

# Shona's Story

The support I've been receiving has been invaluable.

I'll be honest. Before accessing YMCA Employment Services, I was hesitant to reach out due to some preconceived notion that I would be another number rushed through the system, no matter where my own psychological boundaries lay. I felt broken.

However, Laurene completely eliminated those thoughts from my mind from day one. What she offered me goes above and beyond anything I expected.

To put things into perspective: I've spent my entire adult life convincing myself that I "couldn't" succeed, and until now I believed it. It has been a process, but Laurene has been a guide on my road to rewiring the mentality that kept me backpedalling in excuses that said I couldn't progress. It's powerful how much impact those phone calls each week has had on my psyche. Even the seemingly small things, such as touching base to give words of encouragement, have the power to make a big difference for people like me.

I've always wanted to go to school for my social service worker degree, but my own anxiety and mental health have crippled me in the past (perhaps that's why I'm drawn to the career in the first place). It would have probably been easier for Laurene to try place me in any position that would take me, but instead—for the first time in my life—I'm being supported in not only finding the resources to proceed, but in finding confidence and productivity.



Even when I start to fall back into old psychological patterns, I'm pushed to aim high, and reminded that I can fulfill my goals.

I suppose what it all boils down to is just how meaningful it is, to me. I have the assistance of someone who, besides helping me with my employment search, sees me and hears me as a person faced with unique circumstances. This flexibility and compassion give me the encouragement I've really needed to finally break down the barriers I've placed on myself for too long.

Let's face it: I'm probably the last person that somebody in the field of job placement wants to deal with. It's not a part of Laurene's job description to help me navigate my negative behavioural patterns, or to be my personal cheerleader for obtaining a post-secondary education. Especially when you consider that all of this is on top of helping somebody with social anxiety, and little work experience, navigate the world of job searching.

Instead, I'm offered a truly personalized experience, and I'm given a lot more patience than what, I think, most would give. I've probably overshared a bit, but I just wanted to express; it is people like Laurene that truly make a lasting impact on people's lives, the ones that empower people to overcome their difficulties and grow.