

Personal Achiever of the Year receives her award

EDI learner Julianna Alli overcomes barriers to achieve vocational success

Julianna Alli is a 23 year old single mother with a 4 year old son. Julianna lives in Catford, Lewisham, and recently won 'Personal Achiever of the Year' at the Skills for London Awards 2008. Organised by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and held at The Royal Opera House in Covent Garden, the awards celebrated the achievements of learners and businesses across London who have undertaken Apprenticeships or other further education skills training.



Julianna left school at 16 with a handful of GCSEs at grade D and one at grade C. Neither desiring nor believing she could take her education further at that stage, Julianna went to work at a supermarket as an unskilled employee. An incident at work left her with a slipped disc and incapable of working for several months, a period which ended up extending to two years. During this time she gave birth to her son. Becoming a mother, combined with the fact that she became dependant on benefits and struggling with depression, made Julianna question what she wanted out of her life and where she wanted to be.

Towards the end of 2006, Julianna went to Connexions with the idea of completing a training course. Having enjoyed administration work in the past she decided to sign up for an EDI accredited level 2 NVQ in Business Administration that she would complete as the first step to an Apprenticeship. Through Connexions she found both a training provider and a work placement. Now, two years on, she is near to completing her level 3 Apprenticeship with Bexley Training Group and has gone from strength to strength.

Julianna explains: "I never wanted to be on benefits and I certainly didn't want to bring my son up thinking that life was easy and that work was for other people. I left school with virtually nothing so I knew that I needed qualifications if I was to be able to get a decent job paying a decent wage. I thought that signing up for an Apprenticeship would not only give me the qualifications I needed but also the work experience. I was keen to get back into work as quickly as possible and to have the kind of opportunities that I had always dreamed of. I was also anxious for my son to grow up with me as a good role model – a mother who worked hard to get where she wanted to be in life.

She continues: "Enrolling on an Apprenticeship seemed like too good an opportunity to miss even though I knew it would be tough for a while. And at first it certainly was a struggle – I found it really hard trying to balance work, my son and building up a portfolio of evidence to support my learning. I really thought that I wouldn't complete it and that I couldn't do it. However, I also knew that I had to move forward and make something out of myself. I couldn't continue living on benefits and not fulfilling my potential. I had

fantastic support from Bexley Training Group, EDI and my work placement at Connexions, all of whom helped me to keep focusing on the benefits and long term prospects of the qualification. And although I always tried to keep my personal problems separate to the Apprenticeship, knowing that there were people behind me and who believed in me was a real boost.

“Completing my level 2 in 2007 was the first big step for me and the feeling I had when I achieved it was amazing. I never quite believed I could do it, so to come out the other end with a qualification was the best feeling in the world. I am close to completing my level 3 and already I feel I have the confidence to progress to bigger and better roles.”

Confidence and the opportunities generated from the qualification have been the biggest highlight and eye opener for Julianna. She explains: “Persisting with my Apprenticeship has given me the confidence to know that I can do it and that I can be the manager I want to be one day. I never thought I would be where I am now, especially after leaving school with so little but I now feel that I have really achieved something with my life. I wanted to give up so many times and indeed, it would have been so much easier to stay on benefits but I pushed myself to think of the long term and to hang on in there. I now have the confidence to know that opportunities are out there for me and that I am in a position to make the most out of them.”

For Scott Eldred, Assessor at Bexley Training Group, it has been Julianna’s can-do attitude and determination to succeed that has been so admirable. He comments: “Julianna has overcome a huge amount of barriers to get to where she is today. Not only has she had physical injuries for which she is still receiving hospital treatment, but she has supported herself and her son on an Apprenticeship wage and fitted in all her work around caring for her child. Many people in her position would not have seen beyond the short term and chosen to go down the benefits or full employment route rather than sticking with the Apprenticeship. Her attitude towards the qualifications and her ability to look forward and anticipate the long term career prospects have been inspirational. Throughout the course her confidence has grown and she is now starting to see the opportunities that are open to her – I have no doubt she will make a real success of herself, both personally and in the workplace.”

Confidence has indeed been a huge thing for Julianna. She concludes: “I have definitely got more confidence in myself as a person and in my ability in the workplace. Through both the training and my work placement I had my work valued and praised which was a fantastic feeling and helped my confidence grow enormously. The whole experience has also made me grow up and want the best out of life for me and my son. I now involve learning in everything I do with him – whether it be admiring his painting or reading books together in the evening. Learning has opened my eyes to so many possibilities and made me want to raise the bar – I am already looking at what courses I could do next and what other skills I could learn! I now feel that the sky is the limit and that is an amazing feeling.”



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