



Passport to your future

Cyril's Story

Cyril is presently working at Ightham Mote

My name is Cyril. I was born in West Africa. I lost much of my sight while I was young, gradually getting worse.

The reception at Ightham when I went to train and work there was indeed a very friendly, engaging one. Right away I was accepted into the fold and made to feel as if I had been there a long time with them. I felt part of the team already and I got to work immediately, pitching in with ideas, aiming to improve all the time, the visitor experience which was indeed my role on the property. In the past year I've improved on communication verbal and written, how to learn and apply statutory rules concerning my place of work, the importance of proper presentation and how to play a role in a strong team. These are all valuable things to learn for any future career prospects, and it was my privilege to learn them on the Passport to Your Future Project.

The Property Manager Experience

Bernadette Gillow

The overall experience- how was it?

Very positive, challenging, exciting, stretching, collaborative, emotional, inspiring, at times (very) frustrating administratively in terms of setting up appropriate systems and support, but overall absolutely wonderful and productive in terms of outcomes, experience, impact on the team.

The benefits to the trainee?

- Opportunity to really embed and work with a very diverse and extensive property team. Ightham Mote has *"everything but the sea"*.
- The trainee worked with house staff, conservators, room guides, admin staff, retail and catering teams, visitor welcome, rangers, gardeners and of course visitors of every age.
- To experience life at the property throughout an annual cycle from hectic Bank Holidays to winter estate walks, from training courses and Council visits to strategy meetings to discuss new portfolio sites.
- Much "shadowing" undertaken to give deep insight and to help Cyril decide areas of future work/interest/career moves.

The benefits to the property:

- A very productive piece of work taking forward the Scathes wood project which carries additional validity, credibility and relevance given Cyril insight, experience, knowledge and networks.
- Collaboration and challenging assumptions.
- Team approach to support, including staff and volunteers.
- Additional awareness training.
- Work done for other properties including Knole audit.

What worked well for you?

Flexibility of extending the scheme to suit the candidate and property needs. Once the Support Worker was in place and the required specific technology enhancements (both of which took far more time and resource than anticipated!), this freed up the property team from extensive day to day involvement and enabled Cyril to really "fly". Passport specific training roll out which covered wider NT aspects.



What I have learnt:

1. To communicate with a purpose. Working on Visitor experience at Ightham Mote, I have had to work on what was a constantly improving skill that was interpersonal communication, whether to staff or customer. I am not, nor have I ever been a man of many words, but this particular project has helped me to harness that particular skill and by doing so improve my work and social experiences in and out of the work place.
2. It has given me a different perspective on English history and cultural. I was always a lover of interesting facts, historical trivia and just learning about a place. So coming to work at Ightham was a dream come true. My training on this project not only taught me interesting things about how some people lived during different periods of history, but taught me just how to relate what I have learned as well. Being on National trust properties was a new and wonderful experience for me; the atmosphere transporting me back to different historical periods. I am now more interested in learning.



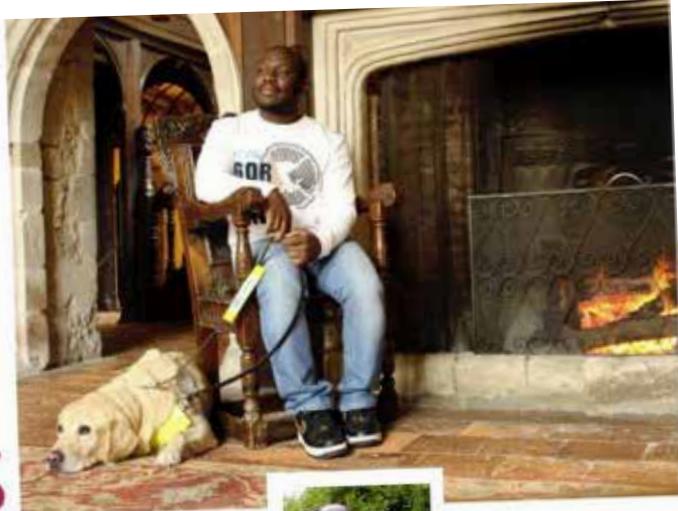
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PEOPLE

A hot chocolate with...

Cyril Thomas



Cyril and Frank in the Great Hall at Ightham Mote. 'Winter and early spring are my favourite seasons here,' says Cyril. 'When it's cold the acoustics are clever and they're no soundwood in the room so smell stronger.'

Cyril completed the Trust's training course 'Passport to Your Future' in September and now volunteers at Ightham Mote twice a week, with his guide dog Frank. He tells Debbie Schrieber about his plans and why he loves giving guided tours

What is 'Passport to Your Future'?

It's a hands-on training scheme based at Trust places. It's aimed at people with disabilities, the unemployed, educational underachievers and those from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds. It arms you with the skills needed to work in the heritage sector. There are four courses: house and collections, managing historic parkland, managing historic gardens and visitor experience. I did the visitor experience course at Ightham Mote, in Kent, which I loved, as it allowed me to get under the skin of the property. I got to do everything from running events and guided tours to improving access in the woods and serving customers in the shop.

What were you doing before?

I worked at a restaurant where all the waiting staff are visually impaired and customers dine in the dark. I also volunteered at Rockingham Community Centre as an audio technician. My manager there spotted the opportunity at Ightham and immediately thought of me because I love history.

What did you enjoy most about the course?

The opportunities I've been given and the people I've been able to work with: staff, volunteers and local community groups. I even took the Trustees and the previous Director-General on a guided tour. I love running guided tours. Most people use a

script, but I do it differently. I lost the majority of my sight as a child in Sierra Leone (I can still tell the difference between light and dark), so I experience historic houses in an other way. Many people just look, quickly moving through the rooms. I make them stop and use their other senses. Listen to the water outside, smell the oak and stone, notice the acoustics and the feel each room has.

Ightham has a lovely sense of history - it's a 14th-century manor house, yet it feels homely. The rooms aren't too big or grand. It's peaceful and calming. It has an energy from the past that seems to bring people together, and it's a sociable place to work.

What does Frank think of Ightham?

He loves it - it's like his holiday home. But he felt comfortable from the start. On our first day, some volunteers took him for a walk while I was in a meeting and he leapt into the moat!

What are you most proud of doing?

Improving access in the gardens and on the estate as well as in the house. This, together with creating scented gardens, for example, brings benefits for all visitors, particularly the elderly and young children. It's something I'm passionate about. But I think more could be done in terms of outreach - to involve local communities and school groups, especially at larger properties. Free events and open days would be great.

What are your plans now?

Completing this course has given me choices I didn't feel I had before. I'm thinking about going back to university or becoming self-employed and helping visitor attractions become more accessible. I'm going to carry on volunteering here for a while though - I've fallen in love with Ightham Mote, and I feel a sense of belonging. But whatever I do next, I'll be a member of the Trust for life.

Learning on the job



Passport to Your Future is a 4.5-year, HLF-funded project that launched in 2010. It provides work-based training placements at properties across the UK. The aim is to increase the amount of skilled workers in the heritage industry by recruiting those who will benefit most: the long-term unemployed, people with disabilities, educational underachievers and people from BME communities. The Trust is working with job centres, charities and other partners. With a year left to go, it's already exceeding its targets - over 80 per cent of the trainees have gone on to get jobs in the heritage sector.

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