Changing lives: Iyma finds her route on Stratford Road heritage project

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The first tentative steps into the professional world can be a daunting experience, but Iyma Atiq found hope with a volunteer role.

“It was a rollercoaster ride of emotions, I didn’t know if anything was going to work out. I had rejection thrown in my face time and time again,” says Iyma Atiq from Birmingham.

Iyma, 22, had studied Media and English at the University of Wolverhampton. She wanted to contribute her time to something she felt passionately about, such as social issues and cultural heritage, but it proved difficult to find work.

She just needed an opportunity to gain some experience and skills so that she could stand out from the crowd.

“After three years of studying and working hard, I wasn’t going to give up,” she recalls.

Iyma’s determination paid off when she found a voluntary researcher role at a local cultural organisation, Sampad South Asian Arts, working on an HLF-supported project called My Route.

Delving into the past

The project charted the history of Birmingham's dynamic and multicultural Stratford Road from the 1940s to the present day, something Iyma felt was close to home: "As a second generation British-Pakistani I've always been fascinated by the stories my uncle told me about growing up in Britain."

Iyma went for a meeting with Sampad and from there she became part of the team: "I began coming into the office twice a week, using a Mac and a spare desk to research things that would be of interest to the community."

Iyma decided to contribute to the project by putting together timelines of the businesses and places of worship on Stratford Road from the 1960s to the present day. Alongside this she also attended archiving workshops run by Sampad at Birmingham Central Library.

"I found it fascinating to hear about people from minority ethnic communities doing their bit and working in jobs that would have been difficult to get at the time," says Iyma. "My grandparents worked for years in tough manual jobs so it reminded me of them."

Paving the way to the future

Inspired by the stories she uncovered on the project, and armed with a new set of skills and networking opportunities thanks to volunteering, Iyma embarked on a job hunt once again.

This time she secured a year-long media and communications internship at her university. Since then Iyma has found a job in a similar role for a social housing organisation in the West Midlands.

"Working on My Route was an amazing experience and I'd do it again. I'm really grateful for all the support I had from Sampad and HLF," she says.

"Thanks to people who play the National Lottery, I got the opportunity to work on the My Route project and gain new skills in a supportive team, it had a positive impact on my life that I needed at the time."

Iyma shares some words of encouragement for people trying to find their first job: "Having been through what many people are going through today, I can say that if you want something with all your heart, you will get it. Whatever you do, don't lose hope and don't give up."

Iyma at the My Route exhibition at the University of Birmingham

Efallai y bydd gennych chi ddiddordeb hefyd mewn ...

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