

PLACE FOR ALL

EQUALITY

DIVERSITY

INCLUSION

“ My journey into employment. ”

Josh Edmundson, Highways Civils Operative



EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Sharing personal stories and perspectives to foster inclusivity in the workplace

What was most helpful/useful about Reintegration to Employment?

The work placement was a better taste of reality than an interview, I got the chance to understand what it's really like working on site and had more opportunity to see what it would be like. I had no experience so I wouldn't have been able to answer interview questions, it would have been scary, and I get a bad stutter when I'm nervous so I wouldn't have passed. I was working part time in takeaways before. It wasn't going anywhere, and the money was bad, but I wouldn't have applied to a job with Colas if I'd seen it because I had no experience.

What difference has it made to how you feel about work, future career and future prospects?

My manager says I've come a long way and am getting good at seeing what needs to be done before I'm told now and doing tasks well. There's loads I want to try. When I've done my driving license, I want to train to drive the 360 and do my digger tickets, and eventually I want to be a supervisor on site. I prefer civils to tarmac as there's more to learn but it's great that I've had chance to experience lots of different things and decide what I want to do. I'm working on a Copenhagen roundabout now banging in kerbs, everywhere we work we find old tramlines and cobbles, it's interesting. I like history

- I like learning at work, applying that to my college work and then applying what I learn at college to my work. I struggle with hands on, paper-type studying because I struggle to write, and numbers can get jumbled too. Learning on the job is perfect for me and I'd like to help other care leavers. Everyone knows the highest crime rate is amongst care leavers because there aren't a lot of real opportunities with good employers who will be flexible and understanding. It's hard when you've got nobody to help and no back up at all - a lot of the time you're just alone with your thoughts. It's good for other staff too - helping young people from care - because it helps teach staff to be kind, responsible, and look out for others.

Was there anything you found challenging/difficult?

Time management is something a lot of young people in care struggle with, and mental health. It's hard growing up alone without family to teach you how to be in a routine and do stuff you're not used to doing. Growing up on your own damages your mental health. I found it a challenge getting into a routine and making sure I stayed in it. It's good for your mental health to have a job and a routine of get up, go to work, come home tired, relax, sleep well - and have money to do the things you enjoy.

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Are there particular challenges for young people who are care experienced and did the scheme help with these?

The banter on site could be a challenge. Employers need to be careful that people know where to draw the line - some people could switch and snap if the banter goes too far. A lot of people in care have mental health issues and stress in their lives that other young people don't have like housing, and bills, and loneliness. Most 18-year-olds are home with Mum and Dad. We're on our own without support managing a home, earning money, just doing everything by yourself.

How could employers/managers better support/understand young people who are care-experienced?

Be patient and flexible. Things went badly for me with my housing recently. I moved to Bradford to be with my birth family, and it went badly so I had to move out, and now I'm in temporary housing waiting for my own place. I really went downhill, personally and at work. It was a really hard time but my manager and a workmate (also came in through RtE scheme, referred from Growing Rooms) really supported me. I'm not going to lie, it was hard at first living alone and getting my bills sorted out and everything, without any family to help but my leaving care worker still supports me, and I'm all sorted now. I'm looking forward to getting my own place and getting settled properly.

Giving lots of help is also important. Young people in care can miss a lot of school and move schools a lot, so don't have as much chance to learn. My manager and workmate are so good to me and spend a lot of time teaching me stuff and going over things again and again. They are always here to help, and I know I can always ask for help when I need it. The right people to manage and supervise is important - people with the patience to listen and find out the cause if things are going downhill. My manager always says you spend more time with your colleagues than your family and you have to care for each other, for me that's been so important.

An end of shift debrief is a good idea, just have a coffee and a chat about the day. Just so there's a chance to chat if anything is worrying you.

What did you enjoy most about your experience/the scheme?

The flexibility is good. I did the paid work placement then went into a full-time job. I hadn't worked full time before and found it really tiring coming in to such a physical job, but the flexibility in the scheme meant I knew I could ask to reduce my hours if I found it too much. As I was turning 18, I knew I would be leaving my foster family and wasn't sure what I would be doing next. Having flexibility and support from my employer and colleagues made it less stressful when I went through a bad time with my birth family. The care I have from the people

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I work with is really important to me. Learning to manage time and money has been important. Being here has taught me a lot - opportunities like this make you know you can be at rock bottom and still widen your chances and your life. If you're inspired to be great you can be great.

Do you think the scheme helps care experienced young people to recognise what they have to offer?

Yes, because it takes away the parts that would have put me off like the interview. I want to get involved with supporting other care leavers and would like to

develop an on-site training facility for care experienced young people to come to site and do civils experience days. I think there's loads of opportunities for young people like me, they just don't know about them. There's a lot of people who would do well and just need some help to get into jobs. My boss said "it's been worth every minute invested in me and by giving me a chance, Colas has got a real diamond."

Josh Edmundson
Highways Civils Operative
Colas Ltd