

Anthony's story

My CCM story starts with a single tweet. I had recently left my full-time job in the City and was thinking about local opportunities when I noticed a reference to Chelmsford's annual volunteer festival (VolFest) which was soon approaching. I decided to go along and met with several charities, all of whom seemed very keen to get more help! Of course, one was CCM...

After several months break, visiting family abroad and doing endless must-get-round-to-that jobs, I picked up the phone to CCM and arranged a visit. After all, I had picked up plenty of other contacts at VolFest if it didn't work out... I shouldn't have worried. I was welcomed as if our chat had been just the previous week, and we picked up the conversation exactly where we had left off. Already, I was feeling very welcome!

After two 'taster' sessions I had no doubt that CCM was the place for me. The warm and caring environment, the tenacity and humour of the students and the cheery positivity of the staff had me hooked. I even managed to help serve the students a full set of teas and coffees without a single complaint so things were looking good!

Now, I'm part of the Monday team and it's a lot of fun. When we split into groups, I have my own team of six students which means I get to know them really well. It gives me huge satisfaction to watch them each develop their skills and confidence in different ways. They also keep me on my toes, though, which is no bad thing!

I have also become a trustee which gives me an additional perspective on CCM's activities. Our trustee board (also volunteers) has been equally welcoming and the breadth of their expertise and perspective makes for a formidable team of which I am very proud to be a part.

When COVID-19 forced us to close Mencap Centre temporarily, I partnered with Grace and our tutors to set up the Virtual Academy. This was one of the best collaborative efforts I've been part of, professionally or since. The way everybody pulled together, sharing knowledge, helping out, going above and beyond, and working with a single purpose was quite inspiring. **I will never forget our first week.** Many of our students were not quite sure what to expect so the look on their faces when they first saw their friends and chatted with them online (after two weeks of lockdown) was quite humbling and instantly made all the hard work worthwhile.



And the great thing is there have been lots of moments like that. One day I was working with a student who was determined to solve something for himself but just couldn't get there. I suggested we stop for tea break, think about something else, and come back to it afresh. We did, he figured it out straight away, and made a point of finding me at the end of the day to thank me. Absolutely priceless, and left me in bits!

I often think about that tweet; it changed everything. I've learned so much about LD and CCM's students in particular, the power of positivity and overcoming personal challenges, and just how much you can get back from putting a little in. And we've had a few laughs. Actually, make that a lot of laughs. Thank you, CCM.

“ Volunteering is very rewarding and you will be amazed how many ways you can help, even if you only have a few hours to give. ”