Enthusiasm pays off

He first came to The Coffee Pot in 1993, to work for two days a week on a temporary placement. The management there were so impressed that within a fortnight they’d offered him a full-time job.

Ian says that his job can be very hard work. On summer weekends the large café and all the outside tables may be full, and they also provide business lunches and buffets for parties. But he enjoys working in catering and the bustling café environment suits his positive outlook and sociable nature. “It’s a good thing” he says, “I get on with the customers superbly, you know”.

Ian tidying up the outside picnic tables
Stephen Batchelor – Kitchen Porter

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<tr>
<th>Employee</th>
<th>Stephen Batchelor</th>
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<tr>
<td>Job</td>
<td>Kitchen Porter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Company</td>
<td>Thorpe Park Hotel and Spa, Leeds</td>
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“Officially I'm disabled but I don't even think about it unless other people mention it”.

In May 1988, Stephen Batchelor lost his right arm in a serious car accident. However, he remains philosophical about what happened. “It took me about six months to come around but then everything fell into place. I realised that I'd lost my arm but hadn’t lost my life. I also realised that I would have to learn to do things differently”.

During that time, Stephen wasn't aware of many support networks or agencies for disabled people that could help him. He therefore relied upon his own resources and the support of friends and family to readjust to his changed circumstances. He was practical then about his prospects for employment and remains practical now.

**Strategy for success**

His strategy for success at work is simple – do with one arm what other people do with two. This approach has obviously worked because Stephen has been successfully employed in his current job as a Kitchen Porter for the last five years and was previously employed in a similar role at another hotel.
Employer's story

If Gordon Jackson, General Manager at Thorpe Park Hotel and Spa, had to sum up his approach to recruitment in one phrase then it would be ‘prove you can do the job’. Before being offered permanent employment at the hotel, every potential employee - disabled or not - is given the chance to do exactly that. The approach works very well for everyone because each individual is given the opportunity to demonstrate whether they can fulfil all the requirements of a particular role. “We always ask ourselves whether there is any logical reason why we cannot employ a person who has a disability but has the right attitude” says Gordon, “there might be hurdles to overcome but then we think of what we can do to overcome those hurdles”.

The right person for the job

After a successful interview, candidates are employed on an eight week probationary basis. The trial period is used to allow both employer and employee a chance to assess whether the job and the person are well matched. “The focus of our selection process is to find the right person for the job. What is very important, particularly in our industry, is finding employees who have the right attitude” says Gordon.

Finding the right person for the job applies to all candidates and Gordon is fair and equal in his approach to employment of both disabled and non-disabled people. With Stephen, the hotel was only interested in his level of productivity and whether he could be as productive with one arm as other employees. Stephen has emerged as someone whose disability is not really noticed and whose productivity and effectiveness as a Kitchen Porter is not limited by his disability.

Thorpe Park Hotel also employs a housekeeper who is profoundly deaf. Manager, Gordon, who is also Chair of the Leeds Hotels Association, genuinely believes that the diverse range of roles that are available within a hotel makes his industry well placed to offer opportunities to disabled people.
Message to other employers

“My main priority as a manager is to look for the right attitude in people because that is the hardest thing to develop or change in a person. It's far easier to train a person who has the right attitude than it is to try and change the wrong attitude of a person who may have the right skills for a job. If a person happens to be disabled, then it makes no difference to us. We'll try to explore options for dealing with any potential issues”.

Gordon Jackson, General Manager at Thorpe Park Hotel and Spa.

Employee's story

Stephen Batchelor does not dwell on his disability. After his accident he worked in a family business before finding employment in the hotel industry. He does not need any specific adjustments or support at work and carries out his duties effectively. Stephen does accept that some employers will discriminate against disabled people though, and has experienced this personally in the past.

Accept people for who they are

Stephen believes that the solution is for employers to accept people for who they are and what they can do, rather than make assumptions about what they might be able or unable to do. He also supports Gordon’s approach to giving people a trial period first, before making a decision about whether or not they can do a job. "See what disabled people can do before making a decision. Give them a trial period" Stephen says. And like his boss, Stephen also agrees that the hotel industry is well placed to employ disabled people. “Hotels have to cater for disabled customers, so they are in a good position to cater for disabled employees”.

Stephen Batchelor
Sarah Haller – Solicitor

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<th>Employee</th>
<th>Sarah Haller</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Solicitor</td>
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<td>Company</td>
<td>Chadwick Lawrence, Huddersfield</td>
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“I wasn’t going to make my illness an issue. My strategy was to make sure my employers knew that my illness wouldn’t get in the way of my work.”

Like many solicitors, 37 year old Sarah Haller works in a high pressure environment but thrives in it. Unlike many solicitors however, she has to balance the challenges and demands of her job with a chronic illness. Sarah has lived with Crohn’s disease since 1992 when she was first diagnosed with the condition. Crohn’s disease is a chronic inflammatory disease of the intestines which affects people in different ways depending on its location.

Sarah specialises in property law at Chadwick Lawrence, a successful law firm with offices across West Yorkshire. She doesn’t make an issue of her illness either to other colleagues or to her clients and only mentions it when necessary. For nine years she didn’t need to take any time off work for health reasons. However, in 2007 she needed to take sick leave for an operation. After a few months absence Sarah was back at work. HR manager Linda Hodgson encouraged her to work reduced hours until she felt ready to resume her normal working hours. Sarah worked part time hours for a few weeks after she went back to work, but soon felt strong enough to resume working full time.

Remain positive

Sarah puts her success in managing her successful career and living with a serious health condition, down to attitude. She said: “I’ve always tried to remain positive and I am determined to work”.

Sarah puts her ability to manage her successful career and live with a serious health condition, down to attitude. She said: “I’ve always tried to remain positive and I am determined to work”.

27.02.08 – www.dwp.gov.uk/employability
Employer's story

The priority at Chadwick Lawrence is to employ people who have the skills for the job. Managers are committed to caring for staff and take a ‘holistic’ approach to managing employees. “We think of people as people and not members of staff” says Human Resources Manager, Linda Hodgson.

Focus on skills and abilities

Managing Partner Jeremy Garside, believes that the key to looking after staff is to treat them as you would like to be treated yourself. Staff who have disabilities or health problems are not treated any differently from other employees. Managers focus on their skills and abilities rather than their health problems. “Our priority is to ensure that employees have the skills to do their job” says Jeremy. “If employees have health problems, we consider each case on merit.”

Managers respect the dignity of their staff, particularly if they have to live with the challenge of ill health. Adjustments are made as necessary to accommodate the needs of employees. For example jobs have been restructured or even created to enable some employees with serious health conditions to continue working.

The strategy to give employees the best possible care really does work at Chadwick Lawrence. Staff turnover is low and attendance is good. Human Resources Manager Linda Hodgson said: “The bottom line here is that the company really does care about people.”

Message to other employers

“If you give staff flexibility, they will respond in kind. We see the way we treat our staff in the context of being in a service industry and believe that as an employer you get back what you give.”

Jeremy Garside, Managing Partner.
Employee’s story

When Sarah was first diagnosed with Crohn’s disease, she was a student at Huddersfield University but managed to complete her course and graduate. She began her career as a secretary before training to become a journalist and then finally made the switch to a career in law. Throughout all the stages of her career, Sarah has never allowed her illness to become a barrier to what she wants to achieve.

Sarah takes responsibility for her health and keeps managers informed of any relapses in her condition that will affect her work. She doesn’t require any particular physical support at work but does have the full support of the Human Resources Manager and management team.

Mutual trust

“One of my previous managers was particularly sympathetic. He’d had a kidney transplant so knew what it was like to live with a health problem” says Sarah. The mutual trust that is shared between Sarah and Human Resources Manager Linda Hodgson is highly valued. “Linda started working for the company whilst I was on sick leave but she took the time to call me and check on my health even though I’d never met her” says Sarah. Sarah’s return to work after her operation was phased and she was encouraged to take as much time as needed to recover.

Sarah is aware that not all employees feel comfortable talking to their managers about their health problems. She believes that trust is important and that keeping lines of communication open helps to make what could be a difficult situation, manageable.
Shane McDermott – Production Assistant

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<th>Employee</th>
<th>Shane McDermott</th>
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<tr>
<td>Job</td>
<td>Production Assistant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Company</td>
<td>Andel Ltd, Huddersfield</td>
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“Work gives me something to get up for. I feel like I’m contributing something valuable and I enjoy the routine of work.”

Shane McDermott, 48, arrived at Andel Ltd of Huddersfield at just the right time. The company was expanding its production unit and Shane was keen and ready to work. After being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS), Shane was determined to continue working and has been with Andel for seven years. He works alongside other staff producing and testing circuit boards and panels that are used by engineers out on site.

**Employer's story**

Julie Greenwood, Operations Director at Andel, understands the difficulties that some disabled people may face in finding work. She is a supportive employer who believes that even when individuals have been through long periods of unemployment – for whatever reason – it doesn’t mean they are unemployable. Managers at Andel feel a sense of social responsibility towards the community and have worked effectively with local agencies to support potential employees, including disabled people.

**Inclusive policies**

Andel employs three disabled people in total and managers have made it their responsibility to learn more about their disability or health condition. For example, when Shane was first employed, Julie researched his condition on the internet so that she could understand more about the symptoms and effects of MS. Around 85,000 people in the UK have MS and according to the Multiple Sclerosis Society, most people with the condition are of working age when diagnosed.
However, the company believes that each individual is in the best position to advise managers about a disability or long-term health condition and how it may affect the type of work they can do. This approach has helped Andel to implement a recruitment policy that is genuinely inclusive. Julie says “Shane is a very dedicated and loyal employee. His job requires great attention to detail and he has that ability”.

**Message to other employers**

“It’s important to educate people within the company about disability”.

Julie Greenwood, Operations Director, Andel.

**Employee’s story**

Work is very important to Shane and he feels that disabled people should always think of what they can do for an employer or what they can contribute in terms of their skills and abilities. He doesn’t require any particular physical support, special equipment or adjustments at work. “Everything that I need to use for my job such as tools or parts are within easy reach which is good for me” says Shane.

MS affects people in different ways and symptoms are often invisible. In Shane’s case, his main symptom is tiredness. Sometimes his balance is affected which is another symptom of the condition. His work at Andel suits him because he works part-time hours and can also do most of his work sitting down at a bench. “I had to get used to working indoors as I was used to being out and about. But I quite liked the change of pace” says Shane.

**Positive about work**

Despite his diagnosis, Shane has remained positive about his prospects for work. He says, “I wanted to prove I could do the job and as it turns out my disability didn’t affect me as much as I thought it would. I haven’t needed any time off work due to illness”.

Employers, he says, should be equally positive. He adds, “Employers should always think about the potential of disabled people and they’ll find people who have something to offer”.

Shane McDermott
Peter – Auto-CAD Engineer

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<td>Company</td>
<td>Andel Ltd, Huddersfield</td>
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“Being employed, gives me a sense of purpose.”

Not many people in the country can boast about having royal connections but Peter, 49, of Huddersfield can! Peter works as an Auto-CAD Engineer at Andel Ltd, a market leading company that installs leak detection systems. He uses computer aided design (CAD) software to design floor plans which are used as the basis for installing sophisticated systems that detect water leaks in buildings such as royal palaces, museums, galleries and office blocks.

A varied career

Peter, who has been deaf since birth, initially trained as a textiles designer. He then worked as a medical technology officer in a large hospital. Throughout his career, Peter says that being deaf has never really affected his ability to work. He now enjoys the challenge of his current role and likes working for a small employer. “Because it’s a small company, you get to know people really well and the atmosphere is fairly relaxed” says Peter.
Employer’s story

The culture at Andel is relaxed and open and this extends to their approach to recruitment. “We welcome diversity and difference” says Operations Director, Julie Greenwood. “We believe that being inclusive makes our employees better people. As a company we’ve learnt a lot from our disabled employees, employees with different religious beliefs and from those who come from different racial backgrounds”.

Education and understanding

The company’s ‘education’ about disability has come mainly from its disabled employees. Managers have also learned about different disabilities and health conditions by sourcing relevant leaflets and searching for information on the internet.

Peter started working at Andel after the company was approached by Remploy, an agency which helps disabled people find employment. He undertook various roles including receptionist and administrator, before being invited by the management to undertake training in CAD. Now, as an Auto-CAD Engineer, his qualities and skills are used to their best advantage and he’s worked on some of the company’s most prestigious projects.

Peter was the first disabled person to be employed by Andel and Julie admits that there were challenges, one of which was learning how his deafness may potentially affect his capacity to work in specific roles. However, Peter was proactive in helping managers to understand exactly what and how he could hear, and provided information and tapes to help them learn more about deafness. Andel supports Peter by ensuring he works in an office where background noise is lower than in other offices.

In total, the company employ three disabled people and Julie comments that each member of staff is a real asset to the business.

Message to other employers

“When we interview, we look for skills and personalities that will bring something to the company. We impose no barriers; the only barrier will be the barriers the candidates impose on themselves. If disabled people have self-belief, they have as good a chance as anybody else of being employed.”

Julie Greenwood, Operations Director, Andel Ltd
Employee's story

There are almost nine million people in the UK with some degree of deafness, according to the RNID. Peter has high frequency deafness but he does have some hearing. He communicates with other employees using a combination of lip-reading and speech, and colleagues will also write short notes if necessary. Peter does not require any particular adjustments in his working environment and uses the same type of telephone as other employees, simply adjusting the volume control where necessary. During meetings, when several people may talk at any one time, Peter sometimes uses a special microphone which helps him distinguish between different voices and sounds.

Employability

Peter is aware that some employers will discriminate against disabled people. However, he believes that education and training can help to redress the balance.

He sees a role for both employers and employees in promoting the employability of disabled people. Employers, he says, should focus on ‘the person’ rather than their disabilities. As for disabled employees, Peter believes they can help employers to understand more about their disability and can help themselves by being prepared to “have a go and prove their capabilities”.
Daniel Davies – Technologist

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<tr>
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<td>Company</td>
<td>Onteca, Liverpool</td>
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“Employment turned my life around. It gave me confidence, something to do and I met some cool people!”

For Daniel Davies, finding a job he enjoys has made a real difference to his life. Daniel, has lived with mental health problems for the last thirteen years. He left university after being diagnosed with schizophrenia and later on had to stop working when he developed dissociative disorder and could no longer manage the demands of his job. However, after receiving support from Network Employment, an employment service working within the Merseyside based Mersey Care NHS Trust, Daniel was able to return to work. Network Employment works with individuals like Daniel who have experienced mental health problems and who want to get back to work.

Talents and skills

After enrolling on a course at Toxteth TV, Daniel’s employment prospects improved. His talents and skills were noticed by Jon Wetherall, Manager of Onteca, a company which works closely with Toxteth TV. He was invited to work for Onteca and for the last four years has been employed as a Technologist with the company. Daniel works in the fast-moving world of mobile and web based technologies and is involved in programming, web design, database design and development, and mobile phone development.
Employer’s story

Onteca employs three disabled people in total and Manager, Jon, is committed to giving them the support they need to do their work. However, Jon respects the fact that each person has their own specific needs. “I don’t generalise about disability because each of our disabled employees have to be treated as individuals and have different support needs” says Jon.

Daniel was recruited because Jon was impressed with his programming and computer graphic skills. In previous jobs, he had developed software for factory management systems and also has a talent for designing computer games.

Access to Work

Daniel does not require any particular support at work but does need to be accompanied when he works outside the office. When appropriate, assistance is provided for Daniel through Access to Work. This is a Jobcentre Plus scheme that offers practical advice and help in a flexible way that can be tailored to suit the needs of an individual in a particular job.

Jon is realistic about the fact that there are limits to the amount of external support that can be made available to companies from Access to Work but is confident that even without this support the company will provide whatever support is needed for Daniel and their other disabled employees.

Message to other employers

“Employers and employees often don’t realise that they are not alone. Support is available to help companies employ disabled people.”

Jon Weatherall, Managing Director, Onteca.
**Employee's story**

For someone who has lived with mental health problems since he was twelve, being able to work in an industry he loves has given Daniel much more than just a job. Daniel says, “Before I started working again, I just used to sit around in my room playing games and writing programmes”.

Being able to work has helped Daniel in many ways. It has raised his confidence levels and given him the opportunity to develop his creative skills. Daniel has paranoid schizophrenia but being employed in a job he loves has given him the opportunity to make the most of his talents and skills. Daniel who has around 14 years experience of programming and software development, says that work has also given him both a focus in life and the opportunity to meet people with similar interests. He is a productive and valued member of the team at Onteca.

**Raised awareness**

Daniel’s own experience of disability has raised his awareness of the barriers disabled people face. This has, to some extent, influenced his website design work. “When I’m designing websites, I try to make them more accessible for disabled people” says Daniel. As far as barriers facing disabled people who want to work, Daniel’s advice is simple “Try and find a job doing something you love”.

[Image of Daniel working on a computer]
Neil Shepherd – Software Developer

Employee: Neil Shepherd
Job: Software Developer
Company: Esteem, Wetherby

“I can’t change my Asperger’s Syndrome so I may as well get on with what I can do.”

Software Developer, Neil Shepherd was shocked to discover he had Asperger’s Syndrome. Up until the age of about 31, he had lived with the condition without even knowing he had it. Asperger’s Syndrome is a form of autism and is often referred to as a hidden disability because it is not easily recognised. It’s also described as a 'spectrum disorder' because it affects people in different ways. According to the National Autistic Society, people with Asperger’s Syndrome have difficulties with social communication, social interaction and social imagination.

However, Neil’s disability has not been a barrier to his career. He is a computer science graduate and has been able to find employment that allows him to make the best use of his qualifications and his talents. “I need to keep busy all the time and I find my work challenging, in a positive way” says Neil who works for Esteem, an IT company.
**Employer's story**

Although the nature of the professional work at Esteem is highly technical, Human Resources Manager, Joanne Smart, always looks for more than technical skills and qualifications when recruiting new staff. She tries to employ people who will fit in with the company and its culture. “It’s not something you can determine from a CV or application” says Joanne, “you can only really assess whether someone will fit into the company when you meet them at interview.”

**Best person for the job**

Esteem’s two stage interview process gives Joanne and other managers the opportunity to learn more about a candidate’s personality, attitude and motivation. In Neil’s case, Joanne says that his ‘personability’ was a key strength of his interview and this, along with his qualifications and experience made him the best candidate out of the ten people who were interviewed for the job.

Neil was the first employee with Asperger’s Syndrome that Joanne recruited so she researched the condition to learn more about it. She also consulted Neil to find out how he felt the company could best support his needs.

**Message to other employers**

“We don’t view disability as an issue or a problem. Our priority is to ensure that employees have the right skillset and fit in with the company”.

Joanne Smart. HR Manager
Employee's story

So far, Neil’s job as a Software Developer has met his expectations. His job involves using programming languages to design systems that control computer functions. Neil says that the job suits his personality and his passion for numbers and computers. “I really enjoy working with numbers” says Neil, “and I love seeing the sequences and patterns in them.”

Making the most of talents and skills

Neil makes the most of his talents and skills at work and hasn’t allowed his disability to get in the way of his career. From his own personal experiences, Neil is aware that some employers view people who have long term health conditions as ‘a problem’. However, as far as his employment is concerned, Neil treats his Asperger’s Syndrome as a self-managing condition.

Neil has developed strategies to deal with situations that he finds difficult or uncomfortable. He has also learnt much from the example of his father. “My dad was a good role model” says Neil, “he had Asperger’s Syndrome and Multiple Sclerosis but worked in spite of his disabilities because he always focused on what he could do rather than what he couldn’t do.”
Max Zadow – Senior Trainer/Producer

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<tr>
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<td>Senior Trainer/Producer</td>
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<td>Company</td>
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“I feel like I’m working at the forefront of new media and involved in really innovative work. Every day I wander in and feel excited about the work that we do.”

Trying to find an employee who feels excited about their work is not an easy task. However, 39 year old Max Zadow, is certainly one of them. Max, who has worked for new media company Onteca for the last five years, gets immense satisfaction both from his actual job as a trainer and producer and because he enjoys working for a small company. “I feel much closer to the business than I would working for a larger company” he says. At one stage in his career, Max worked for the BBC, so knows how it feels to work for a large organisation with an international presence. Previously he also worked as a self-employed new media artist.

The correct skills for the job

Max arrived at Onteca after completing an MA in New Media Production. His first role for the company was as a guest lecturer. However, after a few months, he became involved in various other short term projects before securing a job as a full time employee. He admits that finding work in ‘new media’ is not easy, especially if you are disabled. However, his manager and the owner of the company, Jon Wetherall, was only interested in one thing. “All Jon wanted to know about me was whether I had the correct skills for the job and whether I was prepared to put the work in” says Max.
Employer's story

Both Max and his manager Jon agree that employing disabled people requires flexibility from both parties. Depending on the nature of a person’s health condition, time off may be required for medical appointments. However, that doesn’t have to be an insurmountable problem. At Onteca, Max and the other disabled employees work flexibly to cover any time taken for medical appointments.

“Research shows that disabled people take less time off work than non-disabled people” says Max, “it’s a case of being flexible. In the end flexibility and a supportive environment will create a more productive environment” he adds. Jon agrees, “It’s all give and take but in our case it’s a good give and take. Because of the nature of our industry with changes in the flow of work, we can work around any time off issues. There’s also a lot of trust on both sides but it works”.

No illusions about the challenges

Jon has no illusions about the challenges employers face when employing disabled people. “You can’t pretend that a person’s disability doesn’t exist or just ignore it. Having said that, you can’t treat all disabled people the same, you have to treat disabled people as individuals with individual disabilities and needs”. As to whether he had any concerns about employing a disabled person, Jon is very honest. “I was at first worried about whether a disabled person would be able to commit to a full time contract but you have to respect the fact that a disabled person knows their own limitations. As an employer you have to be flexible about that and on the other hand the employee has to be flexible about meeting their obligations as an employee”.

Cost is a major issue that can be a deterrent to employers who want to have a more diverse workforce and employ disabled people. But research has shown that on average the cost of providing adjustments is not prohibitive. Jon wanted his company to be more inclusive for clients, trainees and employees, so by the time he recruited disabled employees, the company had already moved to offices that were more accessible than the company’s previous accommodation.

As an employer, Jon has witnessed the positive impact that work has had on his disabled employees. He has seen an improvement in their emotional well being.
He also believes that employing disabled people has been good for the business. “We offer training for disadvantaged groups and it’s therefore been good for our image to be seen to employ disabled employees”.

**Message to other employers**

“If you get it right, disabled employees are more loyal employees than other employees and less likely to leave. Within our industry, retention is crucial for the work we do particularly in areas like programming. As an employer you have to look beyond the initial problems and look at benefits such as the skills of disabled people and the high retention rates”

Jon Wetherall, Managing Director, Onteca.

**Employee’s story**

Max has been disabled since childhood and has arthritis, a condition which affects his mobility. However, when he started to work at Onteca, Max knew exactly how to obtain the support he needed to do his job. He said, “My boss Jon, didn’t know anything about the support that’s available for disabled people but I did. I knew about the Access to Work scheme and I knew how it worked – basically you have to prove a need to obtain support”. Because some of Max’s work involves delivering training across the Wirral, a support worker accompanies him when he travels across the county. The only other support he needs to do his job is in his words a ‘comfortable’ chair, which out of choice he has provided from home.

**There is excellent support available**

Max is well informed about support schemes and agencies that offer support for disabled people and was therefore in a position to be proactive about obtaining the support he needed as a disabled employee. He is convinced that the information both disabled employees and their employers need is readily available, even if it might initially require some investment of time and effort. “There is excellent support available out there to ensure disabled people can fulfil their role and be just as effective as non-disabled people. Employers and employees might find it useful to speak to a job broker to find out exactly what support is available” says Max.
Some employers have been worried about the implications of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and possibly even more worried that employees will use it in a negative way to make unreasonable demands on their employers. However, Max believes that the best way to use the DDA is as a fall back position rather than the first line of attack. “It’s nice to know the DDA is there and to have that legal back-up, but I believe that negotiation is the best way to resolve any issues with your employer”.

27.02.08 – www.dwp.gov.uk/employability
Christine Dryden – Laundry Assistant

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<td>Job</td>
<td>Laundry Assistant</td>
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<td>Company</td>
<td>Coin Op Laundrettes Ltd</td>
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“Working has given me something to get up in the morning for. It’s given me my self-respect back, my self-esteem.”

The Coin Op Launderette in Bradford is a warm and friendly place. Laundry Assistant Christine Dryden chats to regulars and new customers – everyone is welcomed and offered a cup of tea or coffee while they do their washing. On the wall hangs a picture a local girl drew for Christine.

It’s hard to imagine when you see her bustling cheerfully around the launderette, but just a few months ago Christine was deeply depressed. She hadn’t worked for many years because of health problems due to angina, rheumatoid arthritis and serious spinal damage. She has also had a stroke and is in constant pain.

**Lifeline**

However, starting the job in the launderette has helped Christine tremendously with her depression: “It’s made a heck of a difference. I feel like they threw me a lifeline. There is a future for everybody; you’ve just got to take that first step.”
**Employer's story**

Adam Patel runs the Coin Op Launderette. Christine looks after the launderette for two hours a day, whilst he takes his children to school. He says that the arrangement is working out well: “Christine lives around the corner – it’s ideal for me. She opens up in the morning, gives change to customers and so on.”

Adam is also pleased with Christine’s work: “She’s a good worker, hardworking and very good with the customers. She’s very popular in the area – people ask for her when she’s not here.”

Adam didn’t need to make any particular adjustments for Christine. He was looking for someone reliable whom he could trust to open up and manage the launderette while he’s not there – Christine fitted the bill perfectly.

**Message to other employers**

“I’d say to other employers, observe how disabled people work – let them show what they can do.”

Adam Patel, Manager, Coin Op Launderettes Ltd

**Employee's story**

Christine started her working life as a cook in the army. Later, while she was bringing up her children, she had a series of part-time jobs but was unemployed for about 12 years before starting at the launderette.

**New Horizons**

However, Christine was determined to get back into work and describes the moment when she decided to take action: “You feel as if you’re the only one, as if you’re useless. One day I was just crying, crying, crying – my daughter was really worried about me. I said, ’I’ve got to do something. I’m going to see if I can get a job.’”
Through Jobcentre Plus, Christine went to the Horizons programme run by a local training company. The course aims to give structure back to people’s lives and build confidence. “I thought I’d never do a week,” says Christine. “Like anywhere, the first day you’re terrified.”

**Enthusiastic employee**

When Christine finished the Horizons course she saw an advertisement for the Laundry Assistant post in the window. She started work in September 2007.

Christine is full of ideas for improving the business, such as offering a collection and drop-off service, especially for her older customers who are sometimes unwell. “And when the kiddies come in, [I give them] colouring books and crayons – to keep them quiet.”

She likes her job, but it takes its toll: “When I go home I take some more painkillers and have to lie down for a couple of hours – then I’m back on my feet again. I’ve got two dogs – I take them out for a walk. I try to keep myself going. I’m not giving in, it’s not going to beat me. I can do it.”

**Brighter future**

Christine’s now taking NVQs in English, maths and IT. She says she won’t leave the launderette – “I’d never let Adam down because he gave me my chance.” Once she’s got her qualifications she’d like to find a second part-time job to do in the afternoon.

Christine was thrilled to win an award from the European Social Fund, recognising what she’s achieved. She’s enjoying life and is positive about the future.

“I’m just pleased I am where I am. I feel like I’ve won the lottery. I’m happy now. I’m not miserable, I’m happy.”
Stephen Carter – Trainee Team Leader

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<td>Trainee Team Leader</td>
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<td><strong>Company</strong></td>
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“I’ve never been someone who sat at home and thought I couldn’t work due to my disability. I’ve never let my disability get in the way – I’ve always let that take second place”.

Stephen Carter has just been promoted. After a year working in the contact centre at Damartex UK Ltd in Bingley, he’s joined the Team Leader Development Programme.

Over the next few months, Stephen will learn how to manage a team of up to sixteen people, keep on top of the paperwork and meet performance targets. He enjoys his new role but admits it’s hard work: “There’s still lots to know, lots of ins and outs.”

Stephen has cerebral palsy, which affects the right side of his body.
Employer's story

Neil Hirst, Contact Centre Team Manager at Damartex, speaks highly of Stephen. “In many ways he really is a role model employee. He’s not only got the attributes we’re looking for, his attendance record is exemplary. I don’t believe he’s ever had a day off.”

Like everyone who applies to work at the contact centre, Stephen went through a long and rigorous recruitment process. This included completing a lengthy application form, doing a telephone interview and finally, attending an assessment day where “he gave an absolutely fantastic interview. One of the best decisions we’ve ever made, to be honest” says Neil.

Minimal adjustments

The building at Damartex already had lifts and suitable access, enabling Stephen to manage any mobility difficulties he has as a result of his disability. His employer only needed to make a small additional adjustment, which was simply “the cost of a bit of paint and a badge to say this is a reserved parking spot”.

The company employs several disabled people and have provided equipment such as specialised chairs and wrist supports for other employees. They’ve also moved around roles and duties to accommodate particular needs. “The changes we’ve made [for disabled employees] are minor in the grand scheme of things. And even if they’d been major, it would have been money and time well invested” says Neil.

Message to other employers

“If you’ve got any reservations, be honest, open and candid with the people. Be honest about your concerns so they can alleviate them.

[Disabled] People certainly haven’t taken umbrage with any questions, quite the contrary - they find it quite refreshing that you’re speaking to them in an honest and candid way to get the desired result for both parties. If you’re not honest and frank you run the risk of taking someone on when it’s not suitable for you and, more importantly, it wouldn’t be suitable for the candidate looking to join the company.”

Neil Hirst, Contact Centre Team Manager, Damartex UK Ltd
Employee's story

Since leaving school, Stephen has worked in shops, warehouses and contact centres and believes that he has faced discrimination during his career. Working in a warehouse, he felt that managers assumed it was not the right environment for a disabled person, even after he proved them wrong by doing his job well. He also believes he’s been passed over for interview in the past because he disclosed his disability on the application form. “People are frightened of the unknown, that’s the problem we’ve got. They’re not willing to give people a chance.”

In June 2006 Stephen lost his job due to a dislocated knee. It was his first period out of work but fortunately it was a short one - he started at Damartex that October.

Demanding job

Working in a very busy call centre requires excellent people skills. “Each call varies – some are really nice and then you do get some that are really testing your patience and your skill.”

Stephen’s new role as a Trainee Team Leader is also physically demanding: “You’re rushing round from desk to desk. The last few jobs I’ve had I’ve always been sat down using the keyboard. To get myself back on my feet again and moving about I have found tiring. But I am getting back into it now.”

“I’ve only been here a year– I’ve obviously moved forwards. I’m bettering my career and bettering myself. They’re a company that if you believe you want to go forward, they’ll support you.”
Real-life stories – Retail and local services

Peter Skuse – Wine Pricing and Sourcing Manager

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<td>Company</td>
<td>HB Clark &amp; Co, Huddersfield</td>
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“Epilepsy has never stopped me from working, neither has cancer.”

Anybody who has a passion for wine will know that the characteristics of a good one are the right colour, taste and smell. Sensory analysis skills are essential for people who taste wine for a living, such as 60 year old Peter Skuse of Huddersfield.

As a skilled Pricing and Sourcing Manager, Peter’s job is to source good wine from all over the world. But when diagnosed with laryngeal (voice box) cancer in 2001, he had to face up to the very real fear that he could lose not only his sense of taste, but also his sense of smell and his voice. Naturally, he was worried about losing his job. However, after rigorous but successful treatment which included radiotherapy and learning to speak again, Peter regained the use of all his senses.

Being positive and practical

Aside from being diagnosed with cancer, Peter has lived with epilepsy for over fifty years but has never allowed it to become a barrier to working. Early on in his former profession as an accountant, one employer suggested that since Peter couldn’t drive due to the risk of having an epileptic attack whilst at the wheel, his career would suffer. Peter’s response was quite practical. He believed then as he does now, that as long as there’s a transport system available, he’ll be able to meet the business travel requirements of any job.

“I was once advised by a friend that I should try to do everything that I wanted to do and not let epilepsy interfere” says Peter. He took the advice seriously and applies the same positive attitude to dealing with his cancer – it may have affected his speech but it has not changed his ability to communicate well. Basically, Peter has allowed neither epilepsy nor cancer to become a barrier to staying employed in a job that he absolutely loves.
Employer's story

Sales Director, Glenn Brown, admits that employing someone with a disability has been a learning curve. But Peter’s capability has convinced him and other managers at HB Clark & Co that it’s not a problem. “Peter reassured us because of his own ability to manage his epilepsy. As for his cancer, it affected his voice box but his ability to communicate is wonderful” says Glenn. “He fulfils a very important role for the company and has great determination”.

Peter doesn’t require any particular type of physical support at work but he does need support from the company in other ways. For example, trained first aiders know how to respond if he has an epileptic attack. Staff also make regular checks on him if he’s working alone in his office and as a matter of policy, he is never left by himself on company premises.

Valuing good staff

Glenn values Peter’s determination and believes it is a quality that is not always seen in people, yet is clearly an advantage to any employer. Employing a person with a disability has other benefits too says Glenn, “It helps promote a positive image of the company and demonstrates that we are a good caring company and that we care about our staff”.

Message to other employers

“It’s important for employers to understand more about disabilities and health conditions. If they do, they are then in a position to make informed decisions about employing disabled people”.

Glenn Brown, Sales Director
Employee's story

Peter’s approach to his disabilities is to carry on working regardless. “My advice to other disabled people would be to ignore your disability as much as you can and do as much as possible to get around it” he says. However, he does appreciate that to work as effectively as possible he needs the support of his colleagues, which he values greatly. But over and above this, Peter appreciates the additional ‘support’ they give him, simply by not making a fuss about his disabilities.

Active in the community

Apart from working in his dream job, Peter is very active in his local community. He has served as a Director and Chairman of the local Training and Enterprise Council and for the last ten years, has been a Governor at a local sixth form college. In 2006, Peter received the good news he’d been waiting for – he was free of cancer. He now hopes to enjoy many more years of buying fine wines and doing what he can to support his local community.

Peter Skuse
Sharon Stephenson – Administration Executive

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<th>Employee</th>
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<td>Job</td>
<td>Administration Executive</td>
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<td>Bradford Bulls Rugby League Club</td>
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“Now that I’m working, I have more focus to get up in the morning. Doing nothing can be soul destroying.”

Sharon Stephenson, 46, of Bradford is a great believer in positive thinking and believes that it has helped her cope with a chronic illness. Sharon has fibromyalgia, that is usually characterised by musculoskeletal aches, pains, fatigue and tiredness. Like many conditions, fibromyalgia affects people in different ways. In Sharon’s case she is in constant pain and her mobility is limited.

After being unable to work for ten years, Sharon welcomed the opportunity to return to work. She was offered a job as a Sales Administration Executive for Bradford Bulls Rugby League Club which involves selling corporate hospitality. She admits that getting back into the routine of work hasn’t been easy. “After the first six months, I was ready to give up work” says Sharon, “because my pain was getting worse”. However, Sharon persevered and was determined to make a success of her job.

Positive thinking

Sharon accepts that positive thinking would not help everybody who has fibromyalgia but she is convinced that in her case, it enabled her to not only return to work, but to work her way up from working part time hours to working full time. She said: “I went back to work because I felt that I had a life in front of me. I also felt that I had to rule my illness rather than let it rule me”. Sharon knows that there is no cure for her illness but is determined to continue working.
Employer's story

Like most businesses supporting sports teams, Bradford Bulls Rugby League Club, is not short of a ready pool of willing candidates for jobs. “We probably receive about five requests per week for jobs” says Human Resources Manager Jane Wilson-Hall. Staff turnover is low at the club and the supply of candidates for jobs far exceeds the demand for new employees. However, being popular with job hunters has not diminished the club’s commitment to diversity and to recruiting and retaining talented people.

Jane Wilson-Hall said: “The adjustments we made to support Sharon probably cost us no more than about £150. The costs were not prohibitive. If Sharon left us, we would have to spend much more money to recruit somebody else.”

Flexible working

Adjustments for other employees who have returned to work after illness or accidents include allowing them to have flexible working patterns. Jane has an open door policy for staff and encourages them to talk about any problems including health problems that may affect their work.

Message to other employers

“Our aim is to retain staff who become ill and we make adjustments as appropriate to each individual case. This could mean for example that we adjust working patterns or it might mean that we offer staff phased returns to work.”

Jane Wilson-Hall, HR manager.
Employee’s story

Sharon admits that it took time to adjust to the demands and routine of work. As far as physical adjustments at work are concerned, these have been very few. The main adjustment was to her phone which has been adapted so that Sharon can use a headset instead of a standard handset. The flexible work patterns that are available within the club mean that Sharon can adjust her start and finish times as needed. If she feels unwell she can also take a break and make up her hours later.

Challenges of working

Sharon is getting used to the challenges of working in a busy sales environment. She is making good use of her administrative skills and developing new skills in selling corporate hospitality.

Looking back to 1995, the year she was diagnosed with fibromyalgia and had to give up work, Sharon says that being unable to work left her feeling that she was on, what she calls, the ‘scrap heap’. Through sheer determination however, she has gradually worked her way back to being successfully employed in a job she enjoys with a future to look forward to.
Colin Jones – Security Officer

**Employee**  Colin Jones  
**Job**  Security Officer  
**Company**  Advance Security, Merseyside

“I didn’t feel happy not working. I didn’t feel quite right. Now I'm back at work, I feel part of society again.”

After an industrial accident on an oil rig, Colin Jones from Moreton in Merseyside, had to face up to the fact that he would have to leave a job he loved.

Colin 56, who has a back injury, had worked on oil rigs for 25 years so leaving the industry wasn’t easy. He believed he had abilities and transferable skills that would be of use to employers but was unsure of what work he could actually do.

**Employment advice and support**

It had been 28 years since Colin’s last interview and he needed advice and guidance not just about changing careers but also about how to ‘sell’ his skills and abilities to employers. Advisers at his local Jobcentre Plus office referred Colin to Remploy, a specialist employment services group which supports disabled people, where he received help to compile a CV that reflected his experience and abilities. They also arranged for him to have an interview with Advance Security.

Colin’s interview was successful and he was offered a job as a security officer in a car showroom. He has since completed various accredited security courses and gained his Security Industry Authority (SIA) licence.
**Employer's story**

As a ‘two ticks’ disability symbol holder, Advance Security is committed to providing equal opportunities for disabled people. The company is an approved training centre for security training and can therefore offer both job opportunities and training. Managing Director Barry Graham is proud of the ‘two ticks’ symbol as he believes it demonstrates the company’s awareness of disability issues.

**Holistic view**

“We try to employ bespoke people to do a bespoke job – that’s how we operate as a business. We work with people not businesses” says Barry. The company takes a holistic view of employees and asks job candidates to be open and honest about any issues such as health or home life circumstances which they feel could have an impact on their ability to work.

Barry recognises that for some employers, the cost of employing a disabled person may be an issue. However, in his experience, the cost of employing a disabled person is no greater than the cost of employing a non disabled person. “It costs just the same to employ a disabled person as it does a non-disabled person” says Barry. “Non-disabled people take sick leave and have other problems that have cost implications for a company” he adds.

**Message to other employers**

“Whether job candidates are disabled or not, ask them about any circumstances that might affect their ability to work such as home life issues or for example whether they need to take medication”.

Barry Graham, Managing Director, Advance Security.
Employee's story

Colin recognises the difference employment has made to his life. “I just feel better being back at work” says Colin who has been working for Advance Security since January 2007. “The job is ideal because I didn’t want to be in a job where I was either sat down all day or stood up all day”.

Give people a chance

Colin knows from experience that having a long term health condition can be a barrier to employment. But he also knows from his own success that barriers can be overcome. Colin’s view is that employers should give people who have long term health conditions or are disabled, a chance. “Give them a trial period if necessary” he says, “Don’t just write people off”.

Colin Jones
James Edwards – Operations Manager

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<th>Employee</th>
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“My attitude as a recruiter is, give people a chance because you might just be letting someone good slip through the net.”

There are over 2 million people with diabetes in the UK. Operations Manager, James Edwards of Merseyside, is one of them. James, 32, was first diagnosed in 1999. “I was devastated at first” says James, “especially as I could no longer do the same work as my colleagues”. At the time he was working in the Marines and eventually left to explore various career options before securing a role in the security industry.

Being honest

James’ experience in the Marines has been useful in his current position as an Operations Manager. His experience of disability and the discrimination that sometimes goes along with it has helped to shape his attitude as a recruiter. “A lot of people keep their health conditions to themselves but I think it’s important to be honest with your employers about your health” says James. He also feels that it’s equally important for employers to be honest about what potential employees can do despite any health conditions, and to give them the chance to explain how their health may impact on their work activities.

Employer’s story

Managing Director, Barry Graham, is obviously interested in productivity and success. But he also recognises that business success is dependent upon having the right people in the right jobs. Barry knows that James is the right person for the Operations Manager role but also recognises that there are times when he will need support to help manage his diabetes.
James’ diabetes is effectively managed at work by always having access to his medication and from his colleagues being aware of the symptoms of his condition. When he travels on company business, James’ journeys are planned to ensure he has sufficient time for resting and eating. However, hypoglycaemic attacks are unpredictable and can happen anywhere and anytime. In practice this means that occasionally, clients and contacts have to be informed about his health condition.

The company employs other people with disabilities and takes the view that open communication is the best way to support staff. “Our approach is to ask employees to be honest about support needs when they first start working with us” says Barry. “We also ask them about any limitations they have in terms of work they can’t do and we ask them about any medication they need to take”.

A proactive approach
As a holder of the two ticks disability symbol, Advance Security takes the employment of disabled people seriously. The company is proactive in working with agencies such as the Shaw Trust, a charity that provides training and work opportunities for people who are disadvantaged in the labour market due to disability, ill health or other social circumstances. As a manager, Barry treats disabled and non-disabled staff in the same way when it comes to support. He believes that employers have a duty of care towards all employees. This care is demonstrated by the company scheduling regular opportunities for staff to talk to their managers about whatever issues they feel may affect their work, be those health related, personal or otherwise.

Message to other employers
“I have personal experience of knowing someone who went from A1 health to being classed as ‘disabled’. My approach now is to try and understand as much as I can about employees’ health conditions. I want employees to be open about their disability and then I can be open with them about how, as an employer, we can help”.

Barry Graham, Managing Director, Advance Security
Real-life stories – Other business areas

Employee's story

At work James has more than just operations and people to manage - he also manages his health condition. He does this very effectively; firstly, by making sure that everyone he works with knows he is diabetic and secondly, by ensuring he always has access to medication. James says, “Everyone I work with knows about my health and understands that I might need to be reminded to eat or drink something”.

Other than this, James does not need any specific physical support at work. What he does require though is understanding from his colleagues. Diabetes can sometimes affect his behaviour and on occasions when it may seem totally out of character, chances are he’s having a hypoglycaemic attack and needs to eat or drink something to adjust his blood sugar levels.

Give people a fair chance

James’ own experience of how employers can discriminate against people with health conditions or disabilities has helped him appreciate why some people choose to keep this to themselves. However, he believes that honesty really is the best policy when it comes to working with a disability.

James feels that the challenge is for employers to try to understand employees’ and potential employees’ individual circumstances. And rather than just rejecting someone outright because of a disability, employers should be honest about the extent to which this may impact on a person’s ability to do the job. James’ message to employers is quite simple – give people a fair chance.
Gordon Jeffs – Security Guard

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<td>Security Guard</td>
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<td>Company</td>
<td>Mitie Security, Manchester</td>
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“When I started working at Mitie, I felt elated. I wasn’t a nobody anymore. I felt like I was worth something – contributing to society again.”

For someone like Gordon Jeffs, who used to be a keen footballer and five-a-side player, not being able to play his favourite sport anymore was quite a challenge. Even more of a challenge for Gordon however, was getting back to work after a catalogue of health problems.

Self-belief and persistence

In 2001 Gordon was seriously injured in a motorbike accident which left him with steel pins in his left arm, knee and lower leg. During winter, the pins swell up and affect his mobility. Ten years previously, Gordon survived brain damage after being injured in service. In spite of all the physical and psychological consequences of those injuries, Gordon was determined to work and as far as he was concerned, was fully capable of working. But many employers did not share his enthusiasm and as far as they were concerned, he was a walking liability and would either need lots of time off work or would be a danger to others.

Gordon wasn’t discouraged by the negative response from some employers and in spite of the frustration of being rejected for employment, his self-belief and persistence paid off. In May 2007, he started work as a Security Guard for Mitie Security and is currently based at the My Pet Stop shop in Denton, Manchester.
Employer's story

As a Personnel Officer with Mitie, it's Gaynor Johnson's role to match the right people to the right jobs. As an equal opportunities employer that genuinely tries to practise what they preach, at Mitie the ‘right person’ for the job is the person who meets the criteria for the job. For positions as a Security Guard, this includes having the ability to gain the SIA (Security Industry Authority) licence.

When Gordon applied for a job with Mitie, he was treated as an individual. The main focus of the selection process was to determine whether he had the ability to fulfil the duties of a Security Guard, and it further included eye, colour and smell tests. Gordon successfully met all of these criteria and was subsequently employed.

An excellent employee

All employees at the company are offered the opportunity to have ‘reasonable adjustments’ made where necessary, to enable them to do their job. In Gordon’s case no adjustments were required. “Gordon turned out to be an excellent employee and exceeded my expectations. He’s never had any time off work and carries out his duties expertly” says Gaynor.

Both as a recruiter and an employee, Gaynor Johnson has more than just a professional interest in disability and employment issues. She is fifty per cent deaf and wears two hearing aids. She also has severe tinnitus and takes medication for asthma. As a disabled employee herself, Gaynor understands the barriers faced by disabled people seeking work and has been excluded from certain jobs because of her disability. Similarly to Gordon, Gaynor fulfils her duties as a Personnel Officer without requiring any adjustments or additional support at work. “Colleagues know to look at me when they speak because I lip read” says Gaynor.

The culture at Mitie is one of support for all staff, irrespective of whether they have a disability. Employees like Gordon Jeffs value not only the opportunity to work but also the respect they are given as individuals who have valuable skills they can bring to the workplace.
**Message to other employers**

“Look beyond the disability and look at the individual. Look at the capacity and the potential of every person that walks through the door. Ignore the disability. If the person fits the job that you’re advertising, just grab them”. Gaynor Johnson, Personnel Officer, Mitie.

**Employee's story**

It took great determination for Gordon to eventually find a job after the injuries he sustained. He didn’t only have the physical side to deal with but also the psychological effects of being disabled, being inactive and in his words ‘stuck at home’. Gordon was supported back into employment by Working Links, an organisation that works with groups such as disabled people, to help them find employment. Staff at Working Links helped Gordon gain the confidence to re-enter the job market and assisted him in completing application forms and preparing for interviews.

**Think about the person**

Facing up to discrimination against disabled people was clearly an obstacle that Gordon had to overcome. However, he believes that there are employers out there who are willing to give disabled people a chance. His message to employers is quite simple, “Don’t look at the disability, think about the person”.

Gordon outside his workplace