



The Leadership Academy – A Career Development Programme for employees with lived experience of disability and long-term health conditions.

LAP just completed its 7th year of delivery. Below is a record of some of the case studies we have received; detailing the impact that LAP has had on the Delegates and Mentors, who have participated in the Programme, since its launch 2014-15.

What makes LAP different to any other Leadership Academy Programme, is that it is underpinned by Disability Rights UK, an organisation with years of experience and expertise in disability.

The Team and this programme was developed and designed by disabled professionals, for disabled employees. Great time and effort has been taken to develop a robust programme, that gets results and changes lives and impacts places of employment for disabled staff members.

Employers benefit by send their employee's onto LAP because,

- Their employee's gain from the delegates increased confidence,
- They develop and uncover great skill sets, that they may not have been already tapping into,
- They feel ready to fully participate and are comfortable to be open with their employer about their disability and the impact that it has on them,
- They add value to the organisation because they are motivated and feel supported by their employer
- They often establish great networks through LAP and the shared experiences and good practice, only serve to benefit their place of employment.



Please read the case studies below, which represent a snippet of some of the results we have achieved thus far.

Paul - CQC – 2021 Cohort

The leadership programme will enable me to develop my skills and utilise my knowledge and experience to benefit the CQC, its staff and the customers we serve, and it has impacted my personal development.

My aim is to be able to effectively lead in a team that offers the most inclusive working practices with the best equipped staff incorporating a diverse and unique skill set. This course has given me the confidence and tools to unearth skills and abilities that have previously been hidden in me and LAP will help me to grow to become a productive and motivational leader in the future and support my progression and promotion in future role.

I was given a 6-month secondment to research inequality with British Sign Language users in the health and social care setting in England and lead the project and this a great opportunity to test my leadership skills from my learning. Just as importantly, it will enable me to show that my disability is not a barrier for me to progress, it's me as a person and professional that matters most. I will also act as a role model to other disabled persons in work and outside work. We need to adopt a 'we can do attitude', the course has opened these opportunities for me and helped me to explore a new adventure, which has given me the first step which I am grateful for.

Saima - CQC – Lawyer 2021 Cohort

- **Why have you attended LAP?**

I attended LAP to get a better understanding of leadership and management and the skills required to be a good and effective leader. I had a desire to progress to a leadership role within my career however lacked experience. I felt I needed to gain confidence in being a leader and develop my skills. I feel the course had provided me with a strong foundation to develop on.

- **How you found the online training, content, and trainer?**

The online contact was very informative, and I have been able to look back on the content to refresh my learning and apply some of what I have learnt on the course. Grahame has been very engaging and encouraging. Grahame has provided praise where he has seen that I have developed and become more vocal throughout the progress of the course.

- **How has the learning impacted you and your leadership?**

The learning has encouraged me to apply for leadership roles and successfully interviewing and obtaining a leadership role at my current place of employment. I referred to what I have learnt on the course when giving my interview and writing my



personal statement. I also refer to the content of the course when dealing with challenges relating to leadership.

- **How has LAP helped you in terms of career development and feelings as a disabled employee/leader?**

LAP has helped me to be more vocal about my disability and have written an article for my organisation about disability and leadership. I no longer shy away from my disability but at the same time acknowledge that my disability is not a barrier to leadership and that I must find confidence with my disability and that obtaining a leadership position is possible.

Andy – Foreign and Commonwealth Office – 2021 Cohort

I decided to attend the LAP because I always felt that I had quite realised my potential and on reflection realised that being disabled had impacted on my self-belief and behaviours at work for progression. I have found the content of the course and the trainer interesting and engaging. It always helps when someone delivering a course is genuinely enthusiastic about their subject matter.

Whilst being on the course, a combination of the learning itself and discussions with other participants have really helped me realise that I'm not unique in my outlook and behaviours and provided me with tools to improve and think about leadership differently, appreciating the behaviours of others and how to utilise this in a team. Towards the end of the course, I decided to throw my hat into the ring for a new job and a promotion at work. I'm delighted to say I got the job and will now get to put into practice what I have learnt as I will be managing a small team.

Daniela - D & C Police – 2020 Cohort

I wanted to join this program as I was ready to take the next step in moving towards a supervisory role. Having a course aimed at those with disabilities made me less conscious when talking about my concerns and impact of my condition, where many adults without disabilities don't always appreciate how disability permeates the whole self. I was able to speak about lack of confidence, feeling stupid when I don't find words quickly, and how this had made me feel judged or measured.

The course has given me a genuine feeling of empowerment for myself; the confidence to know that I have a voice and that when used wisely, I have a lot of say. It has consolidated previous management and leadership training but took it away from the more traditional hierarchical systems I have learnt and experienced. It has helped me to recognise that my stronger areas are in policy and strategic roles, rather than in direct personnel management. Thanks for the course.



Case Studies – 2017-18 Cohort

Rekha – NHS Trust - Delegate

Thanks Katrina, I hope you are well.

I do hope to have my final appraisal in the week beginning 18.06.18. I do promise to send my feedback as soon as I have had this, along with my full case study.

I would like you to know that I was successfully appointed as a Trustee for Chartered Society of Physiotherapy Charitable Trust.

I had my first step into the corporate world yesterday.

Thanks for giving me opportunity to be on the Leadership programme which is clearly helping me to move on and for all of your support.

Best wishes
Rekha

Simon – Retired - Civil Service. - Mentor

I've mentored for many years. I started mentoring whilst working in the civil service, mainly with people in my own profession (procurement). I also mentored people seeking to develop their career – in particular, those seeking promotion to the senior civil service. I also took a particular interest in mentoring people with hidden disabilities.

Why did you decide to mentor for LAP

I benefitted from a civil service development programme – Leaders Unlimited, which focussed on preparing people from under-represented groups for promotion to the senior civil service. The programme took a multi-strand diversity approach, but included people with disabilities. I found the programme so valuable that when I saw the Leadership Academy programme, and its similarities to the programme I had benefitted from, I wanted to support it. I had also particularly enjoyed mentoring people with disabilities, and am passionate about unlocking people's potential and not allowing talent to fall to waste.

How many years have you been involved with LAP

I started mentoring with LAP at its inception four years ago, have come back every year, and have made suggestions to further develop the scheme.

How have you found the support from The Leadership Academy Executive/DRUK

I have always found Katrina very supportive – happy to give advice, and to talk through issues. As a disabled person myself, and since this is a scheme focussed on helping disabled people, things are not always straightforward and having the support Katrina gives is invaluable.



How have you found the training?

I have found the training useful – a particularly valuable part of the training is swapping ideas and discussing experiences with other mentors.

What have your experiences been like with your mentees?

Each mentee has been different – and each has had specific needs. So, I have found it necessary to work differently with each – from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs. What I have sought to do with each is to establish what their development goals are, and to work in the right manner to support them. For some, this has meant supporting them in achieving very specific and challenging goals. For others, this has meant working on underlying issues as enabler to success – a very common issue has been the need to develop confidence.

Vidar, MBE – Key Note Speaker, is currently the Inclusion and Diversity Consultant with ITV News working across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands.

Before taking on this national lead role, Vidar worked in a variety of senior editorial posts - running Political, Current Affairs and Social Action programmes - with ITV in the Midlands as well as working as a Consultant Producer with ITN in connection with the then Channel Four day-time political programme. He also delivers a number of Guest Lectures each year at several UK Universities and receives requests to give motivational talks.

An Associate with the business Disability forum, Vidar has not-for-profit Board experience in the Arts and Disability sectors.

Being visually impaired, Vidar has always greatly valued the work-related opportunities he has been fortunate to have thus far, ever since completing a postgraduate Journalism qualification from London's City University just over thirty years ago - following a Modern Languages degree from the University of Manchester - and, without wishing to sound sanctimonious, he has always felt that, whenever possible, it is incredibly important for people with a disability who are lucky enough to be in employment - especially in their chosen professional milieu - to give something back! Moreover, he believes that it is also equally crucial to support people who happen to have any kind of disability to aspire to their ambitions and goals in terms of paid and pro [bono](#) positions as well as trying to encourage those who wish to take on greater responsibility entailing some form of leadership.

Vidar has been privileged to enjoy an association with the DRUK LAP over the past three years or so, after initially being invited by Katrina Morris - who has thus far been skilfully running the various courses - to speak with candidates as part of their leadership development. Subsequently, he has been delighted to have been asked by Katrina to return to provide similar in-put on an annual basis and he has also very much appreciated the chance to attend and take part in the Graduation Ceremony for LAP candidates each year - on occasions being honoured to present certificates!

In addition to having the pleasure of meeting those involved with the various recent programmes - including candidates, trainers and mentors - Vidar has always found the different presentations given by the various LAP participants on the day of their graduation really engaging and impressive, not least because - and not wanting to be remotely

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patronising, of course! - everyone involved seems to have developed his/her self-confidence which, hopefully, results in greater leadership potential? Indeed, based on more informal conversations with graduates during the various networking sessions, it is clear that they feel that they have, not only learnt a great deal during the course, but also increased their own self-esteem which has hopefully led to greater leadership opportunities for each of the individuals wishing to pursue this particular career route?

Monica - Independent Practitioner Occupational Psychology – Mentor

Hi, I am one of the LAP UK mentors. I have been mentoring for LAP UK for the past 2 years. I have experience with mentoring and coaching, as part of my previous job roles. I am occupational psychologist.

I decided to mentor for LAP UK, as I heard great things about the programme from previous mentees who were also my past coaching clients. I have worked, in my previous job roles, providing psychological support to a vast number of people with disabilities, and I am very sympathetic to LAP UK core values around disability and the support they give to disabled people. I was delighted to be part of the programme and be able to help with the mentoring. The programme has taught me a lot too. It has increased my understanding of the challenges people with disabilities face, in our society, and in the workplace.

LAP UK and DRUK staff have been very supportive of the mentors and mentees. We feel part of the family and are well looked after. Katrina is our main anchor and I love her motivation and enthusiasm about the programme, and her care of the mentees and mentors. She is a vital part of this programme, but also the support of the DRUK staff, senior management and LAP UK trainers are invaluable.

LAP UK has a good training framework for both mentees and mentors to develop their leadership and mentoring skills, and their understanding of the real challenges disabled person face. My experience with mentees has been an enlightening developmental opportunity. I have grown as a professional and as a person. My knowledge about disability related issues have increased and I have made great professional contacts. Some of them, I can now consider friends.

There are ups and downs in the process of mentoring someone, but I can say that it is always a learning experience that you get a lot out of. I think the programme as it stands, is great, and is helping people to grow personally and professionally, however it could also explore in more detail, the area of entrepreneurship, as an option for employment and fulfilment for a disabled person. Additionally, emphasise the importance of the whole person, where leadership skills could also be developed through volunteering and personal life projects.

Case A

My 1st mentee had depression and ME and often found difficult to manage these conditions in personal life and work. There were also issues around poor self-esteem and low confidence interlinked with her conditions. We worked together trying to find ways to increase self-esteem and confidence by reflecting on past achievements and others' comments, appraisals and feedback she received in work and personal life.

Using strengths-based approach slowly but surely, the mentee grew in confidence/self-esteem and was able to commit to actions that allowed her to safely challenge herself.



The better management of her health was achieved through various journal exercises to assess when she was doing too much, which activities energised her and which ones drained her from energy and affected her mood.

She learned on how to be more observant of her body signs and learned how thoughts can affect feelings and in turn affect how we behave.

She also became more comfortable with her disabilities in the workplace and in asking for reasonable adjustments where they were/when needed.

The mentoring process helped her to understand herself in more depth and helped her to flourish in the workplace.

Her final presentation at LAP UK showed a confident person ready for her next work challenge.

Since her participation in the LAP UK programme, she applied and secured a more challenging role within her organisation. She increased her work capabilities, confidence and self-esteem too.

Case B

My 2nd mentee encountered some difficulties at work when he was assigned into a particular project. The difficulties caused him a lot of stress in work and made him wonder about his work capabilities. He went for assessment and was diagnosed with dyslexia.

He since changed roles internally, received adequate work support and began to feel more confident about work again. However, the issues he had around his disability has caused a level of trauma and every now and then he feels insecure, feels stressed and doubts his work capabilities.

We worked together to build his confidence around his work capabilities by observing all the great achievements he has specifically contributed too in his workplace. His disability issues made him much more equipped to help others experiencing similar disability problems in his workplace and made him more disability aware in general, this got him involved in the Health and Wellbeing strategy at work.

We also explored all the reasonable adjustments and dyslexia support aids/tools he could utilise to make his work more efficient and to minimise the negative effects of his dyslexia.

We also explored what kind of work environment he thrives on and he now has a clear understand of that, and proactively seeks to be put in projects where the team works collaboratively and is supportive of one another.

He via the mentoring, realised his strengths, his challenges and ways to mitigate them. He feels more confident and optimistic about his future in the workplace.

Anonymous – Written by a LAP Mentor

I have a health condition which can get progressively worse if I don't monitor my health and wellbeing appropriately. It hasn't impacted on my work to date, as it's a silent condition, which has helped me understand that disability is not always a visible or obvious condition and therefore having an open mind, not making assumptions about people's abilities is very important as a mentor.

One of my mentees had a visual disability and communication was predominantly over the phone rather than face to face; this was very much a learning curve for me, as I had to gauge emotions and feedback through verbal communication only, rather than a combination of both. It meant that I really had to focus on asking the right questions and active listening.

Mentees with disabilities, have all the same issues that non-disabled people face, when it comes to management and career issues. I found that my mentees had career goals they set



at the start of the LAP programme, these were achieved through different pathways; from reassessing priorities, focusing on the here and now, building their confidence and even taking a career break!

I was privileged to have outstanding mentees who worked hard and never used their disability/health condition as a barrier to progress further; something employers I feel should appreciate more, as they can put up unnecessary barriers, through a lack of understanding and making assumptions. All my mentees had supportive managers, which made a big difference to their confidence and I feel crucial to their learning and development and career choices.

Having been a mentor and coach for several years it's been a fantastic learning experience for me to mentor delegates on the LAP programme as I have personally learnt more about people living with disabilities and the workplace trying to fulfil their career potential.

The LAP programme is unique as it offers delegates access to excellent bespoke training material incorporating up to date leadership/management resources together with opportunities for delegates to network with other people with disabilities or long term health conditions in a safe environment with support and guidance provided by Katrina and the mentors.

Paul - Blind Veterans UK – Case Study –May 2018

Through 2016. The organisation I work for embarked on a major project of restructuring service delivery for our membership. As part of this process a number of new roles were identified and created.

In my first attempt at moving into a leadership role I was unsuccessful in securing the position I applied for and instead was offered an interesting role within the new organisational structure. This however did not challenge me or offer me the opportunity to develop leadership skills. I ultimately turned down this sideways move, but was later approached by the interviewing manager who supported me to continue with my goals and suggested that I gain experience and develop my skills in order to secure a leadership position in the future.

As a result of this conversation, I applied for and successfully secured a place on the 2017-18 cohort of the DRUK Leadership Academy Programme. In June 2017. I was successful in securing a temporary leadership position within my then team. In November 2017. I started with the leadership Academy Programme and by February 2018 I had managed to negotiate a full-time position as a team leader.

While this course is set over a relatively short period of time, for me, the 'learning curve' was steep in places, which is exactly what I wanted. Learning about models of human interaction and how to get the best from diverse teams has been hugely valuable, learning that an impairment can be seen as an alternative way of looking at a challenge. Identifying solutions as part of a diverse team has really added to my confidence as an active participant within my organisation as it grows, develops and improves.

As part of the Programme I joined up with another student to work on a project researching the role of design in enabling workplace inclusion. Not only was I able to learn new skills



around structuring surveys and analysing data from my fellow researcher, and indeed new skills and perspectives from every member of my cohort through the “Module” days, I was also able to challenge my own prejudices around established ideas of work and the ageing population, which has enabled me to think more freely and creatively about the impact of inclusion and the importance of simply good design.

Through this course I felt well supported by both Katrina Morris, Leadership Academy Executive, along with a dynamic enthusiasm of the course facilitators and the admin staff in general. I would like to see more time set aside for students to work together on projects even if this meant the inclusion of an additional Module day. Time spent with my co researcher was so valuable as we live and work in different cities.

Personally on most occasions information was made available in accessible formats. However, I did not receive printed slides for the final module and the environment for the presentations, while immensely attractive took me unnecessarily out of my comfort zone as a vision impaired presenter.

On this last point, as an inevitable outcome of my course project, the new home of DRUK came under scrutiny and while it is a vast improvement on the location we endured for our first module at the CAN Mezzanine, the new offices open style and the actual space where learning took place presented challenges for those with hearing problems and is not the most sight loss friendly environment to work in or get to.

Looking into the future. I have already joined a working group to develop wider inclusion when redeveloping not only work spaces but all spaces within the multipurpose building I work in. I now work directly with the facilities manager on various projects to upgrade and broaden the accessibility of this environment, enabling it to remain fit for purpose for all into the future. This is running alongside my now established leadership role for which developing projects with an IT training colleague specifically around the inclusion of people with sight loss in the use of emerging technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR) and Mixed Reality (MR) is another growing project.

I am confident that being part of the Leadership Academy Programme through DRUK helped me to focus on and achieve the goals I set myself nearly 2 years ago. I believe that this programme has helped me build a strong foundation for my career development into the future.

Shona- Devon & Cornwall Police - Delegate

I asked to go on the Disability Rights UK/LAP course, because it looked really interesting, and I had talked to the previous delegate from my employers for last year. All the staff involved were really inspirational and helpful throughout the course. The external mentor sessions further reinforced practical learning undertaken on the course and offered advice on ways forward. To me the best part was talking to the other delegates, every one of them was a star and couldn't do enough to help if you needed it.

Lyndsey - Delegate – Devon & Cornwall Police (in Alliance Function with Dorset Police)



I came onto LAP as my current role (although not a Managers Position) requires me to take lead on Projects in an advisory position. I felt the skills I needed were limited and this course would assist me as a disabled employee to learn the required skills to take lead in my role. Personally and Professionally I had limited confidence in attending meetings as a leader due to my visible disability and how other can judge my preserved weaknesses and undermine my skills and advice. I wished to build my confidence in my own ability but also to learn new techniques to collaborate on new projects.

LAP gave me the chance to meet other disabled people who shared the same experiences and passion to prove ourselves as capable leaders. Learning skills in conflict resolution has provided me with the confidence to deal with highly emotive situations in an appropriate manner.

The skills and learning provided by the trainers and support by Katrina were top rate. Open discussions around the course content gave greater clarity for the learning and the take home message of the learning. Katrina also provided an ear to discuss issues with completing the Project work along with an understanding of the issues long term health conditions can cause in learning.

My highlights were in learning the psychology of being a leader and grasping techniques to resolve conflict during highly emotive situations.

I have recently applied for a position which is 5 grades higher than my current role. I hope to become the Corporate Equality, Diversity & Human Rights Officer for the Police Force and I am campaigning to change the culture within the Police Force in regards to managing staff with disabilities. We serve a diverse community and should be expected to have a diverse employee pool who can serve those communities appropriately.

Jacqueline – Keystone – Delegate

“It’s amazing what one can achieve with great support and encouragement and of course with the right attitude towards challenges. It’s never too late, even at nearly 50 years old. I have adjusted my way of thinking and have set my goals high. “

Mark F – Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) - Delegate

By attending LAP it enabled me to fine tune some of my leadership techniques and continue to develop as a good leader. I was fortunate to have already had quite a lot of management experience and had never found my disability a barrier to employment. Because of this I was able to support others with less confidence and re-enforce my previous learnings.

Catherine | Coach/Mentor and Consultant – Mentor

“The session was enjoyable and informative. I gained an understanding more about the LAP and its context and feel that there is a Good learning and support network”

Lorraine | FInstSMM Managing Director | PSTA Ltd

“I really liked the fact that previous mentors were there to give their experience, I also liked the fact that the slide deck was sent out post the day. The mentor mentee information pack was also good, Katrina was great at training us and getting everyone to engage”.

David | Foreign and Commonwealth Office - Mentor



“Being seated next to two mentors who themselves had a disability made me appreciate some of the challenges faced (from talking to them about their own work experience). I really benefited and enjoyed my experience mentoring and I have learnt a great deal”

Andy | KPMG LLP | Head of Procurement – Mentor

“I joined the LAP as a mentor in 2015 and was assigned my mentee in early 2016, I have found it to be incredibly rewarding, professionally and personally as the relationship with my mentee has grown and I have seen them blossom. I believe mentoring is a two-way street, that as a mentor, you learn as much as that of the mentee, you see different perspectives and it enables you to reflect personally as much as it does them.

What DRUK have created with the LAP is an incredible platform which allows people with disabilities to develop new skills, to grow personally and professionally to equip them further within their careers, enabling them to continue their upward progression or to break through the barrier(s) they had in front of them”.

Liz | CEO-Performance and Well-Being – Mentor

“Mentoring on the LAP programme was a great experience for me. My mentee was an absolute delight to work with - she engaged really positively with the whole process and we talked about all aspects of her work. It made me realise how rare it is, for those of us with disabilities to talk openly about the impact not just on work performance but career opportunities, relationships and sense of self. And how easy it is for other people to under-estimate the ability and potential of someone with a disability.

That’s why the LAP programme is so important - it’s not about disability, it’s about achieving potential by building skills, self-awareness and confidence and developing individual ways of managing any impact of disability”.

Ryan – FCO - Delegate & Mentor

‘I had a really enjoyable time on the Leadership Academy Programme. I particularly enjoyed the chance to work with a mentor with lived experience of disability. This gave an important added dimension that was different to my previous experiences of mentoring. I also really enjoyed the project work, which gave me a chance to contribute to the consideration of an issue that is key to the success or otherwise of people with disabilities or long-term health conditions’. The trainers were great at really getting us to look at leadership in relation to our disability and Katrina, who leads on the project was invaluable. Nothing is too much and she is always there to lend a helping hand or an ear! Great programme, thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

Danu – Devon and Cornwall Police

“Two years passed and I engaged in lots of coaching and support to manage my health in work and to try to be a better Policy Officer, but my confidence was much shaken, along with my health. When I saw the advert for the DRUK LAP I jumped at the opportunity. Again, I had two conflicting beliefs “How can I be a leader? I have brain fog and anxiety and fatigue half the time, how can I lead others?” But also “I have so much more to give. I want this opportunity to grow. Look how far I have come despite my illness. How much further can I go?”



I was exceptionally lucky to have extremely supportive managers and Head of Department who supported my application. I did not believe I would get a place, because I felt that someone else would be more deserving, and yes . . . more disabled! Having unseen conditions and masking them with all your energy, having to pay the cost in privacy, one starts to buy in to the belief that “you are not that sick”.

But I was given a place, the Deputy Head of the Department said she heard me squealing with delight from down the corridor!

So, this was the next big turning point for me.

Autumn/Winter is the worst time of year for me, because my SAD, anxiety and depression kicks in big time. So, I recall even getting to the first session in London being a real struggle for me. I remember arriving super early because of my anxiety, and drumming up all my energy to “fake it until I make it” and be present, despite feeling so ill. Everyone was so exceptionally warm, friendly and welcoming, I immediately relaxed. In the introductions, it became apparent that I was not the only person there who felt they were “not disabled enough” or worried that their healthy appearance made them somehow a fraud. What was incredible though was how every single person there, in complete authenticity, reassured everyone else that they had a right to be there. In the room was a wide range of people from a variety of organisations including diplomats from the Foreign Office, local authority staff, and nurses from various NHS trusts. Some held management positions already, where others were aspiring. Some had visible disabilities, others did not. But we were immediately a group of people encouraging and supporting each other. The icebreaker was incredibly meaningful: we talked about first impressions of each other. The impact of learning that others see you in a really positive way was both emotional and inspiring. What other of our assumptions would be challenged in this way on the course? Plenty!

The trainers were fantastic, again, so warm and welcoming. Katrina, the course director, is someone you will never forget: she makes you feel uniquely important, nothing is too much trouble for her and she always seems genuinely pleased to see you. The course content was invaluable. We learnt more than 20 different models and theories of leadership. Each session developed us holistically: we learnt leadership skills and practised them, discussing with our colleagues how we might use these new skill in our roles. But more than that, we coached each other and in so doing, coached ourselves, our confidence ever increasing. During the course, at each session, individuals brought along positive updates including many promotions into leadership roles. Unfortunately, my updates were less positive: despite progressing in my role beyond my own expectations and undertaking many development projects above and beyond my role and realising I could make the policy role my own and that yes, I could actually do this and do it exceptionally well in fact (my confidence having increased through the course) a Job Evaluation project at work had reduced my salary to below a level I could live on! This made finding my next role even more urgent.

The course had taught me to turn up the volume on that inner voice that had originally told me to take a leap of faith and try the EA role. So, when a Leadership Trainer job came up at work the job sang to me. Not only would it promote me back to nearly the same grade as I had been on and with more increments available, it kind of looked a lot like the job for me! It encompassed all my interests in one lovely looking job: developing others, mentoring, coaching, MBTI, Springboard, facilitating and leading groups, wellbeing, self-awareness and emotional intelligence. So, of course the two conflicting thoughts returned; one – how can I train other leaders when I am not a leader, surely someone else is far better qualified I would be mad to even apply? And two – this role encompasses all my life and work experience and



qualifications. I do have experience of leadership, and I do have many years teaching experience, gained during those boom and bust cycles of my illness that saw me undertaking teaching qualifications and voluntary and paid roles in the charity and further education sectors. Furthermore, I had a brand new leadership qualification from the Institute of Leadership and Management, gained through DRUK and was also studying police leadership on a Masters course. I could do this!

The grand finale of the course involved delivery of a project and presentation which I worked on with a colleague from Dorset police on barriers to promotion in the two organisations for people with disabilities and long-term health conditions. The findings of the project were very educational and the organisation were welcoming of the recommendations. The course had taught us to be advocates for disability and to be open about its impacts on progression and simply remaining in work. I watched my colleagues on the course grow from being shy of discussing their disabilities with their managers, to openly challenging senior leaders. The growth was tangible. For me, the growth was very personal. I observed myself going through many stages of confidence development, including a very low point where my depression and anxiety made working with my colleague on the project incredibly difficult indeed and nearly broke me. But instead, it made me! Thanks to the course and the project but also to the mentor support from the course which we undertook between each session and which was invaluable, I learnt so much about managing myself and managing conflict, through all the mistakes I made and all the things I did well.

I was interviewed for the Leadership Trainer role a few days before graduation. Luckily, the course had refreshed my understanding of delivering presentations and also reinforced my confidence that I could stand up and present (me who sometimes barely speaks up in meetings!), so when it came to the interview and the accompanying presentation, I took heart from the now familiar “take the leap of faith” inner voice, believed in myself, and – wow - landed the role! A few days later, I delivered the project presentation in London with my colleague as confidently as I could muster, and graduated. It was a whirlwind of reward for stepping out of my comfort zone and stretching myself. What I remember most from that hazy day surrounded by hugely important people from the world of disability rights, including broadcasting consultants, MBEs, parliamentary committee members and more, was the tangible group support from my fellow colleagues. I can still see in my mind’s eye the huge grins they gave me from the front seats as I delivered the presentation to these terrifying but smiling important people. My colleagues gave thumbs ups, hugs and business cards as we parted, massively pleased with each other for all we had achieved. Not once did anyone look at me and make me feel I didn’t deserve to be there because I “did not look sick” as so often do those people who do not have health conditions or disabilities and make glib remarks that can be so hurtful. Instead, we supported each other and willed each other along. I look forward with real pleasure to our alumni reunions that DRUK kindly arrange.

I would not have had the confidence to apply for my new role were it not for the Leadership Academy Programme. And yet, now I am here, three months on, I know that it was entirely the right move for me. My line manager just now expressed surprise that I had hesitated to apply, telling me I am “such a good fit” – and I really do agree with him! Isn’t that funny, me who really didn’t believe in herself (and who still sometimes has moments of self-doubt). I hugely value that I, through taking these plunges of faith, have found myself in an environment which supports me and sees my potential, and interestingly my health had improved a great deal in this role. I am surrounded by positive people delivering positive products and am able to share my learning with others whilst continuing to learn myself. I lead groups confidently (nobody would know I had anxiety!) and get good feedback. I peer support others with



disabilities and health conditions, and mentor women who face similar self-esteem challenges.

Thanks to a happy combination of that persuasive inner voice (which occasionally overrides my low self-esteem and enables me to take a plunge) along with the Leadership Academy Programme which gave me the tools and confidence to develop my career further, and an array of supportive and encouraging leaders at various points who believed in me when I did not, I have been able to overcome many challenges and battles and progress my career to a place where I can give back and help develop others. I love my job and can now, at last, see a really clear, Danu-shaped career ahead of me.

I would not hesitate to recommend the course. Please do not stand in your own way because you think you don't deserve a place. You do! And you will be surrounded by people who will happily reassure you that this is the case.

I would say, without wanting to be overly effusive, for me was life changing!"