



Press Release

Immediate Release

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'It has changed my life' – My Apprenticeship Journey

An aspiring nurse from Bishop Auckland has spoken about how apprenticeship opportunities are enabling him to reach his dream job despite being a dad as a teenager and leaving school with few qualifications.

This week it is National Apprenticeship Week 2025, which aims to highlight the exceptional work being done by apprentices and employers across the UK.

Stephen Weston is a senior support worker at Thornfield Grange, a Cygnet Social Care service in Bishop Auckland which supports adults with learning disabilities and/or autism.

He said the apprenticeship opportunities he has been given since joining Cygnet Social Care in 2021 have been "life-changing."

Having initially completed a Leadership and Management Apprenticeship in 2022, Stephen started his Advanced Nursing Apprenticeship in October 2024.

"I plan to become a Nurse and make positive impactful changes for the people we support," he explained.

"Cygnet not only changes the lives of the people we support and care for, but it also provides the opportunities for staff to further develop and change their lives too."

From a very young age, Stephen said he didn't know what he wanted to do work wise.

Having become a Dad at the age of 18, he went from one job to another, including marketing consultancy, sales and a kitchen assistant.

Explaining why he wanted to work in the care sector, Stephen said: "With having a family, I cared a lot. I cared a lot about my children, I cared a lot about people in general. I always went above and beyond to speak to friends to make sure everyone's okay and support them with whatever was needed.

"I gave a lot of support, respect, and just empowering my friends without even knowing."

In 2022, Stephen began the Leadership and Management Level 3 Apprenticeship. It was meant to be a one year course, but with Stephen not having GCSEs with C or above in English or literacy, he had to redo his literacy functional skills, so it took close to two years in total.

He said: "With an Apprenticeship, you're not doing extra studies in addition to your work day. It's all involved in your work, so you're not having to work additional hours. So that fits in really well with my family life.

"Through the one year course we did theory work and work booklets. We had online sessions to go through the theory side of things and towards the end of the Apprenticeship, we did professional discussions and I had to make a PowerPoint presentation for the exam board on what I've learned and how I've implemented that in the service."

Stephen has three children – two sons aged 13 and 11, and a 4-year-old daughter.

"It's really important for me personally to have that work-life balance," he said. "I don't have spare time, along with my working hours, to put towards education because I want to be there for my family.

"So going through an Apprenticeship with Cygnet Social Care really does help, and it helps the family, and I'm able to do the stuff I need to do, but I'm able to study at the same time, which is super useful."

Stephen has now begun his Advanced Nursing Apprenticeship through Cygnet.

"Nurses have always interested me in what they do and what they are able to develop with the support and care that support workers follow for the individuals that we support.

"I remember feeling like one day I would love to be in a position, not only doing the work that nurses do with the development of care plans, medication, etc, but also being that role model within the service and being able to motivate and uplift staff and give them opportunities.

"Since then, I've always wanted to be a nurse. I am forever grateful for the opportunities that have been given to me, to my family, to my children, to achieve me ultimate career goal."

On his advice to anyone considering an apprenticeship, Stephen said: "Go ahead and do it. If you're holding back because you feel like you don't have an academic background or you might struggle, then you'll never know about the support that you can get while going through the Apprenticeship.

"Doing an Apprenticeship has changed my life. It's changed my outlook. It's changed what I want to be. It's changed the support that I can give to other people. Most importantly, I think it's changed the view of what my children see. Having children young, it's easy to get stuck in a dead end job and not being satisfied with what you're doing.

“No matter what happens when you’re younger, no matter how old you are, no matter your academic background, or your personal situation, you can achieve something.”

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