

Noel's Story

My name is Noel Chapman. I am 30 years old and have a learning disability. I live with my mum and dad in Bartley Green, Birmingham.

I have always had an interest in catering. After leaving school I started a catering course at Bournville College. I gained an NVQ Level 1, 2 and 3 in Catering and Hospitality in Food Service. I also won the college's Patrick Prendiville award for the student who had achieved against all the odds.

After passing my course I tried for a long time to get a job but found it hard. Because of my learning disability no one would give me a chance, even though I knew I had so much to offer the right employer.

In 2004 I started to work with the Direct Employment Team at Birmingham City Council. The team was set up to help people with disabilities and health conditions find work. After a few weeks My Employment Development Officer (EDO) went with me to an interview at a bar in St Paul's Square. The bar offered me a 2 week trial period. After the trial period I was offered the job of Catering Assistant. I worked at the bar for 5 years. I was really happy and had a very supportive manager but in 2008 the bistro was taken over by new managers and I lost my job.

After this happened the Direct Employment Team stepped in to help me find a new job. First I had a two week trial period at a day

nursery, which did not work out. Then I spent six months volunteering as a Catering Assistant in sheltered housing for elderly people in Birmingham.

In August 2009 I said to my Employment Development Officer I would like to work at a Wetherspoons pub, which is a well known pub chain. He spoke to several Wetherspoons pubs and got me an interview at the Figure of Eight pub on Broad Street. He went with me to the interview and afterwards I was offered a 2 week trial period. I took travel training so I could get to the pub. I also had a support officer working with me for the induction and for the first few days of the trial. After the 2 week trial I was offered a job at the pub as a Catering Assistant. I have now been working there for 8 months and love my job.

In November 2009 I won the Employee of the Year award at the Disability Employment Solutions Team awards. The awards celebrate people with disabilities who have overcome barriers to find work.

The Direct Employment Team still help by visiting me at work once a month to see how I am getting on. I am so grateful to both The Figure Of Eight pub and the Direct Employment Team for the support they have given me in my job.