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Opening up job opportunities for people with learning disabilities

South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust has welcomed a new member of staff, demonstrating its continuing commitment to breaking down barriers for people with learning disabilities wishing to enter the workplace.

David Johnson, 24, of Jarrow, is now part of the administration team for the talking therapies service and is loving his job. He said: "I had done work experience but this is my first proper job. I am really enjoying the work and the tasks that I have been given and I have already made some good friends in the team."

According to the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, only seven per cent of people with learning disabilities have a job, while 65 per cent want to work. The Trust was among a group of South Tyneside employers who attended a recent employment summit, organised by Equal People and Your Voice Counts on behalf of the Learning Disabilities Partnership Board, to find out more about how people with learning disabilities feel about work, what the barriers are to finding work and how the situation can be improved. Some years ago, the Trust changed its processes to make recruitment information more accessible so that people with learning disabilities were able to apply for posts and this was recognised as good practice with an award from the CIPD, the professional body for HR and people development.

David is one of several people with learning disabilities currently working in the Trust. Others include one who is employed as an assistant support worker promoting awareness and understanding of learning disabilities in GP practices in Gateshead and Andrew McWhirter, who has been part of the learning disability service, in the administration and clerical team, for almost five years.

Andrew, 29, who lives in Sunderland, said: "I am so pleased that I was given this wonderful opportunity. It is a pleasure and an honour to be part of the staff and the service and my colleagues have shown me great kindness and support."

Tracey Peters, head of the learning disability service, said: "Andrew has a lot of experience and skills and has proved a valuable member of the team. We have had fantastic feedback from people outside the organisation with whom he has dealt about his positive attitude and behaviour."



Clinical Business Manager Mandy Bowler, who is in charge of both the learning disabilities service and the talking therapies mental health team, added: "Andrew has been a great success in his role and we had no hesitation in offering a similar opportunity to David who, I am sure, will prove equally as effective a team member."

Ian Frame, the Trust's Executive Director, Personnel and Development, said: "We are committed to providing equality of opportunity in our employment practices and we are delighted to have staff of the calibre of Andrew and David on board."

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Pictured above: Andrew McWhirter and David Johnson with South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust Clinical Business Manager Mandy Bowler, head of the talking therapies service David Henderson and Tracey Peters, head of the learning disability service

Issued on behalf of South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust by Kay Jordan

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