

My journey to employment

31 year-old Kayleigh Aris was diagnosed with mild A-T when she was 26. She has never let her condition define her and has always been determined to live as normal a life as possible. Kayleigh wanted to share her journey to employment and the challenges she faced to find a job.

My ambition was to be a Primary School Teacher, so I undertook a degree in Childcare and in 2009 I achieved a BA (Hons) in Education, but to be honest this put me off working with children full stop! So I decided to have a career change. I applied for lots of jobs and had a number of interviews but had the feeling that my disability had a bit to do with me not getting the job. All I ever wanted was for an employer to give me a chance and see that my condition only affected me physically; I did have a brain and I could use it! I do firmly believe that this is all each person with a disability wants - to be seen as a person who has a disability and not a person who is disabled.



I started hearing really good things about Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (RJAH), what a good employer they were so I was determined to get a job at the Trust too. I had many interviews here, but was always second in line to getting the job. Determination to work at RJAH saw me through and I successfully got offered a job in the Clinical Governance Department – beating 60 other candidates for the post!

When I started working in the department, Kris, my assistance dog, and I came as a team so steps were taken to ensure that he would be made welcome and a part of the team too. During my induction day at the very beginning of my employment, a member of staff came up to me and offered Kris a bowl of water whilst I was sitting listening to various talks on how the Trust operated – I knew at this point that I was in safe hands and that this was the place of work for us both.

In terms of the practicalities, I was given a bigger desk so that I could get a dog bed under it and the Estates Department put up a poo bin on the field for him – being an assistance dog Kris is so well-trained, but I still haven't managed to train him to clean up after himself as of yet, or to input comment cards, but believe me I am working on it!

Kris is very well known in the hospital; in fact the staff here quite often know his name over mine. For example, I can be walking down the corridor and people will acknowledge Kris first – it's really quite funny actually, but talk about stealing the limelight!

The Trust has been so supportive of my disability, I have longer lunch-breaks so I can exercise Kris on the field, away from the Heli-pad I must add, and they are flexible with my days off. Also I am allowed to have time-off for my annual trip to Papworth Hospital and for yearly breast-screening too. I also have Access to Work, which is where the government supports me financially to have a taxi to and from work.

I feel lucky that I was given a chance when I started working at RJAH and my line manager, Alison, has never judged me. Instead she encourages me in all aspects of my work and I will always be very grateful to her for that. Following a Leadership course that Alison undertook, she had to develop a member of her team who showed potential – she decided to develop me, which made me very happy. As a result of this, my role has changed dramatically since I first started working here; I now have much more responsibility.

I do really enjoy my job and I believe this has helped me in my achievements. I have become much more confident and developed many new skills. However, it hasn't been all plain sailing – for example, I have had to learn to work as part of a team, which has been a challenge at times and is frustrating.

One day I would like to have my own consultant to look after, being his/her secretary as I do like to nurture people and take them under my wing.