

# Career change opportunities in construction

EDGE is the jobs and skills partnership that works with Alconbury Enterprise Campus and businesses across the region to help them find the staff they need and give local people the skills to fill those vacancies.

The construction industry has a wide range of career opportunities, not just for apprentices and school leavers, but for all ages and abilities including people looking to retrain having started on a different career path.

Community charity Groundwork East runs an employment and skills project called *Green Team*, which takes groups of volunteers from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences and provides training in landscaping and horticulture whilst improving local community spaces.

The Spring 2019 Green Team, funded by Urban&Civic and EDGE Construction Skills Centre, saw the transformation

of the Margaret Wright Community Orchard in the Abbey Ward. Over the course of 14 weeks, the team learned new skills and constructed a paved disabled access pathway, a raised stage area, two ponds, a rockery and three shed platforms as well as constructing four large raised planters.

Not only did the team gain valuable practical experience, they were also awarded qualifications to help boost their job prospects: City & Guilds Level 1 Diploma in Practical Horticulture and City & Guilds Level 1 in Employability.

At the end of the course, the volunteers were given mock interviews to help build their confidence and ensure they

were prepared for the types of questions they would be faced with in real life interview situations. Included on the interview panel was Nick Archer from Encore Estate Management, which is responsible for the maintenance and management of green areas and public spaces in developments such as Alconbury Weald.

Nick said: "I was really impressed by the volunteers, their attitude and resilience, and what they achieved as part of the Green Team. It was great to see how far they had come from their first days on the course to the mock interviews at the end. We had opportunities at Encore following the course and are delighted that Andrew has joined us. He is working as part of a mobile unit covering a number of sites across Cambridgeshire and is doing a fantastic job."

In recognition of their hard work, Andrew and his colleague in the mobile unit were awarded Employees of the Month in September 2019.



## Andrew's story

Andrew worked in the IT industry for over 20 years and became unhappy with his situation at work, his personal life and his health. He decided to quit his job and use his savings to take eight months off to work on his mental and physical health, losing over nine stone in the process.

His diet played a huge role in fixing his health problems, and during his weight-loss journey he spent more time outside, which made him realise how much he missed being outdoors and realised he wanted to spend every day working outside.

Having exhausted his savings, he needed to get back into work and although he didn't have any practical experience or knowledge of landscaping or horticulture, he was prepared to learn.

When he saw the Green Team advert for a 14 week volunteering opportunity that would provide practical training and qualifications, and wouldn't affect his benefits, he jumped at the chance.

He met Andrea and Mike from Groundwork in the JobCentre, where he was given his first job interview in over 20 years. During the interview he realised that even though he had improved his health and could do the physical work, he was still a shy and anxious person that hated talking about himself.

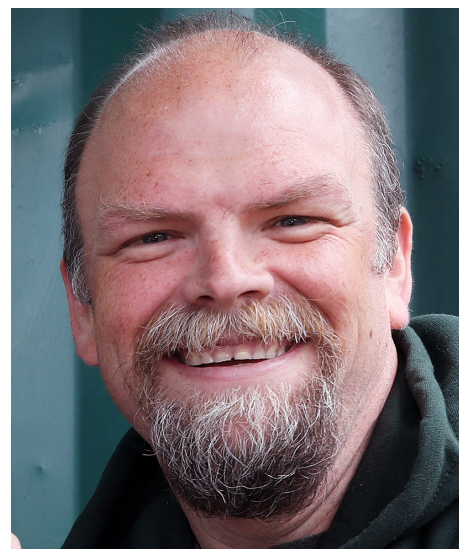
By the end of his time on the Green Team his abilities and confidence had been significantly improved. In his presentation at the end of the course, Andrew said: "I have learnt practical skills in both horticulture and landscaping, and so much about myself and what I can do, both for myself and for others. I can mix concrete, lay paving, take cuttings, dig holes and line ponds. I can create rockeries from nothing, remove turf, plant shrubs and identify those shrubs. I can mow and trim. I can be a helping hand, a leader or a shoulder to lean on. I can be someone to play games with, a friendly ear and a great team member.

"I am so glad I stayed to the end, I have learnt so much from being a part of this team and I don't just mean the course work. I've learnt that I like to get stuck in, why wait when you can do something now. I've learnt that you can talk to people about your problems and that it does help!"

Since joining Encore Estate Management, Andrew is enjoying the challenges of his new career: "I am really enjoying working outside and travelling around as part of a mobile unit. Starting a new career at the bottom has been a real eye opener to the operation of a business I knew next to nothing about. I had spent almost 20 years managing staff and clients and now I am the one being

managed, which takes some getting used to."

Andrew is continuing his studies towards RHS Level 2 qualifications in Horticulture (Principles and Practical) and is looking to acquire his spraying licenses (PA1 & PA6) either through training supplied by Encore or through external funding sources to advance opportunities in his new career.



Torie Denny-Morley, Skills Lead for Urban&Civic, said: "We have sponsored a number of Green Team initiatives and fundamentally agree with their practical and inspiring approach, which provide support, training and access to local opportunities. We have seen the benefits as participants have completed the course; building skills and confidence; transforming local spaces and communities; and being offered jobs with contractors they have worked alongside or been impressed by their hard work and determination.

"We're delighted that Andrew has been appointed by Encore and is flourishing in his new role."