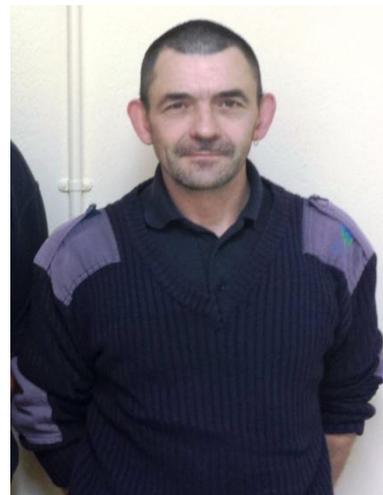


Case Study: Tony Price – Dŵr Cymru (Welsh Water)

When Tony Price moved to a different job within Dŵr Cymru (Welsh Water), he found he was struggling to cope with the demands of his new role. The situation deteriorated to such an extent that he was put under threat of disciplinary proceedings and he feared he would lose his job.

It was at this point that Tony turned to his union for help. His workplace union learning reps got involved, and they realised that there might be an underlying issue causing the difficulties. They arranged for Tony (pictured right) to have a diagnostic assessment which revealed he had a previously undiagnosed condition, dyspraxia. By getting this condition diagnosed, and providing support through arranging training and adaptations to workplace practices, the union has worked together with the company to help Tony to turn the situation around. Now Tony is flourishing at the company and has not only achieved a number of new qualifications but has also been promoted to a more senior role.



A deteriorating situation

Tony has been working for Dŵr Cymru, which is responsible for providing drinking water and sewerage services for over three million people in Wales, for around 16 years. The problems first began for him around three years ago, when he was moved to a new role at one of the company's water treatment sites near Abergavenny. Tony found that this new role required learning a lot of new information and many new processes and also keeping computerised records, using systems he was unfamiliar with. He found that despite his best efforts he was struggling to complete his work.

Unfortunately the situation worsened for Tony as some of the colleagues he was working with at the time did not understand why he was finding things difficult and were not very supportive. Matters escalated to the point where Tony was put under disciplinary proceedings with the potential end result that he could have faced dismissal. Understandably, this put him under a tremendous amount of stress. Tony became very depressed because he didn't see how there was a way that the situation could be resolved. He says, "I was getting a lot of grief and was on the verge of being sacked. I couldn't get the hang of things at all and thought I would just have to leave because I didn't know what to do." Like anyone would be when faced with such a situation, Tony was very anxious about the prospect of losing his job and livelihood, and he feared that his future looked very bleak.



The union step in to help

Tony realised he needed help to deal with situation, and he went and spoke to his workplace union representative, Andrew Brown to ask for some support. Andrew is also a trained union learning representative, and he suspected that that there might be an underlying issue that was causing Tony's difficulties. Andrew spoke to the lead union learning rep at Dŵr Cymru, Mike Wilson, and with Tony's permission they approached the company's HR department about the situation. Tony already knew that he had dyslexia, as this was picked up when he was at school, but the learning reps suggested that Tony should be put forward for a full diagnostic assessment. They thought that this may help to identify any other conditions that might be causing him difficulties and to see if there was any training that might help him.

Assessment and diagnoses

Tony attended the diagnostic assessment in Cardiff, and the results showed that as well as dyslexia, he also had the condition dyspraxia. Dyspraxia is a form of developmental coordination disorder that affects motor coordination skills. It is thought to be caused by a disruption in the way messages from the brain are transmitted to the body. It can cause problems planning, organising and carrying out movements in the right order in everyday situations. Dyspraxia can also affect articulation and speech, perception, concentration and thought. The condition is recognised by the World Health Organisation, but in many cases it remains undiagnosed. Research suggests that over half of people with dyslexia may also display features of dyspraxia, but it is often not picked up as there is a lot of overlap between many of the signs and symptoms of both conditions. For Tony, he finds that dyspraxia has a big impact on his memory and concentration, and one of his biggest difficulties was retaining verbal information and instructions. "If someone told me to do something I found I would forget it a few minutes later and couldn't remember what they had asked me to do" he explains.

As a result of the assessment, Andrew thought it would be helpful for Tony to receive some specialist training to help improve his IT, literacy and communication skills. He spoke to Mike Wilson, who as the lead union learning rep (ULR) at the company had experience of organising courses to meet specific learning needs. Mike's role is being jointly funded by Dŵr Cymru and the Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF) to enable him to work 3 days a week on promoting learning within the company, which has around 2800 employees at sites all over Wales and parts of England. Mike leads a team of 12 union learning reps from a number of different unions, and together they have promoted learning to staff throughout the company through meetings and a series of road shows. In the last few years, the team have signed up hundreds of staff on to essential skills courses. Between them, these learners have now achieved more than 800 qualifications. And through word of mouth, the reputation of the courses has grown and grown amongst the staff.

Training in a supportive environment

At the time of Tony's diagnostic assessment, Mike had just started organising training courses with a local training provider, Arfon Dwyfor Training (ADT). ADT are a not for profit organisation who are experienced in providing essential skills training for adults. Mike thought that their expertise in this area could help Tony. Mike has worked closely with ADT to ensure the training courses they provide are tailored to meet the needs of the staff at Dŵr Cymru, for example by getting the training adapted to incorporate the computer systems and bespoke software used at the company. Mike (pictured far right with staff from ADT) has also



consulted with staff and supervisors to find out how the courses can be best tailored to meet the needs of specific job roles. This means that as well as meeting the requirements of nationally recognised essential skills qualifications, the training ADT provide is also contextualised to make it as relevant as possible to the learners' every day work. This makes it easier for them to apply their new skills back in the workplace.

Mike liaised with ADT to make sure that Tony got the appropriate training he needed, incorporating literacy skills and company software into the IT training at the same time. He also made sure that Tony was put into a small group with other staff who were all learning at the same level. "This made it a more supportive environment to learn in" Mike explains. The cost of the training was funded by Essential Skills Wales, which

is a Welsh Government administered fund which aims to improve adults' essential skills levels. As well as liaising with training providers and identifying funding, part of Mike's role as lead ULR has also been to make the case to the company on the benefits of them supporting workplace training. Mike has been effective in convincing the company of the value of the training by showing how it can help raise staff morale and productivity. As a result they have agreed to release staff with time off to attend training and have also provided training rooms and equipment to facilitate the training.

Union-led learning boosts qualifications and confidence

Following Mike's negotiations, Tony was given time off work to attend 2 hours of training per week in work time, and the company also provided a training room for the group and a company vehicle for staff working off site to travel to the training venue. Despite having not enjoyed his experience of learning at school, Tony jumped at the chance to do the training. As Mike explains, "Tony took to it like a duck to water. With the support of his tutor Kerry, he has made great progress. Starting from Entry Level, he progressed through to Level 1 and he has now completed his Level 2. This is a fantastic achievement in just 2 years."

Tony agrees that the training has made a huge difference to him. He explains, "The course has helped me with my computer skills but has also helped me to improve my writing and spelling." He continues "As part of our work, we are required to keep a diary of activities at the site, and I have gone from writing just a couple of lines to writing a whole page!" Mike explains that the training has also given a huge boost to Tony's confidence and morale, "I can see the difference the training has made to Tony. He is now keen to learn new things and confident to take on new responsibilities. He is like a different man." Tony agrees, "I have really enjoyed the training, in particular I was proud of the health and safety project report that I wrote. The training has given me more confidence not only at work but also at home, where I now feel confident using the computer which I didn't before."

Learning more about his condition and doing the training has also helped Tony to identify learning strategies that work more effectively for him. For example, although he still has difficulties retaining verbal information, he now has complex verbal instructions provided in the form of photographs or pictures with notes which he can use to help jog his memory. The company management have been very supportive in terms of adapting workplace practices in this way to assist Tony in learning new workplace procedures.

Promotion and a positive future

In fact, Dŵr Cymru have been so impressed by the improvement Tony has made since doing the training that he has now been promoted to a new role at the company's sewerage works site in Monmouth. It is a credit to Tony's achievements that he has been trusted to take on a more senior role with greater responsibility. In his new role, he is responsible for overseeing the running of the whole sewerage works at the Monmouth site. It is genuinely inspiring to see what a difference the training has made to Tony, who is now feeling so much more positive about the future and is really enjoying his new role, "You couldn't ask for a better job than this" he says. He is keen to continue with his training and with the ongoing support of the company is still attending weekly classes to continue improving his skills.

"I would honestly recommend the training to anyone" Tony says. "For me it has been great. I didn't feel that I learnt much at school but I've learnt so much on these courses and I've enjoyed it. My spelling, writing and IT skills have really improved." He explains "My teacher, Kerry, has been really helpful and given me extra support when I needed it." Tony is also very grateful for the support of his learning reps Andrew and Mike, whom he feels have helped him to turn things around. "They stuck their necks out for me," Tony says, "as a result I've not only kept my job but got a better job. I'm very grateful for all they've done to help me." Boosted by his success, Tony is keen to keep on with his learning and to see how far he can go. "I've got two

certificates now” he says, “but I want to keep going with my training. Now I’ve started learning again I’m not going to give up!”