

Leonie talks to DYW about life as an apprentice plumber

MEARS BACKGROUND

Mears employ over 15,000 people from all over the UK. Involved in both social housing maintenance and care for the elderly and disabled, Mears are a company who put the communities they serve at the centre of everything they do. This vision and approach is based on developing outstanding partnerships with clients, tenants, communities and employees. 2018.



LEONIE'S EXPERIENCE

It was this approach, coupled with Mears company values of teamwork and support that got us sitting down with 4th year plumbing apprentice, Leonie and General Manager, Gerry. Nearing the end of her 4 year apprenticeship, 21 year old Leonie opened up to us about her experiences as a female plumber and how she found herself in the role. After attending Lenzie Academy, and coming from a family background in construction, Leonie told us how it all came about. Originally wanting to become a Police Officer, she took advice on board to gain some life experience before applying. Talking with her uncle he joked that she should apply for a plumbing course at College, although tongue in cheek, it got Leonie thinking. After some deliberation she went to her parents for advice. They thought it was a great idea and encouraged Leonie to go for it and that's just what she did.

She soon found an apprenticeship with a local company, but not long into her apprenticeship was made redundant. This is where Mears enter the story. Mears as a company look to adopt apprentices who have been unfortunate enough to have lost their job at smaller companies and this is what happened in Leonie's case. The current contract at Mears has a 98% retention of Apprentices, so you could say it was a no brainer for Leonie based on that alone! Although, after speaking with Gerry and Leonie you can see it's about much more than that. Gerry went on to tell us all about Leonie and the business. Telling us that she isn't only a competent plumbing apprentice but also described as "one of the best in class" in her college class. The relationship between Gerry, Leonie and other members of staff is clearly a good one and it's evident that Leonie is comfortable in her working environment which is testament to both Mears and Leonie as its common knowledge that you don't get too many females in construction!

WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION

Gerry went on to tell us more about a push from Mears to try and attract more women into the industry. It was all really encouraging stuff and was great to hear that Leonie has been involved in several community events (some of our own DYW events!) with Mears in an attempt to reach young girls and get them asking questions. She was also at a conference down South based all around women in construction. Leonie told us about how she found her first few days at Mears "terrifying" however she then described herself as "lucky" to have been placed with some great teams where she feels valued and loves coming to work, so much so she no longer wants to join the Police and hopes to look into the possibility of moving into management.

We asked Leonie about her hobbies, one of her biggest is baking amazing cakes (see for yourself). From plumbing to cakes- talk about opposite ends of the spectrum- although you could argue there is a precision to both! It was at this stage Gerry added that there is a common misunderstanding from young people about the skill set involved within plumbing. He told us that to get more women involved they need to start at grass roots level and show young people what a career in plumbing entails and can lead to. With Leonie going out to community events, meeting school pupils and attending women in construction conferences she's certainly doing her bit. Confirmation of that would be her younger sister now looking to be a plumber too.



There is no doubt a mass of work still to be done to convince more women to pursue a career in construction but with apprentices such as Leonie sharing her story and with supportive, inclusive companies such as Mears, the path is certainly being highlighted.

DYW

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