



WATSON ESAM Solicitors

**PRESS
RELEASE**



Work placement scheme raises aspirations for BME pupils

An innovative work placement scheme organised by Sheffield Chamber of Commerce's Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Business Forum is offering school pupils the opportunity to work alongside successful role models.

Bernadette Grocock, the BME Business Forum's coordinator, has organised for BME pupils from across the city to take up work experience placements with some of the region's top companies.

Tyrone Gunter, of Wincobank, was the first pupil to embark on a placement through the BME Business Forum.

The Tapton School student has ambitions to work in the legal sector so Bernadette arranged for Tyrone to spend a week at Watson Esam solicitors followed by a week at Irwin Mitchell.

Said Bernadette: "One of our forum members told me about the difficulty in trying to find the right work experience placement for her 15 year old son. Her son was unhappy with the work placements offered through his school. I thought I would ask forum members for help and I received a great response."

Tyrone spent his first week of work experience at Watson Esam, where Senior Partner Jay Bhayani was his mentor.

Said Jay: "I'd spoken to Bernadette about the BME Business Forum and I was keen to contribute. I've had a really positive experience in business life but I know that isn't always the case.

"In the early days it was really hard to find a training contract because I didn't know people in the profession and I hadn't been to private school.

"It often comes down to who you know so when Bernadette put the idea of work placements forward through the forum I thought it was a really, really good idea.

"I'm lucky because I came to a firm like this when I qualified 14 years ago and they really value diversity even though it was a very traditional very white, middle class working environment. The partners saw the value in having different people on board and that's a credit to them."

The current partners have tried to carry on that commitment and this was recognised when Watson Esam won the Law Society's Race Equality Award last year in the Best Employer category.

And Tyrone (15) relished the placement at the company. "I'm really enjoying it," he said. "I've always wanted to become a solicitor so it's been very interesting."

Tyrone split his time at Watson Esam between departments so that he could develop a good understanding of the different aspects of the law.

"I think family law is my favourite at the moment. It's been a lot more laid back than I thought but that's because everyone's so organised and that's clearly important."

And with the forum producing such a good result for Tyrone, Bernadette said she's hoping to strengthen her ties with local schools even further to offer placements to other pupils.

She said: "It's always been part of our goal to provide support to young people. We want to try and encourage them to achieve the careers they dream of as well as inspiring them to consider business enterprise as an option."

“Through work experience such as this, young people from BME backgrounds see positive role models and mentors and it helps to break down barriers.”

“In many professions it can be a case of who you know as to whether you get a placement or a foot in the door. Many BME youngsters don’t have such contacts and it’s great that we can provide that for them and show them what they’re capable of achieving.”

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