WORCESTERSHIRE APPRENTICESHIPS CASE STUDY:

Apprentice name: Grace McNiff

Employer name: University of Worcester

Type of Apprenticeship: Level 2 Horticulture

Grace had found the school a very challenging environment and attended a Pupil Referral Unit in the latter part of her education and left with no qualifications. However, she loved the outdoors and was able to find a placement to study for a BTEC Level 1 in Sports Education. She went on to take a Level 3 Access to Higher Education course together with taking some Maths and English qualifications in order to help her get to University of York with the aim to become a sports teacher. Unfortunately, her studies were interrupted by a family bereavement and this affected her significantly. She returned to Worcestershire and decided to take some time away from her course during which time she did various temporary jobs working in bars or as a cleaner.

Whilst in post as a cleaner at the University of Worcester, she came to hear of a vacancy for an Apprentice Grounds Assistant at the University. She applied and was delighted to be accepted and started her apprenticeship in February 2018. The apprenticeship comprised of working full time at the University with every couple of months having a week-long block of time at Pershore College totally 5 weeks in total for the academic year. Given that Grace started her apprenticeship a few months late, she started her apprenticeship straight away with a 3-week block of time at Pershore College before settling into the normal routine of 1 week at college every couple of months.

The course helped build upon the horticulture experience Grace had learnt as a child from her father and grandfather who were also both horticulturalists. As a child she spent many an hour in the greenhouse with her grandfather propagating flowers and vegetables. In addition, her father even did the very same qualification at Pershore College 45 years ago! The new knowledge Grace learnt at Pershore college included learning the Latin botanical names of the plants that she had only ever known the common names as a child, plus pruning and more advanced propagation techniques, growing habits and preferred growing conditions. The course also gives particular importance to correct Health and Safety practices in the use of chemicals and machinery plus environmentally sustainable practices for controlling weeds, pests and diseases.

Grace was able to immediately put the theory into practice, often working at the different campuses including line marking on the new American football field. Indeed, the year of Grace's apprenticeship has been particularly challenging with an extremely cold winter and long dry summer during 2018.

Grace is now coming to the end of her course at Pershore College and her contract with the University of Birmingham continues until February 2020 after which she wants to gain some more experience within the horticulture industry, before moving onto a level 3 qualification.

In Grace's own words, "I can speak from experience that apprenticeships are particularly helpful for those who have been disaffected by a formal educational environment and give people an opportunity benefit from learning and whilst benefitting from practical experience at the same time."

If you would like to know more about apprenticeships, please contact Worcestershire Apprenticeships by email at info@worcsapprenticeships.org.uk