



## Siobhan Kavanagh – McLean Role Model Profile

Administrator and Personal Assistant to the Director of Health and Safety

### What is your role at Queen Mary? What do you do?

I have been working at Queen Mary for five years. I spent my first year working as an Administrative Assistant in Estates and Facilities department (EAF) until I moved over to the Health and Safety Directorate (HSD) to take the role as Administrator/PA to the Director of Health and Safety. My role is fast paced, varied and no two days are the same, which makes it interesting.

### What is your experience of being disabled at Queen Mary (or in your life more generally)?

I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety when I was 13 years old following a bereavement of an immediate family member. When I was 24 I was diagnosed with Dyslexia.

I knew whilst I was at school that I had a learning difficulty, however the only support my school could offer was replacing extra curriculum subjects with Life Skills lessons where four other 'struggling' students and I were advised we were not capable of furthering our studies (A Levels/College). Instead we were taught budget management, how to apply for work and what benefits we might be entitled to.

Fortunately, I have always been very determined and strong minded, therefore I went back to study as a mature student at the University of Westminster. It was during my studies I was diagnosed with dyslexia and the university provided help and support to assist me whilst learning which then enabled me to successfully complete my BSc Psychology degree.

### How does Queen Mary support you?

#### **Support I receive for dyslexia:**

Three years ago when I finally plucked up the courage to make the request to my previous Line Manager for reasonable adjustments, she was very supportive although she did not know how to go forward with this request. Therefore, I was set the task to discover how we do this. I contacted what

I thought would be the obvious departments: HR and ITS, but both were unable to provide any advice as reasonable adjustments were not in their remit.

Just as I was about to give up, I contacted a colleague in Student Services to ask her how students with disabilities were supported. Thankfully my colleague provided all of the guidance required and I now have all of the tools I need to assist me in my role.

### **Support I receive for anxiety and depression:**

Being diagnosed at an early age I have been fortunate to receive several counselling and CBT sessions where I learnt tools to manage my anxiety and depression. At the beginning of 2019 my father was diagnosed as terminally ill. I found this extremely difficult as I am my father's main carer. The tools I had previously learnt were not helping me, I was in despair and I knew I needed help. My GP referred me for counselling although the waiting list was approximately 6 months long. Thankfully my Line Manger was aware I was struggling and could not have been more supportive if she tried. I was provided with all of the information on resources Queen Mary offered and advice on how to apply for counselling via [Workplace Options](#). My counselling sessions started within 2 weeks and were extremely useful.

### **How could Queen Mary better support its disabled community?**

I believe Queen Mary needs to raise awareness and visibility to be able to support the disabled community. I am aware that Queen Mary offers tons of [support](#) to assist people in various ways, although on many occasions I only stumbled across this information by mistake, as it was not easily accessible. The fairly new [Staff Disability Network](#) is a huge step forward which gives disabled staff the opportunity to share experiences and offer advice and support to those in need.

### **Why do you want to be a disabled role model? Why do you think role models are important?**

Being a disabled role model at Queen Mary would be personally extremely rewarding knowing I may be able to encourage and assist someone to access the support they need. Disabled role models are important as throughout the years growing up with disabilities I felt very isolated and alone at times and I think it would have really helped having a role model to encourage me to seek support sooner.