

## **My PA story**

I began working as a PA about a year and a half ago, for a disabled lady in Sheffield. On a typical day, we travel to the her office together and I assist her with personal care needs throughout the day such as having lunch, assist her with some of her work admin including booking travel, expenses, and some emails . Before I found this job, I had previously been studying abroad in Sweden for a year and was unsure what to do with my time when I got back. I saw the job advertised through a friend on social media who was about to leave the post.

I had no real previous experience with this sort of personal care work (I hadn't even had much valuable office experience), so was unsure of my suitability, however when I went to the interview it became clear that my employer wasn't looking for the world's greatest admin staff! The most basic requirements were that we get along on a one to one level, that we are going to be able to communicate well, I had a positive attitude and that I could be flexible and could offer some overnight work and occasional travel. Everything else I was able to learn on the job.

My employer is a fantastic communicator, so learning on the job has been pretty easy. During the first few months, she told me exactly how to do everything from her make-up to how she likes her scrambled eggs and is still happy to remind me if I forget anything (which I do sometimes). You have to remember that when you are acting on someone else's behalf, you can't possibly be expected to know everything about how they want their coffee or their hair doing, and that PA work will be completely different depending on the person you are supporting. Communication skills are key to this job role, as you can't make assumptions about how something should be done. Your way might not be their way!

I have been sent to formal training days including note taking, first aid and moving and assisting which has been really valuable, and my employer is open to my requirements for further training. Due to the varied nature of the job, my role expands beyond office work and I occasionally support my employer at personal events such as meals out with friends, shopping trips, sports activities and even support on holiday. I really enjoy a job that changes frequently, and I certainly enjoy being paid to bounce on a trampoline!

The job works really well around the rest of my life, as I am self employed as a dancer and musician the rest of the time. My official working hours fall Monday- Wednesday and often incorporate nights. This allows me to clock up paid hours in a short time, and I have the rest of my week free to pursue other employment opportunities. I really value working closely with my employer as there is direct line of communication for both of us. For example if I need to take annual leave, or a personal phone call during office hours, I can speak directly to my employer about those needs. I think this allows for a more personal and flexible working relationship, where my employer understands my needs and does her best to fit around me. My employer also has several PAs working for her at any one time, which makes finding cover much easier for everyone when people are unable to work.

I think PA work suits a lot of people's working lives these days. I see many more people becoming self-employed, having several jobs or moving between jobs more frequently than people used to do. It suits student life brilliantly as many PA jobs involve early morning/evening shifts in people's homes, which fits around study hours. It also feels like there is more to be gained by having a positive relationship between employer and employee (the whole thing is based on being able to get along with each other), which generally makes the working situation much more pleasant than any other jobs I've had!

Lucy.