

# 50+ WORKS

## Case study: training

### Wise Owls

Jackie, 56, of African origin, had spent most of her life as a housewife. Having left school at 16, the only way she had been able to earn any money had been to look after the children of her neighbours and acquaintances. She learnt about Wise Owls through a drop-in session at her local library and was able to join their ESF programme for ex-carers as she had been caring long term for her husband who had died six months previously,

Jackie didn't want to return to child minding as it didn't bring in enough income and she also thought of it as a job that required no qualifications. Suzan, her adviser at Wise Owls, saw that Jackie clearly had ambitions. But there has always been something that had prevented her from them and now she wanted 'a proper' job. She felt that she had been looking after others her whole life and she now wanted to put herself first.

She had ideas of becoming a receptionist or something similar. She had good communications skills and was happy to talk to people on the phone. When Suzan carried out a skills analysis based on her previous caring responsibilities, she found that it revealed that Jackie had skills which were suitable for admin roles. But there was a major obstacle because Jackie didn't realise that she would need to have IT skills to work as a receptionist. Suzan explained that IT skills are needed for virtually every role these days. She then forwarded Jackie a few job advertisements with the types of role Jackie was interested in so that she could see for herself what skills were required. And to reinforce the point and get Jackie to use a computer, she started sending her job advertisements by email, rather than showing them to her in the office. As a result Jackie started using IT naturally and without thinking about it.

But there was still a long way to go. Jackie helped look after her grandchildren so she could only look for a part time job. Suzan saw that Jackie wouldn't give up and explained how she would accompany her on her journey.

First Suzan needed to find a basic weekend IT course which Wise Owls would pay for in part. Wise Owls ask their customers to cover part of the costs of their courses to ensure they are committed to attending them but the amount they pay depends on each individual's circumstances. In Jackie's case, it was suggested that she cover the final exam costs of £60 while Wise Owls undertook to pay for the course itself (which cost £250). The course ran at weekends over six weeks and provided distance support. As Jackie had computer at home, she could practice with her grandchildren. She started to

become excited and often phoned Suzan to ask various things about working with a PC.

After passing the basic IT course, the next stage in Jackie's journey was for her to enrol in a business course so that she could acquire adequate admin skills. But before that she needed to find a work placement to gain sufficient elementary IT skills. Suzan made a few calls and fortunately there was a receptionist volunteering position available with Brent Council. In haste, they put together a CV and sent off an application. Jackie was accepted for the position.

Jackie's new commitments meant that she had much more to cram into her weekly schedule. Along with her business course, she had to fit in her child care responsibilities, her work placement and the IT course. But her new life style was a positive change – she felt energised and proud of how much she was managing to do. She was pleased too to have more social contacts than in the past when they had been limited to her family members.

After her three-month business course had ended, she felt it was time to start looking for a job. And there was another lucky coincidence – a job opening had become available at Brent Council. Jackie's manager recommended her for the position as she had been so satisfied with Jackie's performance as a voluntary receptionist. She was offered a permanent post as a part time administrator of in-house training courses for the whole of Brent Council.

Her new role required skills which Jackie had not used as a receptionist, but, knowing this, her employer understood this. With the help of Wise Owls, her manager drew up an appropriate induction programme and increased Jackie's workload and responsibilities gradually.

Jackie has been in her first 'proper job' for 18 months now and is enjoying her new life and what she has achieved. Although the job opportunity came as a stroke of luck, she would not have been able to apply for it had she not been prepared for it and had she not been able to demonstrate her qualities while working as a volunteer receptionist.

### **Key learning points**

- Carefully delivered bite sized training  
By starting with small tasks and building on them, the adviser can support a customer's enthusiasm and help develop their confidence to tackle more advanced training.
- Importance of volunteering  
Volunteering has many positive outcomes, such as practicing new skills, expansion of social contacts and, in some cases, a job offer.