

FEATURED APPRENTICE: ANDY FARRINGTON

**MEET ANDY FARRINGTON,
A TEAM LEADER FOR THE
INFRASTRUCTURE TEAM AT
SANDWELL AND
WEST BIRMINGHAM NHS TRUST.**

**WE SPOKE TO ANDY ABOUT HIS
EXPERIENCES OF UNDERTAKING
AN APPRENTICESHIP.**



What apprenticeship are you studying and what does it involve?

I undertook the Level 3 Team Leader or Supervisor apprenticeship commencing in February 2021. The course requirements are clearly set out in all the documentation around the course, so the modular nature, regular meetings and work submission were no surprise. What was a surprise was the level of introspection and self-examination that several of the modules caused for me.

I had a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome in 2019, so prior to the course introspection and self-examination were not things I engaged in regularly, and certainly not 'in the moment', often to the detriment of both me and those with which I was engaging. Tact and subtlety were employed sparingly, and I could be difficult to engage with. None of those traits have changed following the course. What has changed is my awareness of them, and most importantly my acknowledgment and awareness of the impact of those behaviours on others.

Why did you want to do the apprenticeship?

I'd been asked by my line manager if I'd be interested in becoming the team leader, as they had seen potential in me to perform well in a 'leading people' role. They also recognised that I'd need some support with this and suggested an apprenticeship.

Why did you want to do the apprenticeship?

Being someone old enough to remember the Youth Training Schemes of the 80's, I was initially somewhat sceptical, but a quick chat with Emma, one of the Trust's apprenticeship team, provided some reassurance that an apprenticeship was absolutely a valid direction for me to take. I still had some reservations though, and it wasn't until I was a couple of months in that I started to realise some value to the knowledge and skills I was learning.

What is your current role?

I'm the team leader for the Infrastructure Team at Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust. The team are responsible for the servers, networks, cyber security and telephony services that support the Trust's clinical and operational objectives.

Whilst it's less 'hands-on Geeky' than my prior role as an Infrastructure Engineer, being the team leader gives me opportunities to influence the Informatics Department, and the wider organisation, in a much wider, more strategic way. I take this responsibility very seriously, knowing that some of the decisions I make or have input to will influence and impact the organisation for years.

How did you get into your current role?

I started working for the Trust on the Service Desk, answering the phones and providing an initial fix for issues wherever possible. Opportunities for internal advancement within the Informatics team were very limited at that time, so after 7 years I transferred to a more senior IT role in a specialist clinical team. 2 years later, and I'm back in Informatics in the Infrastructure team. From that point forward, it's been a case of experiential learning and knowledge transfer, with some self-directed technical courses undertaken.

In 2020, COVID hit, and working from home became the new normal for most, but I remained on-site, and was asked to manage the Service Desk and Desktop Support Teams whilst both of their management teams were ill with COVID. This was my first real opportunity for management in the Trust, and my line manager recognised some potential, and asked me to step up as the Infrastructure Team Leader. I was formally appointed in February 2022.

“

***Commit fully, engage
with the process, and go
for it!***

”

What has been your proudest achievement on your apprenticeship to date?

On the apprenticeship itself? Simply passing!

However, that's far too simplistic an answer. The knowledge and skills that I've gained during the apprenticeship have made a huge difference to my day-to-day working practices and interactions with colleagues. Critically, I utilised these skills during a major IT incident that occurred in November and was able to successfully lead the team's response and recovery efforts, along with influencing the Trust's response as well.

I'm most proud, however, when colleagues tell me that "you're a different person to who you were when you started the course". I'm absolutely and fundamentally still 'me' and I always will be. But because I'm more aware of my own challenges and 'triggers', I'm able to integrate and co-operate much better with colleagues and peers.

What do you want to do once you complete your apprenticeship?

I successfully completed the course in July 2022, and one of the first actions I took was to pause, reflect, and assess how to continue with my learning journey.

I'm applying in the very near future to take part in a Level 5 apprenticeship, with the NHS Mary Seacole Leadership Programme embedded, hopefully commencing in February 2023, with a view to progressing further in my NHS management career.

On a personal note, I've continued with some self-development, working on those 'Aspie' traits that are the most challenging for others to deal with.

What would you say to someone considering an apprenticeship?

I was initially more than a little embarrassed to admit that I was undertaking an apprenticeship at 52 years old, but it has been the most empowering and worthwhile activities that I have ever undertaken in my working life, and one of the accomplishments I'm most proud of.

Commit fully, engage with the process, and go for it!

Click here to learn more about the Level 3 Team Leader or Supervisor apprenticeship.