**Movement to Work and Me – Nikita Blog**

My name is Nikita. I’m an apprentice at Ashington Jobcentre.

One thing about me that surprises any new colleagues that I meet is that I actually started my civil service journey as a Movement to Work placement; and I want to share my experience...

Before my placement, I was long-term unemployed. I was a carer and I was socially isolated; I had low self-esteem, low self-worth and no confidence at all. I wanted to find work but I struggled to stay motivated.

Because of my isolation, I found it difficult to communicate with people in person and talking to unfamiliar people just filled me with anxiety.

I actually have a fond memory from the start of my Movement to Work placement where I was approached by the Jobcentre Customer Service Manager for some feedback. At the time, I felt very overwhelmed and had to go away and write all of my suggestions up because I felt like I just couldn’t communicate them in person; and this is a fond memory because it reminds me of how far I’ve come… Back then, I couldn’t have imagined speaking at Civil Service Live (but I did!) or having an involvement in many other challenges.

In the past, my work coach spoke to me about the civil service as a career, but it all sounded too complicated and I felt like I wasn’t qualified.

Then one day, I was offered and accepted a work experience opportunity at the jobcentre.

During my placement I had various responsibilities including, but not limited to:

* Clerical tasks, such as preparing the following day’s appointments
* Searching for local opportunities and updating the jobs board
* Researching provisions and making posters for them

There were times where I was on the go all day so I learned how to manage my time and prioritise my tasks, and then we had slow days where I had to use my initiative to find tasks for myself, which I think was a healthy balance for development. I learned so much!

I also supported front of house with signing in customers and with any ad-hoc digital support needs that came in.

It was a very real experience – it wasn’t watered down and I wasn’t wrapped in cotton wool or anything. It was just *real…* And challenging. I met some difficult and, for want of a better word, *unsavoury* customers. I was forced out of my shell and my comfort zone and it made me more resilient.

The service that I was providing to the customers made me feel like I was making a real difference. I would support them to create and manage their Universal Jobmatch accounts and I’d help them to write their CVs, and they would leave the office feeling really motivated and enthusiastic about looking for work. It was transformational! And it was really empowering for me to see the impact my work was making.

I had a really good, nurturing mentor, and the team all made me feel included. They gave me feedback and encouragement and it helped me to appreciate talents that I had overlooked. It was a massive confidence boost.

I’m now 19 months into my apprenticeship, I’m a mental health first aider, an ambassador and I’ve participated in the Force for the Future leadership development project. I have recently taken over line management of the Movement to Work placements. I’m looking after potential future civil servants and sharing my experiences with them because I’ve been there. And I want to give them what I had when I did my placement.

I’m still an introvert, but since I have joined the civil service I have never felt limited by it. I used to feel like I needed to be more like other people, but I'm happy with who I am now and I want others to be too.

Additionally, I'm delighted to share that I have successfully passed a sift and an interview and received a job offer. Unfortunately, I did have to decline it due to it being outside of my travel to work area and being limited to public transport but I’m really happy to be reaching and sometimes even surpassing criteria, so I’m hopeful that I will succeed in securing a permanent position soon.

My Movement to Work placement opened my eyes to the possibilities of the civil service as a career and negated the self-doubts that I had. It was the first big step in making me the person that I am today and I’m so grateful to have been given the opportunity.