



Mentor Carl Asibey with Thomas

HOW MENTORING HELPS EVERYONE TO GET AHEAD

The school mentoring scheme set up by Petrofac's Woking office benefits the pupils, the community, and the employees who take part. Photographs by Karen Robinson

When Carl Asibey heard that our Woking office was running a school mentoring scheme, he felt he had to be involved.

"I've experienced, first-hand, the difference having a mentor can make," he says, "In whatever guise they might come."

The 31 year-old Carl, who now works for Petrofac's ECS business in Woking, says his professional mentor played a significant role in his progression.

"When I began working with Petrofac a few years ago, I was assigned a mentor. I'd completed a Masters, but I knew that the real learning would begin when I got into the workplace. My mentor spent a lot of time coaching me, and helping me hone my

skills," he explains.

"So I wanted to give other young people that opportunity."

The Woking mentoring team was established by Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Coordinator, Lisa Lewis, who had been exposed to the power of mentoring herself during a community event.

"I thought that Petrofac could do something that really makes a difference," she says. "And by creating an in-house mentoring programme, it means we have the flexibility to do what we want to do."

Having reviewed Ofsted reports and met with the headmasters of a handful of schools, Lisa forged a relationship with Fullbrook – a local comprehensive.

"Fullbrook had everything we

were looking for in a partner school," explains Lisa. "The right approach, staff who are fully engaged in the mentoring concept, and – through its focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) subjects – alignment with Petrofac's Corporate Giving objectives."

Lisa canvassed her colleagues to form a team of volunteers, and structured the mentoring programme in line with the school curriculum. A leadership professional was commissioned to train the team and facilitate sessions with the pupils, ensuring that mentors develop their communication and interpersonal skills at the same time as the mentees.

This year, the team is working with a 20-strong group of 13 year olds who have chosen – with the involvement of their parents – to take part in the after-school scheme.

The decision to mentor pupils of this age, as they enter an important juncture in their academic career, was very deliberate. This year they will be asked to make subject choices which ultimately affect their future career paths. But according to Lisa, Carl and the other Petrofac mentors, the role of the mentor is not to distinguish between what's right and wrong for the mentee, but to help them make "considered decisions" by offering an outlet, challenging the thought process by asking questions, and providing encouragement.

"The pupils just want someone to listen to them," explains Carl. "We're not there



A mentoring session underway

to preach or judge. As mentors we all share a similar goal, to help our mentees believe in their ability to achieve something, whatever that might be."

Emma Thacker, also based in Woking, is another Petrofac mentor. She explains how helping others makes you feel good – about yourself and your company. "It's great to see the difference you can make to an individual student's life," she says. "It also helps you recognise the different kinds of skills that different kinds of people can bring to any organisation."

Increased employee motivation is just one of the benefits of the programme to Petrofac: the training and development that mentors receive is also taken back into the workplace. And, in an industry that faces a shortage of skilled people, the team say they are working to develop tomorrow's talent.

"Engineering is perceived as being hard to get into," says Carl. "And the rewards of an engineering career are not always apparent, so it isn't always an obvious choice. We're not there to persuade the pupils to become engineers, but if that's something they're interested in, we can use the benefit of our experience to tell them what it's all about."

Petrofac's Head of CSR, Gwen Folland says that extensive research on the business benefits of employee volunteering programmes such as the mentoring programme are well established.

"Not only does mentoring provide a personalised development opportunity for the mentees, but the mentors benefit too, by gaining competencies and skills across a broad range of business relevant areas," she adds.

"We are now working on a UK-wide mentoring programme; we have already established a programme in



Mentor Emma Thacker with Georgina

'The mentors benefit too, by gaining skills and competencies across business relevant areas.'

the London office and Aberdeen are considering developing a programme in the near future."

Woking mentors won the Ethical category in Petrofac's 2013 group-wide employee recognition programme – the EVE Awards – for adding to Petrofac's position in the community. "In fact," says Emma, "the students were as excited as we were to hear on the night of the EVE Awards that the scheme was among the prize winners."

For further information about the Woking Mentoring team, contact Lisa Lewis at lisa.lewis@petrofac.com

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