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# Developing resilience in the workplace - WAM Resilience Day 2019

## Introduction

The WAM Programme is the transition to employment initiative of AHEAD. It offers graduates with disabilities the benefit of a minimum 6 month, paid and mentored work placement (internship) with high profile employers. In addition to providing graduates with valuable work experience, WAM works alongside employers to upskill them in best practices in the recruitment of people with disabilities.

WAM was established in 2005 and to date has placed over 450 graduates with both private and public sector employers.

## Identifying the importance of resilience

In recent years, a common theme to calls coming into the WAM office from graduates and managers alike is resilience and coping with stress in the workplace. Whether it be managing the impact of a disability in work, the stress of a new environment and the return to full-time employment or dealing with the day to day pressure of work – it seems today's graduates have the technical skills but many need guidance on the competency of resilience. The WAM team decided to be proactive and developed a one day workshop for our graduates who were currently on placement on the topic of resilience.

## The event

On 4th of November 2019, 36 graduates who were either already in work or just about to start came to the Aisling Hotel for a full day workshop covering resilience as a competency, the WAM mentor programme, personal achievement records and performance reviews and positive action planning.

Jointly facilitated by the WAM and GetAHEAD team the day began with the participants brainstorming their experience of '**stressors**' in the workshop. Topics such as commuting, managing disclosure, deadlines and fast-paced work environments emerged. This warm-up exercise got people talking and helped to foster the feeling of a safe space where participants could share experiences and concerns in a space that was free of judgement.

Graduates were asked to assess themselves on the skill of resilience and time management, after which delegates expressed the difficulties of analysing themselves accurately. The group discussed the possibility of getting outside opinions to help assess their skillset, including friends and family, as well as managers in a work context.



The workshop also covered how to do personal action plans, a very useful tool that can assist with professional development and career planning both in and after their placements. Graduates were then asked to think about one short term goal they wanted to achieve in the next 6 months, and then work out and document the steps (activities) necessary for them to achieve their goal, including realistic timelines.

As well as group exercises where participants interacted with one another and shared ideas, the day allowed time for private self-reflection.

From our feedback, one of the most popular sections with graduates was the session on how to get the most out of the WAM mentor programme, which included a video of previous WAM graduates sharing their experience of working with a mentor. After this, we explored how to get the most out of mentoring, and it was agreed that the reflections they made during the workshop could actually be used during mentoring sessions to help with setting career goals and professional development discussion with mentors. One graduate remarked that it was **'Interesting to hear other people's experiences and thoughts, I enjoyed the videos shown and learning more about the role of mentors'**.

Closing the day WAM encouraged graduates to network with each other and learn from each other's experiences. According to the workshop evaluation, 85% of graduates felt they a better understanding of how to manage stress at work, with one attendee saying **'I would like to thank AHEAD and all presenters for organising this workshop. I learnt quite a lot and this will help me in both my professional and personal life.'**

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## **Hannah Kelly**

Programme Manager at NStEP

Hannah (she/her) is the Programme Manager at NStEP (National Student Engagement Programme). Previously, she was Student Engagement Officer at AHEAD. Her role involves working to include the student voice in the work of AHEAD and creating inclusive environments for disabled students in extracurricular settings. As part of her role, she was the co-founder and now coordinator of the USI/AHEAD Students with Disabilities Advisory group. Now, as the Programme Manager at NStEP I hope to further the conversation around engaging students and building meaningful partnerships with all students. Always looking through the lens of accessibility, intersectionality and belonging. Outside of her work with NStEP, Hannah is a volunteer with Dublin Lesbian Line and is a public speaker, particularly in the areas of intersectionality and inclusion.

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