

Seeing potential

Leeds City Council Step into Care



This series of case studies profiles how locally-based programmes can support people from non-traditional backgrounds into the care profession, from the perspectives of the programme operators, local care employers, and the candidates themselves.

These four case studies profile Leeds City Council's Step into Care Programme, which helped Devon Watson and the Leeds Jewish Welfare Board become an ideal match. In this case study, we hear from Devon about how the Step into Care programme supported him into employment in social care.

Devon Watson

Devon Watson entered the Step into Care programme almost three years ago now and he can say wholeheartedly that it has changed his life for the better.

Step into Care avoids an application process, instead inviting potential candidates to an information day. Devon said this made a huge difference for him and other participants, as long and complicated application processes are often the first barrier for those jobseekers who wanted to work but needed support.

At the information day that Devon went to, there were 100 people in attendance, and 20 people went on to participate in the Step into Care programme. Devon said he was concerned that, because he was one of the older people on the course, he may not get a place. Little did he know, Step into Care was designed specifically to support those who might face barriers to pursuing a career in care, and to help them to succeed. "I was a little apprehensive at first, but once I spoke to the trainers at the information day, they put my mind at ease, and I began to look forward to where it could take me," said Devon.

Devon had been unemployed for a number of years and found searching for a job to be difficult. He wasn't entirely sure what he wanted to do, which made it hard to know where to start. After attending the information session and speaking to Step into Care team members, they identified skills from a previous role in mental health, and in care he had provided to family members, which meant that Devon could be well suited to this career. The identification of these previous skills, along with the promise of support within the programme, gave him the confidence he needed to take on a placement.

Step into Care programme

Once on the programme, Devon found the role of the Step into Care team hugely beneficial: "Everyone I met was so encouraging and wanted me to succeed."



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Throughout the programme, each recruit has a mentor, who they can approach for guidance and help on top of those who support them directly with their training. The programme is also very flexible, so if anything had happened that meant that Devon had to pause, this could have been accommodated.

Leeds City College was a significant partner in Step into Care, and candidates had access to the college to complete their two-week training whenever they needed it. Like many candidates, Devon didn't have a computer at home, so being able to use the college was vital. What's more, this gave him the ability to check in with his trainers in person, and he could also reach out virtually. The trainers also helped to instill confidence in their candidate and were on hand to help with any part of the course, giving participants like Devon even more confidence that they could succeed.

Stepping into a work placement

Step into Care matches candidates to organisations which are on a direct public transport link from their homes. Devon found this made a huge difference to his ability to stay on track with the placement and keep going. They also give candidates bus passes which was crucial, as Devon said that some on the course were not receiving their support payments until the end of the week, and they would not have been able to keep up with the programme otherwise. As well as travel, LCC also provides lunch to candidates while they are carrying out their two-week training and two-week placement. This is another way they remove barriers, by ensuring that candidates have everything they need to participate in the programme. Devon said: "This programme aimed to really pull away as many of those barriers as possible in terms of your placement" and that "all these things added up to take the pressure off and give me the push I needed to continue."



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The most important thing this programme gave Devon, and many of the people who participate, was confidence. Devon talked about how the kind and dedicated team at Step into Care were invested in the achievement of their candidates, and took the time to really get to know them, which he felt was key to everyone's achievement, including his.

Devon says: "You are also invested in your organisation because they've given you an opportunity. Because they have seen you right from the start and are helping and encouraging you to succeed".

With a guaranteed interview at the end, both parties wanted the two weeks to go well and there was strong buy in and support from both the employer and candidate. Knowing that there was a guaranteed interview and the potential of a full-time job at the end really focused Devon's efforts, giving him extra motivation and encouraging him to "put the work in". It also gave him a no obligation opportunity to try it and find out whether it was for him.

Because candidates are often new to the sector, they shadow a current team member, to learn the practical skills they need. This removes any nervousness, because candidates can see how things are done by an experienced colleague first, and slowly learn to carry out tasks themselves over the two-week period.

In particular, Devon had never done any personal care and he was unsure about what it actually entailed in practice. Initially, he was worried that it wasn't something he would be able to do. However, shadowing someone and seeing how they approach it showed him that he could do it, which really "put his mind at ease".

At the end of the process, Devon had a newfound confidence; in his caring abilities and also in himself, developed over the comprehensive and supportive course. Working in a team was a huge bonus for Devon, and he flourished in his role at Leeds Jewish Welfare Board.

Devon said that while care can be challenging at times, it's very rewarding and the benefits outweigh the challenges. "I really surprised myself, and my ability to achieve new and more difficult tasks and I think this would be the same for everyone," Devon said. He is enormously grateful to Leeds Jewish Welfare Board, who have been so supportive since day one. Devon is now looking to complete his level three diploma; something he said he couldn't have imagined two years ago.

Top tips for jobseekers looking to participate in a similar programme



If you are thinking of trying a career in social care, and particularly a course like this, just give it a go. With an opportunity like this there is everything to gain and nothing to lose.



Take full advantage of the support structure provided, including the trainers. When Devon needed help or further guidance, the Step into Care team were more than happy to help, which meant he could do his very best in the programme.