

Ascender

Stories:

Mya



Transforming the lives of young adults in Sheffield through
work placements, training and mentoring

"I'm not as anxious as I used to be. Ascend has shown me I can do it."

For 20-year-old Mya, having a proactive and supportive personal career mentor has made the world of difference to her ability to participate in the Ascend young adult employment programme. Here's her story.

Mya comes from a jobless household. Of mixed White and Black Caribbean descent, she lives with her mum – who is on income-related benefits – and no one else. Mya attained low-to-average grades in her GCSEs; she did not complete a work experience year at school, and left full-time education when she was 16.

We first met Mya at a very busy jobs fayre which was held at a local Job Centre. Mya was well-presented, on time and engaged, but seemed painfully shy and very anxious. Mya was not able to express any particular interests, nor was she able to identify any key strengths, reasons for employability or any areas of work she would like to pursue. We signed Mya up to receive updates from us about future opportunities for work trials.

We initially set Mya up with a work trial in a sweet manufacturer. In the first couple of weeks Mya spent on the Ascend employment programme (a combined programme of work experience, training, and mentoring), she was tearful at the thought of having to speak in front of a small group, wouldn't contribute to any sort of discussion and eye contact was minimal; she spent most of the time looking at the floor.

However, one of our mentors – Nikki – immediately started working with Mya to overcome her barriers to employment, as well as helping Mya figure out where her dreams might take her, and how she might achieve them.

The mentoring relationship Nikki has built with Mya has been transformative. Nikki has spent hours getting to know Mya, identifying strengths and weaknesses. She has visited Mya during her work trial, encouraging her to keep building her bank of work experience, easing worries and concerns, and helping Mya to focus on the areas in which she is excelling.



*"I'm not as anxious as I used to be.
Ascend has shown me I can do it."*

- Mya

Without the support of a mentor, we have found that for some young adults, the anxiety around the transition into work can become so huge that they drop out of the programme without finishing their work trial. Mya not only completed her trial, but really impressed her employers with her progress

At the end of Mya's first work trial, her employers were extremely complimentary about her and commented on how her confidence had grown since her first day with them. By holding Mya's mentoring sessions at Mya's workplace, Nikki helped to create a cohesive and shared sense of support for Mya. Mya's line manager was able to offer insights into Mya's work; sharing with Nikki areas for improvement and suggesting topics for discussion during the mentoring sessions. Mya told us that this joined-up approach – having her employer and her mentor work together – 'helped my confidence; I'm not as anxious as I used to be. Ascend has shown me I can do it'.

Mya completed her first work trial, but was not successful in securing a long-term role there. She continued meeting Nikki and coming to training sessions where we started to see a different side to Mya. She was often the first to speak during discussions; she started to share some of her interests outside of work, she brought others – who were just starting their employment journey with us – into the group, reassuring those who felt nervous and afraid. Throughout the course of these sessions, Nikki started to notice that Mya was very organized: she would be prompt with replying to messages, eager to provide anything admin-related by email, and was confident using computers.



Mya's mentor Nikki – far right – celebrating the success of another group of young adults who completed Ascend's pilot programme.



Nikki and Mya spent some time during their mentoring sessions working out together why the sweet factory wasn't the place for Mya. From those mentoring conversations and Nikki's observations about Mya's natural flair for admin and organisation, we found Mya a new work trial, this time in an office environment.

Mya successfully completed this work trial, too, and this time was invited to interview for a permanent, full-time, role.

Nikki and Mya set to work together; mentoring sessions became all about interview technique, practice questions, and CV refreshers. We were able to work with the employer to time the interview so that Mya was able to have a mentoring session immediately beforehand. The rest of the Ascend participants sent her off with best wishes and a video for her to watch before she went in. As a result of her performance in the interview, Mya was offered a choice of two permanent full-time roles, and is continuing to thrive.

Mya is still meeting Nikki regularly: recently they had a pizza night together! You'll notice from Mya's story that mentoring has meant holistic change for Mya. Yes, she is employed, but just as importantly her social anxiety and depression has hugely decreased, her soft skills are being constantly honed and her confidence to employ them is markedly improved. Mya has gone from not being able to communicate any sort of dream or future aspiration to confidently making eye contact with me as she tells me, "I'm looking forward to seeing where my job at S4S might lead, they always say at Ascend the journey isn't over, so watch this space."

To find out more about how you can support young adults like Mya, email Katie@togetherforsheffield.co.uk



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