



ST. ANDREW'S RESOURCE CENTRE

Published to celebrate the

# 4,000th JOB PLACEMENT

from the St. Andrews  
Resource Centre  
Construction Skills Project





# Dermot McCarthy,

Chair, St Andrews Resource Centre, September 2026

St. Andrews Resource Centre has been serving the community of the south inner city for more than 50 years. It has changed and developed as the needs of the community have evolved, but what has not changed is the philosophy of care, support and solidarity that guides our approach, our belief in people, their dignity and potential, and our commitment to a holistic response to the needs of individuals and the community.

Unemployment and helping people to develop their skills and achieve their potential has been part of the Centre's programme from the beginning. Training and education, connecting local people to local job opportunities and removing barriers to progression are a key part of our story. That was the context in which Jim Hargis and his team developed the simple concept of connecting local people looking for work with the many opportunities for employment in construction in the inner city. This simply wasn't happening on anything like the scale that was possible and necessary so St. Andrews began a pilot project to equip people with the basic skills and confidence to access well-paid jobs on their doorstep. The philosophy was to keep it simple, with easy access to everyone who was interested in taking advantage of the opportunity and providing them with practical and feasible training that provided a clear pathway to success, while introducing potential employers to people who could make a real contribution at work, even if it sometimes looked like taking a chance with them.

Even simple ideas require partners to make them happen. We were fortunate to have early encouragement from Dublin City Council and the Department of Social Protection and truly fortunate to find in Dublin Port a partner with the vision to put their facilities generously at the disposal of the Centre to enable this idea to become a reality, and to continue to support the project as it expanded its scope and footprint. Without that early and continuing support from Dublin Port the project simply could not have happened.

It would be wrong to say it was a smooth journey: in truth there were many obstacles on the way to getting the programme beyond a pilot and established on the scale to which it has developed. New ideas, sometimes even simple ones, can struggle to find their place in established structures and ways of doing things. Fortunately, along with the Inner-City Renewal Group, we developed a strong partnership with the relevant state agencies, Solas and the Laois Offaly Education and Training Board with their national construction skills Training Centre in Mount Lucas, with the support of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

The model is still very simple, but it has grown and developed into a significant and sophisticated training resource for the construction sector, including the strategically important areas of retrofitting and modern methods of construction.

Celebrating that achievement is in some ways less important than celebrating the success of the participants in our programmes who have often encountered on life's journey many setbacks and disappointments. We have never underestimated what it may involve for someone to take a chance by taking up a place on our programmes. We do our best to give them the best possible chance to begin a new chapter in their lives and it is gratifying that in so many cases the impact has been transformational.

We celebrate also our own team, led by Jim Hargis whose vision, persistence and dedication have made possible what we celebrate today. In truth, this is not just a skills development programme: it is about developing the whole person with advice, support and encouragement. In that, it is an expression of what St. Andrew's Resource Centre is all about, affirming the dignity and value of every person, believing in their potential and creating opportunities for them to flourish. That is certainly worth celebrating!

# Barry O'Connell,

CEO, Dublin Port Company

Since 2017, Dublin Port Company has been proud to support the Construction Skills Course delivered by St. Andrew's Resource Centre and its partners. What began with ten participants in a portacabin within the Port Estate has grown from strength to strength, becoming an important pathway into employment for people from Dublin's inner-city communities and beyond.

From the outset, the programme had a clear and practical purpose, bridging the gap between what people seeking employment need and what employers in the construction industry require. Dublin Port was pleased to provide the space in which that ambition could take shape, initially through classroom and practical training facilities at the Port and, since 2019, at the Odlums training centre.

I remember attending an event to mark the 1,000th graduate back in November 2023 and being blown away by some of the stories I heard that day, particularly Megan Pepper, who addressed the room on behalf of the graduates. It really brought home what the course is all about, and the incredible work Jim Hargis, Manager of the Education and Training Hub at St Andrews Resource Centre, and the wider team do.

The success of the course lies not only in the skills and qualifications participants gain, but also in the confidence, encouragement and individual support they receive. Through hands-on training, candidates can achieve essential certifications and develop experience in areas such as safe working practices, manual handling, working at heights, carpentry, plumbing and block laying. Participants are also supported with job applications, interview preparation and their progression into employment.

As of July 2025, the programme had supported nearly 3,000 people, many of whom had faced significant barriers to employment, with more than 65% securing a job start shortly after completing their training. Behind those figures are individual stories of resilience, second chances and lives changed through meaningful work.

On behalf of Dublin Port Company, I congratulate St. Andrew's Resource Centre, the Inner City Renewal Group, the trainers, employers and all supporting partners who have contributed to this remarkable programme. Most importantly, I congratulate every participant who has taken that first step towards a new career. We are proud to have supported this initiative from the beginning and to see the difference it continues to make.

# Sarah Miley,

Principal Officer, Skills Policy Unit, DFHERIS

I first visited St. Andrew's Construction Skills project at Dublin Port in 2022, having heard about the great work going on there from colleagues at SOLAS, the state agency responsible for the Further Education and Training sector.

When talking with Jim, Alec and Henrietta that day, it was clear that this project was fantastic but needed funding certainty to really achieve what it could. The potential and ambition of the project and the commitment of all those involved in it were so clear that it didn't make sense not to try and do something to help.

Just a few days later I met SOLAS and Laois-Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB) colleagues. LOETB is the leading ETB for construction skills through its National Construction Training Campus in Co Offaly. SOLAS and LOETB colleagues immediately saw the project's potential too.

And this was the beginning of our work with Jim and his management team.

The involvement of LOETB is important for providing academic recognition for the courses. This means that completing the courses provides learners with widely respected and valued certification.

Since then, we have been fortunate to get funding through the National Housing Plan Implementation Fund, which is administered through the Department of An Taoiseach.

All of this shows how valuable the training offered through this programme is. More importantly, it underlines the importance of education and training in providing opportunities for people for all backgrounds, including those who have difficulties accessing the labour market. Opening up these opportunities is a core value within the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

On that first visit I didn't get to meet any learners but I have been fortunate enough to do so on other visits. Speaking with them and hearing how the project has changed their lives has been – and continues to be – so inspiring.

Well done to everyone involved in this brilliant project.

# Tony Dalton,

Director of Further Education and Training,  
Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board

The St. Andrews Project is a powerful example of what can be achieved through strong partnership, shared ambition, and a commitment to creating opportunities for those who face the greatest barriers to education, training, and employment. Since LOETB commenced its collaboration with St. Andrews in 2022, the partnership has grown significantly, delivering meaningful outcomes for learners and responding to evolving industry needs.

A key strength of St. Andrews is its focus on supporting some of the most disadvantaged learners. Many participants face complex challenges that can make engagement with education and training difficult. Through its comprehensive wrap-around support model, St. Andrews provides learners with the encouragement, guidance, and practical supports needed to overcome these barriers and progress towards their personal, educational, and career goals. This learner-centred approach has been fundamental to the success of the programmes delivered and to the positive outcomes achieved.

The growth of the partnership is reflected in the remarkable increase in learner participation. From an initial cohort of 47 learners in 2022, engagement has grown to 1,152 learners in 2026. This significant expansion demonstrates both the value of the programmes being delivered and the effectiveness of a partnership built on trust, responsiveness, and a shared commitment to learner success.

The collaboration has also evolved to provide a broader range of training opportunities aligned with identified skills needs and industry demand. The partnership began with the delivery of Level 3 Construction Skills and Level 4 Retrofit Assistant programmes, creating accessible pathways into a sector undergoing significant transformation. Building on this success, 2026 sees the introduction of the MMC Groundworks programme, developed in partnership with industry to support the advancement of Modern Methods of Construction and equip learners with the skills required for the future workforce. This programme also supports the objectives of the Government's Housing for All strategy and the MMC Action Plan by helping to develop the skilled workforce needed to accelerate the delivery of high-quality, sustainable housing through the increased adoption of Modern Methods of Construction.

The success of the St. Andrews Project would not have been possible without the support and investment of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) and SOLAS, whose commitment to Further Education and Training continues to enable innovative and impactful learning opportunities. Their support, combined with the dedication of St. Andrews, industry partners, and learners themselves, has helped create a model that delivers real and lasting outcomes.

The St. Andrews Project demonstrates the transformative impact that can be achieved when education, training, support services, industry, and government work together with a shared purpose. I would like to acknowledge and thank all those involved in this successful partnership and look forward to its continued growth and impact in the years ahead.



## Aoife Cullen



I always wanted to do an apprenticeship, but when I first started applying a couple of years ago, I didn't get very far. I applied for a few and never made it past the interview stage, mainly because I didn't have the qualifications or the experience they were looking for at the time.

Because of that, I went back and did my Leaving Cert maths. Around then, I was recommended the construction skills course as a way of getting some hands-on experience and seeing if construction was actually what I wanted to do. I decided to give it a go and see where it would lead.

Before the course, I had tried a few different jobs. I worked in hospitality, I worked in a bar, and I also tried office work. Sitting at a desk just wasn't for me at all. I've always enjoyed working with my hands more, and I knew I wanted something practical, something active. The course felt like a good way to test that properly.

The fact that it was only three weeks made it an easy decision. I was really looking forward to starting it, even though I was nervous going in. I didn't know the area very well and I was a bit anxious about meeting new people, but from the very first day everyone was sound. Someone even sent me directions and met me outside, which immediately put me at ease.

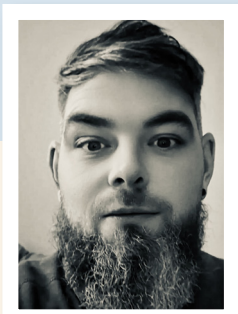
Once the course got going, I knew straight away that I'd made the right choice. I really enjoyed it. You get experience in lots of different areas, like plumbing, carpentry and painting, and you also do all the essential tickets such as Safe Pass, manual handling and abrasive wheels. They manage to fit a huge amount into three weeks.

There were two other women on the course with me, and everyone got on really well. All the fellas were very friendly, and the atmosphere was comfortable and welcoming. The staff were great too — really helpful and supportive throughout.

After finishing the course, things moved quickly and I was offered three apprenticeships. I ended up taking an apprenticeship with ESB, where I'm working now. I'm only in my first year, but it's a four-year apprenticeship and I feel like the course fully prepared me to get started.

Even now in work, I can see how much it helped, I'm only starting off, but I can go, 'oh, yeah, I do know what that is', and I'm sort of familiar with a lot of the stuff already. That's down to what I learned on the course.

I'd definitely recommend the course to anyone, especially if you're unsure about what you want to do. It's short, it's practical, and it gives you real experience. For me, it helped kick-start my career and confirmed that construction is exactly where I want to be.



## Darren Brophy



I've been working consistently since doing the course, and when I look back on it now, I honestly don't know where else you'd get what that course gives, especially from a community point of view. It took someone like me - a person who was struggling badly and felt written off - and, six months after getting clean, offered real support. It gave me skills, certificates and qualifications, all within three weeks, and made me employable again. You don't get that anywhere else. There's nothing quite like that course. It's brilliant in its entirety. Before I did the course, I was in residential treatment for people in recovery. I'd done a three-month programme, detoxed, and then moved into a place called Teach Mhuire on Gardiner Street. While I was there, a couple of lads mentioned the construction skills course. I think there might even have been a poster or flyer up about it.

I needed to get back working on sites. I had no money, nothing really, and if I'm being honest, I didn't have a clue what I was at. I just knew I had to earn, to become a functional member of society again. I had a daughter, and I needed to get back into a work environment. This course gave me that chance. The upskilling side of it really appealed to me.

I'd been a problematic drinker and drug user since I was about 14. I worked on and off sites over the years, but drugs and drink were always there in the background. Looking back now, a lot of it came from untreated mental health issues. Doing the course was one of many things that were pivotal in helping me change and become the person I am today.

The course was the first social setting I'd been in outside of recovery services. It was part of reintegrating back into society. There were like-minded people there, and the staff really minded us. Alec and the rest of the team were phenomenal. They helped me become a better man, often just through small things, little nudges.

At that stage, I was very inward. I'd been floating around in catastrophic addiction for a long time, and then you're expected to live normally again, without drink or drugs. That's tough. I was really minded on the course during that period, and I wasn't used to that kind of kindness.

It wasn't just about labour skills. The course helped me develop self-worth, accountability and personal skills - things like looking people in the eye, turning up on time, holding yourself responsible. Those things weren't there for me before.

It isn't a cure for anything I suffer with, but it gave me a safe space to reintegrate into society, in an environment I understood and didn't understand at the same time. And that made all the difference.



## Darren McDonnell



I did the course in 2024. Before that, I'd been in the building trade for over 20 years, so construction wasn't new to me at all. At the time, I wasn't working — I'd actually been away travelling for a couple of months — and when I came back, I knew I wanted a change. I didn't want to go back to the same company I'd been with before.

A friend of mine had lined up work for me doing electrical planning, but I needed to get all my tickets updated before I could start. Safe Pass, manual handling, the lot. That's when I heard about the course at Dublin Port and decided to go down and do it. For me, it was ideal because it was like a kind of a **one-stop shop**, to get everything done in one go and get myself back out into the workforce.

From the minute I started the course, I loved it. Every bit of it. Even though I had years of experience behind me, it was great to be back learning, refreshing things and getting everything up to date. While I was doing the course, I naturally found myself helping some of the other lads along, especially the ones who were new to construction or a bit unsure of themselves. I wasn't trying to do anything special — it just came naturally after being on sites for so long.

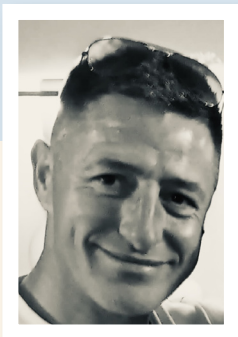
When the course finished, I was actually offered a job there. The people running it had seen my experience and how I was getting on with the group, and I suppose they felt I'd be a good fit. I put it to them that I'd be interested if there was anything going, and luckily enough there was a vacancy for a trainer. I got the job and, honestly, I haven't looked back since.

It's very rewarding work. Very rewarding. We have a graduation every couple of weeks, and that never gets old. In some cases, you're genuinely changing people's lives. For some of the people coming through the course, it's their first real achievement out in the world. Some of them have never worked before, and you can actually see their confidence growing as the weeks go on.

Graduation days can be emotional. You'll have lads coming up to you, shaking your hand, giving you a hug, thanking you. Sometimes it does get to you, because you know what it means to them. You're not just handing out certificates — you're helping people take their first proper step into work.

At the end of every course, I always ask the group if they enjoyed it and if they'd recommend it. Hand on heart, not one person has ever said they wouldn't, and I think that says everything.

Doing the course changed my life as well. I worked hard for years on building sites, and now I'm in a job I really enjoy. Being able to pass on my experience to lads and women who are only starting out in construction is something special. I love the work, and I'm proud to be part of something that actually makes a difference.



# Jonathan Smyth



Before I did the course, life was bleak for me. There was no hope in it at all. I couldn't see any future for myself. I had a lot of overdoses behind me, and I just couldn't cope with the world. I felt like the world would be better off without me in it. Working life wasn't for me, or that's what I believed at the time. There was stigma everywhere - addiction, labels, all that stuff. Growing up in the inner city, drugs were always there, part of broken homes and broken lives for most people I know.

I actually came from good people, from a good family. My da was a working-class man, a postal worker and he's retired now. Drugs were never meant to be my road. I always said I'd never go near them, not for me. No chance. But school was hard - I was restless and I couldn't focus. My head was full of worry about things that happened in the past and fear about what was coming next and I couldn't settle. Wanting to fit in, and I suppose being young and naive, that's how drugs came into my life. Then my grandmother died, the Sheriff Street flats were knocked down, and my ma left home. Everything just fell apart. Drugs felt like they were doing something for me when I couldn't do it myself.

I heard about the course through word of mouth. I saw someone who'd done it before me and I couldn't believe it - he was working. I remember thinking there might actually be something out there, a second chance. When you're broken, homeless, and written off, that's hard to even imagine. I nearly talked myself out of it, thinking it wasn't for me. But once I went down and met Alec, Paul and the rest of them, it felt different. They treat you like a person. It's not just manual handling - you get proper support.

I remember the first day going down to do the course - I was terrified. But you go in, have a cup of tea, do a small interview, meet people. They don't make it complicated, which I liked. They make it doable. That gave me confidence. Everything they taught me, I use now either in work or in life.

I got a job straight after finishing the course with a big construction company and thankfully I haven't looked back. This course gave me my life back - my family and my place in the community. Before that, I was using drugs to live and living to use drugs. That was survival for me.

Now I honestly have to pinch myself sometimes, I really do. I'm happier than I've ever been and work is my happy place. My kids are fed and the bills are paid. I tell anyone who'll listen or who is in a similar situation to what I was: 'It doesn't have to be this way - do the course'.



## Keith Royal



I did the course in 2021. Funnily enough it was the first one they ran when things reopened after COVID. Before that, I'd been in addiction for a lot of years. I grew up in Crumlin and spent most of my life there, and at the time I was living in recovery houses, doing day programmes and bits like that, just trying to get back to some sort of normal living again.

I first heard about the course through word of mouth when I was going through recovery services, and it stuck with me. I remember saying to myself 'I'm going to go for that', but it didn't happen straight away. There was actually a couple of years between hearing about it and starting the course, because I was still in day programmes and spending that time working on myself, trying to get myself free and in a better place first.

By the time I eventually started the course, I was in a good headspace. I'd spent a few years in therapy and recovery, so I was ready for it. I went in, kept myself right, and got stuck in, and I genuinely enjoyed what I was doing while I was there.

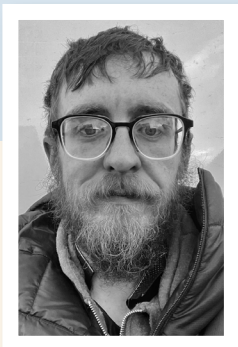
I went straight into work after finishing the course, and one of the big things I took from it was realising that I could actually do what we were being shown. I was able for the work, and I surprised myself a bit, to be honest. I always knew I was fairly good with my hands, but I'd lost that over the years, and I hadn't worked properly in a long time.

The course helped me rebuild that confidence and gave me the drive to get back out and do it again.

The lads running the course are brilliant. All they want to do is help, even if sometimes people don't see that at first because of where they're coming from. A lot of people arrive with the mindset that these lads are just trying to tell them what to do, but if you go in open to it and see that they actually want to help you move forward, you'll get a lot out of it and you'll progress like you wouldn't believe.

After the course, I got back into work and kept going. I was in a previous job for a while, and now I'm working in fire safety, fitting sprinklers. That's what I do now - I'm a sprinkler fitter - and I took a chance on it and learned the trade on the job over the last three or four years. It's going well for me so far, I enjoy what I do.

When I look back on it now, that course was the beginning for me. It gave me the confidence to go back out to work, to trust myself again, and to believe I could actually do it. Everything that came after started there.



## Niall Dawson



I grew up in the care system and, as an adult, ended up in the homeless system. I spent about ten years moving through that before I finally got housed. I hadn't been in stable accommodation long at all when I did the course in June 2022. I was 25 at the time and still trying to adjust to having a place of my own - I wasn't used to being indoors all day. The course gave me somewhere to go, gave me structure, and gave me a reason to get up and get out. More than anything, it gave me a sense of purpose.

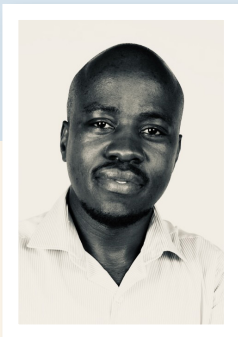
I heard about the course through my probation officer. I think the probation service can be beneficial if people actually want to engage with it, and at that stage I did. To be honest, I wasn't doing much with myself at the time. I wasn't working, I had very little going on, and I was involved in things that weren't exactly legal. This course was what gave me a foot in the door for legit employment and got me my first proper job, really. Before that, I was just living off the €203 from welfare every week and going nowhere.

If I'd gone looking for work on my own without doing the course, I'd have had no luck. I had very little education and nothing on my CV. The course opened doors for me. I was actually surprised by how much was packed into the three weeks. I didn't expect to come out with everything I needed to start working, but that's exactly what happened. We graduated from the course on a Friday, and I swear, I was only 10-15 minutes out the door when I got a phone call from Alec saying there was a job there for me starting the Monday. That was mad.

From there, things just kind of took off. I've done loads of construction jobs since. Honestly, I've lost count at this stage. One of the madder ones was working on a charity episode of Room to Improve with your man Dermot Bannon and Julian Benson, building accommodation for families affected by cystic fibrosis. That was a great week altogether. RTÉ were even paying for our lunch every day, which never happens on a site, so nobody was giving out. Stuff like that just wouldn't have come my way if I hadn't done the course.

I'm not currently working in construction, but even so, I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now if it wasn't for the lads down at the course in Dublin Port. Without it, I'd have nothing on my CV at all. I didn't know what to expect walking into the course. I had no construction background and was thrown in at the deep end, but they were brilliant with me. They knew everything was new for me so they didn't expect the world, they just wanted to see me giving it my all, and I gave it.

The course taught me more than labouring skills. It taught me life skills. It showed me I could make something of myself and not just waste my life sitting on the dole.



# Victor Mavundla



I heard about the construction skills course through a friend of mine. He had already done it and was working in the construction industry, so he told me I should try it. Back home in Eswatini, I had experience in construction, and when I came to Ireland, I knew this was the industry I wanted to stay in. I didn't want to start again from nothing. I wanted to use the skills I already had and learn how things are done here.

I am an asylum seeker from Eswatini and I have been in Ireland for about a year. Finding work is not easy, especially when you are new to the country and don't have Irish experience or certificates. When I heard about the course, it felt like a real opportunity. It was something practical and something that could actually lead to a job.

My first day on the course was exciting. I was happy because many of the things we were learning were connected to construction, but also to what employers in Ireland are looking for. The course helped me understand the critical skills you need to be ready for work here, not just on a building site, but in general. It showed me what is expected of you when you are applying for jobs and turning up to work.

The course is only three weeks, but you do a lot in that time. You learn technical skills and you work towards getting the certificates you need to be allowed on site. But it's more than that. You also learn life skills. Things like being on time, showing up every day, listening, following instructions, and working safely with others. These things are very important, especially when you are trying to build a new life in a new country.

After I finished the course, I got employed immediately. I am now working for a plastering company. For me, this was a big achievement. It showed me that the course really works and that it does open doors. My life in Ireland has been greatly enhanced by doing this course. It has made life easier for me and given me stability when that was really hard to find.

I always tell people in a similar situation to do the course. It is life changing. It makes you competitive in the job market because you don't just say you can work - you have the certificates to prove it. Many people I know really want to work, but they cannot because they are not certified. This course fixes that problem.

If I had not done this course, I honestly don't know where I would be now. I think life would be very difficult. This course had a very big impact on me. It gave me a chance, and I am so glad that I took it.



## Roberta Bari



When I finished college, I thought I had everything figured out. I had just completed a degree in Architectural Technology at TU Dublin and was in my internship when I realised something wasn't right. During college I had struggled with some subjects, especially the technical side, and once I started working it became clear the job was almost entirely computer-based.

Software, technology, screens all day. I knew very quickly it wasn't for me.

I felt desperate. I had spent three years studying and suddenly thought, 'this isn't what I want to do at all'. I knew I wanted to work in construction, but I'd taken the wrong route. I wanted to see things happening in real life, not just learn about them in theory. So I started searching for construction courses and trying to understand how I could actually get onto a site.

That's when I found the course at Dublin Port. The requirements were simple: you had to be unemployed and you had to attend every day. No days missed. When I heard it was three weeks long, I laughed — after three years of college, three weeks felt easy. I couldn't believe I would get everything I need in three weeks. My internship was ending anyway, and when they offered to extend it, I said no thanks. I had other plans.

Once the course started, I realised it was more than training. It was a social project too. There were people there dealing with serious challenges, and I was genuinely impressed. I'm Brazilian and moved to Ireland in 2013, and I've always felt this country gives people opportunities. This course really showed that - it was free, you earned recognised certificates, and you left ready to work on a construction site.

I've always been very hands-on - I love DIY - so I did well. I was the only woman graduating, and that mattered to me. I could do the work just as well as the lads, and that gave me confidence.

A few days in, Alec pulled me aside and asked what I wanted from the course. I told him honestly that I just wanted to work in construction. I didn't know exactly where yet. I knew bricklaying wasn't for me - it's heavy work - but I was open to anything and trusted something would come up.

About a week after I finished, Alec got a call. A company was looking for someone who could use an iPad on site, carry out inspections, raise snags, and sign off completed work. That was my start.

Nearly four years later, I'm still with the same company and I've been promoted. I now oversee the quality team on site, mainly working on large pharmaceutical plants and data centres.

Everything started with that course. It put me exactly where I wanted to be.





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