

“Every once in a while, things turn out better than you had ever expected” - how Patrick sums up his experience of volunteering with Aspire Sheffield and how his time there has impacted his life. Like when your team wins a tough game, or your train is on time, or you win the first prize in a raffle - all unexpected moments of happiness that can have a ripple effect and go on to influence your life in ways you never thought would happen.

Patrick had been working in a call centre for IKEA. It was a job he enjoyed, with friendly colleagues and a happy working environment, but he wanted something more. He had always been interested in IT but had never managed to start a career in that area. That’s where [Big Ambitions](#) got involved - one of their support workers referred Patrick to Aspire, and as he says, “from the get go, I knew that was where I was supposed to be”.

Big Ambitions support people with mental health conditions and learning differences to gain and retain meaningful activity and employment. They help people to improve their personal development, skills and health while supporting them to move towards their vocational goals around entering or reentering employment. Whether it's advice and guidance in mapping out a career plan, personal development training or ongoing support to maintain success, Big Ambitions help ensure that individuals and employers benefit from good work and sustainable employment.

After an informal interview at Aspire, Patrick gladly started volunteering at the project for two days per week, initially in the recycling unit before progressing to the shop. Working with Steve and Connor in the shop was where Patrick started to really develop his skills, learning how to troubleshoot IT problems, schedule and track jobs, and work on his customer service skills. Working in a small and supportive team environment gave Patrick the confidence to try new skills without fear of failure, and push himself to achieve more each time.

“My time as Aspire was amazing, really. They helped me so much in terms of developing my skills, learning more about working in IT, and working on my confidence to go out there and apply for other roles. I couldn’t have asked for more! Who started as colleagues became friends and it felt like a family, like where I belonged. Aspire provided the stepping stone I needed to get to where I am today”, says Patrick.

After about 8 months with Aspire, Patrick secured a full time apprenticeship role as a Junior IT Technician, working with an IT company providing business to business support. He’s hugely enjoying his job and feels invested in by the company, as they are providing regular training and online learning opportunities for Patrick to continue to make progress and work towards his goals both personally and professionally. When he has the opportunity to do so, Patrick refers work back to Aspire from his new role, to try to repay some of the kindness and support he received during his time there.

“Everyone deserves a chance to work towards a career that they’ll enjoy. Everyone needs help along the way, someone or something to give them that extra support, or that stepping stone to

achieve their goals. Aspire provided that for me. It shouldn't matter if you have autism or another disability - that shouldn't be a barrier to people building a career and life for themselves. I'm grateful for every opportunity that my time with Aspire has provided and the doors it has opened for me."

Aspire pride themselves on being inclusive, offering training and support from basic entry level up to level two which prepares people for apprenticeships. Their team of friendly and welcoming staff and volunteers from diverse backgrounds, encourage and support everyone while they are with Aspire. You can find out more about Aspire's approach to training here:

<https://www.aspire-sheffield.co.uk/training/>