

Case study: Changing lives through traineeships

Fair Train and The Calico Group

The Calico Group is the parent organisation to Calico Homes as well as a range of small charities, which complement each other to provide a holistic support service to Calico residents. It has successfully embedded work experience across the many arms of its business and aims to offer 100 traineeships over the next year.

From an employer perspective, Calico offers a range of traineeships which involve learners spending three days on placement within the organisation and one day at college per week. Learners are well supported at Calico – each individual is given a mentor who can help with wrap around support for personal and employment barriers, and one-to-ones are scheduled in at least every fortnight to ensure this happens. Calico's apprentices also provide peer to-peer support which can be instrumental in encouraging younger employees.

Sherrie-Ann, 18, is undertaking an apprenticeship at Calico Homes. At age 17, Sherrie-Ann was not sure what she wanted to do, and ended up at college, but did not enjoy the course so dropped out. In her own words this sent her into a bit of a downward spiral, where she ended up with no job or employment prospects, and no money. Sherrie-Ann was living in a hostel on benefits. She says she had nothing to get out of bed for in the morning.

Sherrie-Ann saw a poster for Calico traineeships in the hostel and thought she had nothing to lose by finding out more. When she arrived at Calico, Sherrie-Ann was surprised to find other people the same age as her, in the same situation, which gave her some reassurance that she was not the only person struggling.

Sherrie-Ann began the placement as a very shy individual, and slowly came out of her shell with the support she was given. She made phone calls to customers and worked as a trainee on reception, which helped increased her confidence. This and the support of her mentor, who she says she wanted to 'make proud', enabled Sherrie-Ann to progress onto an apprenticeship in Business Administration with Calico. Whilst she was nervous at first, Sherrie-Ann is now getting used to working with a variety of departments across the company.

Sherrie-Ann is surrounded by a positive network of similar minded people which is an environment she thrives in. She enjoys being part of a team and can clearly see the progression routes within Calico. The variety of careers available means that she can gain experience in nearly any sector she chooses and her ambition to do so is infectious. Sherrie-Ann said: *"If I hadn't done the traineeship, I can't imagine what I'd be doing now – it's the best thing I ever did. I have gone from a downward spiral of lying around doing nothing for six months, to having the motivation to go out and change the world."*

It is clear that she is now a star of the company, with her mentor calling the difference 'incredible'. This is evident in her chatty mannerisms – before, Sherrie Ann says, she couldn't even talk to people. *"I needed a dentist appointment when I first started and my mentor made me ring them myself which I could never have done before. Little things like that have really helped me increase my confidence."*

When it comes to work experience and traineeships, this wrap around support is arguably more important than the placement itself, which is something the Work Experience Quality Standard accreditation prioritises. Employees will reap the rewards when it comes to investing a small amount of time into their employers.



Sherrie-Ann is now a valued member of the team

It is also clear that traineeships work as a recruitment method to develop your talent pipeline - you could not ask for a better ambassador for your organisation than Sherrie-Ann, who now works with senior managers to help other departments understand the importance of hosting work experience, and also in making the organisation more 'youth-friendly' through its internal communications.

Angela Steele, Careers Officer at Calico commented: *"It is not only a massive accomplishment for Sherrie-Ann, but also for the careers team and her mentor to see the difference they have made to an individual's life. Using traineeships as a recruitment method reduces the risk to the organisation, as you can get to know the person and their interests, and see where their skills lie."*

Stuart Graham, Head of Skills and Employability at Calico, added: *"Traineeships are an essential part of our business plan for growth, succession and our commitment to developing apprenticeships and jobs for the future. The average age of our reporting team, for example, is 50+, which demonstrates the current skills shortages we are facing. Opening up opportunities at a young age also attracts more of a diverse workforce, which is crucial for the development of the business."*

The Calico Group

A group of innovative charities and businesses working together to make social profit, including housing association Calico Homes, domestic violence charity Safenet and addiction charity Acorn. The organisations work together to make a difference to people's lives through their 700 strong workforce. The Calico Group is accredited with the national [Work Experience Quality Standard](#) at gold level.

Fair Train

A national charity which champions the benefits of work experience, including traineeships and apprenticeships, through the national Work Experience Quality Standard accreditation.

For more information about working with Fair Train:

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