

Real-life story - Rachel Williams

Rachel's bad back did not stop her from being voted Shropshire's apprentice of the year and becoming a full-time member of the team!



Rachel Williams Administrative assistant

Employer or university The Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust

Salary range Unknown

How I got into the role

A few years ago, I developed chronic back problems whilst working in a fruit and veg store. Since then I experienced a dispiriting cycle of job rejections because of my back condition. In the end I gave up even looking for jobs.

When I heard that Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital was running a Get into programme, I was eager to seize the opportunity. To give myself a better chance at interview, I even decided to change my hair colour – it had been bright blue!

Whilst on the programme, I applied for a business administration apprenticeship within the therapies team at the trust. I was lucky enough to be offered an interview during my fourth week of the programme. By the end of that week I had been offered a 12-month apprenticeship!

I had just been stuck in this slump for so long I thought it would be another 'no' once I told them about my health issues.

Without the Get into programme, I'm sure I would never have got the post. I also found a more tolerant attitude within the therapies department. In fact, I discovered many of my colleagues also had back problems – it's just a really supportive environment.

What I do

The apprenticeship involved providing administrative support to the four different therapies offered at the hospital – physio, occupational therapy (OT), speech and diet. I also helped run the reception area.

The department has become like a second home to me. In fact, I spend more time here than I do at home!

The best bits and challenges

To begin with, I must admit that I wondered if I'd ever get to grips with it all. But I got a lot of support and I made such progress that, at the end, I was voted Shropshire's apprentice of the year for business and administration. I then obtained a permanent level 2 post as an administrative assistant in the same department.

I love every aspect of my work and particularly enjoy running reception. There are quite a lot of regular patients and I get to know them quite well, so it's always nice [1] to have a chat with them.

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I still have 'good days and bad days' with my back but I have been able to adapt my environment to accommodate these problems.

Life outside work

I have an interest in health and wellness, and helping people to lead healthier lifestyles. I also have two pugs and like to spend time with them.

Career plans and top tips for others

As for my future, I want to stay in the same department but work my way up the career ladder. Following my 12-month apprenticeship, I was offered a Band 2 administration assistant role.

A year later I was promoted to a Band 4 Personal Assistant to the therapies manager. I would like to undertake my level 3 qualification, and then maybe take a step up as an administrative supervisor and ultimately an office manager.

I strongly recommend the Get into programme to anyone looking for a second chance. I don't know where I'd be now if I hadn't done that. It's changed my life into a much happier one. I'm much more focused and I've got a reason to get up in the morning.

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[1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#NICE>