

## Case study: developing confidence

### Seetec

Krystyna (58) came to the employment service, Seetec, in January 2010. She had very little work history as she had been raising her family and then caring for a parent for more than 30 years. When her mother's health deteriorated and she moved into a care home, Krystyna was no longer able to claim the Carer's Allowance and was transferred to Jobseeker's Allowance.

It was a particularly worrying time for her. "I didn't think I would be an employable person to be honest," she said. "My employment history was effectively zero and I thought my age - I was 58 then, 59 now - would be against me."

Yet thanks to an adviser who was able to identify her potential and gradually raise her levels of confidence, she succeeded in finding a job within five months. She had considerable obstacles to overcome: in addition to her lack of employment history, she had no formal qualifications and no IT skills. She was also looking for a job in a recession and was competing against candidates who had work experience. At the time Krystyna joined the employment service, she was suffering from depression and had to attend hospital appointments every three months.

Krystyna participated actively in all the modules Hounslow Seetec was running. These included computer skills, confidence-building, CV writing, how to look for work, and interview techniques. Apart from the courses, she had the opportunity to practise her IT skills in Seetec's centre on her own. Initially, her focus was just on learning. She always achieved her monthly objectives which led to an increase in confidence and an improvement in her health.

She also benefited from the interaction with other people on the courses and within a few weeks Krystyna was building good working relationships and her communication skills improved. In turn, Krystyna's attitude changed. A confident woman emerged who wasn't afraid to voice her opinions.

Krystyna was shown amongst other things how to search for jobs, attach emails and tailor her CV. She wrote down stage by stage what to do so she would be ready the next time to do it herself. She absorbed information and showed a real willingness to learn. She did some research on the job market with her caseworker, looking at the types of jobs that were being advertised to see if there was anything that interested her. She thought she might like to become an interior designer but subsequently acknowledged it was an aspirational ambition.

Her caseworker explored what Krystyna liked doing in her free time. Krystyna mentioned visiting her mother in her care home and that she enjoyed talking to the residents and brightening up their day. Her caseworkers then suggested she might like to try some voluntary work and that she should approach the care home to ask about the possibility of an unpaid placement there. After a few weeks of volunteering her confidence soared. With a little encouragement from her caseworker, she asked if a permanent paid position was available. Unfortunately there were no vacancies there at the time.

Krystyna continued to apply for jobs in the care sector and was soon invited to an interview for the role of Activity Coordinator at a new care home. Her case worker held a mock interview to help her improve her interview skills. Krystyna ran through the interview about five times, taking on board everything her caseworker mentioned from tone of voice to answering the type of questions posed in competency based interviews. Although the care home manager who interviewed Krystyna felt she needed someone with more experience for the Activity Co-ordinator role, she felt that Krystyna showed such passion and enthusiasm that she offered her the assistant position instead.

Krystyna thoroughly enjoys her new work: "I play games with the residents, motivate them, reminisce and do sing-songs. The level of activity is tailored to the resident's condition. If I can do lively things with them, I will. With others I take a gentler approach. It's very challenging, very interesting."

Against all the odds, Krystyna achieved what she would have thought hardly possible some months earlier. By working with her case worker in setting appropriate achievable goals, building on them and taking a step by step approach, Krystyna won her first interview and job offer in over 30 years.