



Life-changing Leadership



Avril Mount

As a new wave of participants start their journey on our award-winning leadership development programme, Linzi Clark, Communications Assistant caught up with one of last year's participants to find out what they can expect.

Here, Avril Mount, Administration Services Manager, shares the highs and lows of being a participant in the first-ever Exciting Futures programme as it established itself firmly on the nation's organisational development scene.

So, Avril, why did you decide to take part in Exciting Futures?

My post here at Meridian House started to change and I got a number of new teams to oversee. Although that was great, I also found it a bit daunting. I felt slightly out of my depth in the leadership process, and I was concerned I was a bit "old-style". I was keen to acquire new management skills and hoped the programme would help me learn them and put them into practice.

Did the programme help you?

Yes, it helped in a number of ways really. The workshops for instance were brilliant. They were quite intensive but I found them to be very thought provoking - they really made me question my skills and look at how I could do things differently to improve my work.

Did you learn much about yourself from the workshops and evening seminars provided on the programme?

Yes, quite a lot. I found myself having a couple of 'Eureka' moments. Looking back, they were quite simple things that I was learning about myself, but it took the workshops and evening seminars to bring them to the surface. For example, I was considering emotional intelligence in one of the seminars and reminded myself of when I was a little girl and wanted to play the piano. My mother had said she didn't want to waste money on me like she had my sisters, who had not followed their piano lessons through. I remember feeling hurt and thought the situation was unfair. Learning from this I have since made sure fairness is evident in the workplace and ensure everybody has the same opportunities.

So what project were you allocated?

I worked on the gardening project at Northcliffe Nurseries. If I'm honest, I really wanted to be part of the cheerleading or fashion show, but in the end it didn't matter. I certainly enjoyed it and got more out of it than I initially thought I would.

What did you enjoy about it?

Getting stuck in, learning more about the work of the Trust and working with



Successful Exciting Futures participants

service users. In my generation there was no such thing as social inclusion; it's so pleasing to see that's changed. I have nothing but admiration for learning disability staff.

Were there any challenges you had to overcome?

There were many challenges, but being able to overcome them is all part of the learning. There were different attitudes and ways of working that required addressing and varying time commitments which sometimes caused a problem, but I made the most of the skills I'd learnt in the workshops, in seminars and from guest speakers. Implementing time management, planning and prioritising skills proved very useful towards the end of the project. There were times when work pressures would have made it easy to leave the programme, but I like to complete things I have started. I was determined to see it through, and did so by focussing on the many positives of the situation.

Overall, what do you feel you got out of the programme?

I definitely feel as though I acquired new skills and a better understanding of the leadership process. I also found the networking aspect of the programme very useful. Some of the people I met, I no longer see as colleagues; they're now my friends.

Do you think you've changed as a result of completing the programme?

I've changed as a leader, yes. I've learnt how to be more effective in my work, I've set boundaries and I'm more organised with my time. Even my colleagues have commented on the positive changes. I'm confident in my work now and I'm happy.

Exciting Futures has gained national recognition for its success. Having been part of the programme, how do you feel about this?

It's great! It's a brilliant programme and I feel honoured to have been part of the first cohort; it was really inspiring. Looking at the bigger picture I can see now that although I'm only a small cog in the organisation, I am making a difference. Exciting Futures helped me realise that.

What advice would you give to participants starting Exciting Futures II?

Be clear on what you want to get out of it; go into it with your eyes open and take the opportunities that come with it. Nobody tells you it's going to be easy, and nobody tells you it can get tough, but go with it, stick it out and I'm sure you'll find it was worth it. I did.

Good luck to the next cohort of future leaders as they start Exciting Futures II. We'll keep you updated on their progress throughout the year so be sure to keep an eye out.