

## Clean Slate Employment – Case Study

### IN THEIR OWN WORDS: NICOLE

I was on the Work Programme in Stratford and through Gary, a Clean Slate Work Champion, I heard about an admin position. I went along to Clean Slate's office in Stockwell to say hello and find out what Clean Slate does and how, as a recruitment agency, they had two four-week vacancies to fill, working with a housing association in London Bridge.

There was a bit of confusion about the recruitment process and start dates as the customer was trying to get things sorted out but within a few weeks four of us were invited along to interview. I was so scared about it. I wouldn't have applied for a job like that on my own. I went along convinced someone else would get the job.

I saw the office building and then the professional people inside and I just thought: 'What is this interview going to be like?' But it wasn't what I expected, it was more like a chat. They made me feel relaxed and I eased up a bit and was able to answer their questions. We even had a bit of a laugh in the interview.



When Maureen, another of Clean Slate's Work Champions, contacted me to say I'd been successful, I was so excited. It'd difficult to describe how it feels for someone who's been out of work for so long. I was just eager to start.

To be honest, I was frustrated that things didn't happen straight away. I began to think they'd changed their mind because I still couldn't believe they hadn't chosen the other candidates. It was also unclear how much I'd be earning because, without me knowing, the employer decided we should be on the London Living Wage and Clean Slate had had to renegotiate the contract. This affected advice I was getting on Housing Benefit but we got there in the end.

When it came to the day it started I was very nervous. It was good to know Maureen would also be working on the project. I spent most of the first day, while the IT system was set up, just reading about the organisation and finding out about welfare reforms as the project we were working on was about telling tenants how benefits are changing.

I really liked the work. I don't think I was expecting to but it was working with Maureen that helped make it okay. I slowly got to know other people at the office and found many of them were really friendly – one person even got into trouble for coming over to speak to us so often. Towards the end of the project, one of the staff gave me a list of contacts at recruitment agencies and encouraged me to sign up with them.

The project was much bigger than the housing association expected but they were still impressed at how quickly we got through it. They even had to put us onto other admin work with other departments because they couldn't always keep up with what we needed to keep going. Maureen and I worked there for seven weeks instead of four.

Now I feel like I could apply for an office job and I would never have done this before. I'm not so scared about the interview process and don't feel that I wouldn't understand all the language they use. I've even started applying for jobs helping people deal with welfare reforms.

What also changed is that when I started I was in a hostel and depressed. Once in work, I felt much more confident and able to ask questions. I felt the hostel staff began to treat me with more respect. They saw that I was trying to get independent and that I was able to fend for myself. My relationship with my family changed too and they see that I'm someone who is really trying to better herself and not just someone sitting around and asking for money.

Now I was earning, I was worried about how much rent I was going to have to pay, even for a small hostel room, but Maureen talked through this with me and I came to realise that this is just how things work. I've just picked up my keys for a new flat of my own.