

Diversity and inclusion stories:

Alasdair: Apprentice



Listen and get inspired by Alasdair as he talks about his experience of diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

First off, tell me about you – what’s your name and where do you work?

My name is Alasdair, I'm an apprentice in Glasgow at a large defence and security company.

Can you tell me a little bit about the condition you developed and how this affected your life?

In 2017 I came down with a neurological condition that wiped out most of my mental and physical capabilities over the space of about eight months. I was then admitted to hospital and with the help of physio, occupational therapy and everyone around me I learned to walk and talk again, to the point where I was able to leave the hospital.

I then did a lot of at home rehab and managed to return to school on a reduced timetable in my final year of school where I sat exams for maths and English. Because of my level of amnesia due to my illness, I had to do a huge amount of work at home to be able to understand even basic concepts and do well in class.

That sounds like it was a very difficult time. Were you able to pursue any of your previous interests or hobbies when you became ill?

During my illness, I took up wheelchair racing because I'd been doing athletics prior to my illness. When I got better, I managed to come back to able bodied athletics – I ran a big personal best and picked up a district level medal in my chosen event. I also did well in my exams.

That’s amazing! Did overcoming those challenges help you see opportunities in other parts of your life?

With this boost of confidence, I felt it was going to be possible to go further with my studies, so I looked into some options. I was interested in engineering and I came across the apprenticeship route. The apprenticeship sounded like a great way for me to learn and also become more independent self-sufficient, something that my life had lacked.

What do you think really helped you get to where you are now in your career?

For my current job, I think if there was any defining factor that may have set me apart from the competition, it wouldn't be my grades or my level of intelligence. I feel that it was probably my strict commitment to building myself and my ability to take something that seems unachievable such as, recovering from my illness. Being able to dilute a huge problem into something easier and more achievable, is a skill that is probably the most important for most walks of life; but especially going into industry at such a young age and being able to cope with all the new responsibilities and the stark contrast of the school environment.

How did you find the job application process?

When I originally applied for the position, I declared my disability. I was encouraged to see that the employer hid all personal details up until the final stage to make sure all applicants were treated equally. At no point did I ever feel I was being looked down on or hired just because of my disability. It has made me feel less nervous to declare my disability in future job applications.

How did your employer support you ahead of starting your job?

Prior to my induction day, I had a good conversation on the phone with the company about things I may need to help me perform to my fullest, such as equipment that's designed to help me work comfortably and ample opportunities to rest. It made me feel very confident that the area I was going into was going to be welcoming and accessible and also allow me to put in the same work as everyone else without my disadvantages. I think all of this is a great example of an inclusive process.

What piece of advice would give other young people with disabilities applying for their first job?

My advice is to use your disability to your advantage – visible or invisible, this is what sets you apart. In an interview show your attributes and turn your disability into an opportunity for you. Never hide it, you must make the most of it.

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