

Football fan enrolls on an Apprenticeship to help fund his match tickets!

How one learner overcame physical and neurological health issues to complete an NVQ and to embark on a fulfilling career

At any one time, around 40% of UK adults are participating in learning*. There are almost a million courses available to adults in the UK and many people choose vocational qualifications (VQs) not only to learn new skills but also to enhance job opportunities and prospects. Indeed, for those individuals who, for whatever reason, did not achieve academic qualifications at school, VQs offer a valuable opportunity to retrain and enter the workplace with confidence.

We look at a story of how one young man overcame both physical and neurological health issues to achieve an Apprenticeship in Business and Administration, certificated by EDI. Fulfilling his dream of being self sufficient in life and being able to afford football match tickets for his beloved team Everton, David Mattocks, a 22 year old receptionist from Stockbridge Village, Merseyside immediately entered the job market once he gained his Apprenticeship.

David has suffered all his life with neurofibromatosis, a genetic disease affecting his nerves, and pseudoarthrosis, a condition where his bones fail to fuse properly. His neurofibromatosis leads to both a poor short memory, reading and writing difficulties and his pseudoarthrosis rules out the majority of manual roles. Having struggled greatly at school and leaving with few qualifications to his name, David's job opportunities were extremely limited. His decision to work towards an NVQ quite simply changed his life, enabling him to face up to his conditions and to become a confident young man – with a qualified skill set.

In 2003 David contacted Rocket Training Limited in Merseyside and commenced his Apprenticeship in Business and Administration, a comprehensive framework which includes the Level 2 NVQ in Business and Administration, Key Skills in Communication and Application of Number as well as the Level 2 Certificate in Business and Administration. However, disinclined to talk about his disabilities and with his confidence at a low level, he struggled.

As part of his course David completed a work placement in an office – a placement that was to instill in him a fervent desire to make a career out of office administration. Yet feedback from the employer revealed problems with concentrating and remembering information. Loathe to talk about his 'embarrassing conditions' as he viewed them, David had been keeping them from his training manager and pretending they did not exist. With encouragement from his training manager, David slowly opened up and discussed all aspects of his learning journey. As a result, the training centre could not only understand why he had been struggling in certain areas but, with the help of EDI, was able to put a support structure in place that would not only help him learn, but help him be assessed accordingly. David has since gone from strength to strength and neither he, nor Rocket Training Centre, has ever looked back.



Five years on, David has not only completed his Apprenticeship in Business and Administration but is now working on raising the standards of his English and mathematics skills so that he can commence the Level 3 qualification. And above all, he is now well on his way within his chosen career, having been offered a job by Rocket Training Limited, the centre that trained him!

Eileen Hibbard, Work Based Learning Co-ordinator at Rocket Training Limited, commented: “As soon as David finished his Apprenticeship, we offered him a job. We were incredibly impressed by the way David had approached his qualification and faced his disabilities head on. As he progressed, so did his confidence and he showed real potential. He is now fulfilling that potential and has proved to be an excellent addition to our team.”

David commented: “Initially I saw my disabilities as a real barrier that couldn’t be overcome. I hated talking about them and felt I should deal with them on my own. However once the training centre knew about my condition, the help and support I was given was fantastic. So many times I thought of packing it all in but I learnt not to give up and to keep going. Now I don’t hesitate to ask for support when I need it and can talk about my challenges openly. I feel like a completely different person.”

Part of the support that the training centre offered David was flexibility with assessment. Working with the external verifier from EDI, the centre put effective strategies in place to ensure David was not disadvantaged by such things as his poor handwriting and poor short term memory loss.

Eileen commented: “Because we were constantly assessing David’s progress, we could see that his skills were developing, however it would be difficult for him to prove this under the stress of an exam situation. Through liaising with the EDI external verifier we could ensure that David was offered extra flexibility with timing in exams and certain leeway regarding his handwriting. As a result, David’s confidence grew and ultimately he was able to face the exams and pass them – a huge achievement.”

As a massive Everton fan, one of David’s overriding reasons for wanting a job was to be able to support himself and purchase his match tickets. Since working for Rocket, David has not only supported Everton at their home ground but also been abroad for special away matches – something he has only ever dreamed of before. David commented: “Doing the Apprenticeship was one of the best decisions of my life. All my hard work paid off and that is a fantastic feeling. All my life I have wanted to be able to support myself and pay my way and this has enabled me to do that.”

The feeling of achievement when he passed his NVQ was surpassed only by being offered a job because of his new skill set. David commented: “I was so surprised when I was offered a job and was thrilled that I was being given such an opportunity. I have now worked at the Broadgreen centre for nearly two years and I love it. I really enjoy office administration and reception work and definitely want to make it my career. I can honestly say that at the moment I couldn’t be happier in my job and that’s not something a lot of people say! I am continuing to learn so much while working – from interacting with people to improving my memory and concentration levels.”

Eileen commented: “Since working for us, David has really come out of his shell. He has impressed everyone with his reliability and nothing is ever too much hassle. At first, every instruction had to be explained simply and written down. As time passes, David is retaining more and more information and performing his duties really well. He communicates really well with both staff and the learners that come to the centre and has gained real respect.”



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It is clear that David has found his niche. Determined to keep achieving, he is still learning about his limitations but now has the confidence to tackle them head on rather than ignoring them. His shyness and nerves around new people have all but disappeared and he has become a confident and able communicator. Although content with his job, he is already considering starting his level 3 qualification to ensure a successful career. He also has a few words of advice for anyone in a similar situation: “Never give up – you will always get there in the end. Put that extra percent of effort in and don’t be afraid to ask for help. You’ve got to be confident in life!”

* According to NIACE



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