

# Growing skills and championing inclusion through apprenticeships

Bipolar UK is a national charity dedicated to supporting individuals affected by bipolar and their families. With a team of 28 staff, Bipolar UK is committed to creating meaningful employment opportunities that align with its values of inclusion, collaboration and leadership through lived experience.



In 2025, the charity introduced its first apprenticeship role - a **Level 3 Fundraising Apprentice** - as part of a pilot initiative to strengthen its workforce and diversify its talent pipeline.

## Why Bipolar UK made it an apprenticeship

A new Director of Fundraising arrived in 2025, wanting to develop the team in a **financially sustainably** way. Having previously recruited apprentices with great success, she recognised the opportunity to bring **early-career talent** into the charity.

Bipolar UK identified three clear advantages of making an entry-level role an apprenticeship:

- **Cost-effective growth:** As a non-levy payer, the charity had most training costs covered, alongside additional incentives such as National Insurance exemptions. This made hiring an apprentice a financially viable way to increase capacity.
- **Role-specific skill development:** The apprenticeship could be shaped around the charity's needs, ensuring the apprentice developed the exact skills required for the fundraising team.
- **Workforce diversity:** Apprenticeships opened doors to younger candidates. As Bipolar UK seeks to strengthen its connection with young people, bringing early-career talent into the organisation offered valuable insight and fresh perspectives.

## Hazel Russell, Director of Fundraising, says:



“We wanted to grow the skills we need without hugely increasing our pay bill. Apprenticeships gave us that opportunity - and brought in **fresh perspectives that strengthen our team.**”

### How Bipolar UK overcame challenges

Introducing apprenticeships into an organisation for the first time can feel daunting, particularly for small or fully remote organisations. Bipolar tackled these challenges head-on:

- **Securing senior buy-in:** Apprenticeships were new to the organisation, so the business case focused on the strong financial incentives – with 95% of training costs covered through the levy (increasing to 100% from 2026) and additional government support available.
- **Managing off-the-job training:** The charity already operated flexibly to support its workforce, two-thirds of whom either live with bipolar or support someone who does. This flexibility made it straightforward to accommodate the apprentice’s one day per week in college.
- **Upskilling existing staff:** Managing a young apprentice for the first time can be challenging, so the charity arranged for a manager to participate in [Workwhile's DevelopMentor training programme](#). The programme develops the relational aspects of line management of apprentices, covering topics such as inclusive leadership, understanding motivation and engagement, and coaching skills.
- **Supporting a remote apprentice:** Starting a career remotely can feel isolating. To counter this, Bipolar UK built a structured support system, including joining an apprenticeship

charity network that connects young apprentices across organisations. This not only supported their apprentice but also enabled the charity to share and learn best practice.

## Bipolar UK's advice for other employers

"Introducing apprenticeships for the first time can feel like a big step – especially for small organisations – but **support is readily available**", explains Hazel.

"The guidance we received from Workwhile was invaluable. They offered free, practical support on everything from registering apprentices to securing funding and choosing the right training provider. **Peer networks have been a huge help**; apprenticeships are a well-established route and many employers are more than willing to share their experiences."



## The impact so far

- **Operational benefits:** The apprentice is already adding capacity to the fundraising team and learning skills tailored to the charity's needs.
- **Cultural benefits:** Apprenticeships align with Bipolar UK's mission of inclusion, offering accessible entry points for diverse talent.
- **Future plans:** Encouraged by the success of the pilot, the charity is exploring apprenticeships in other departments as it grows.

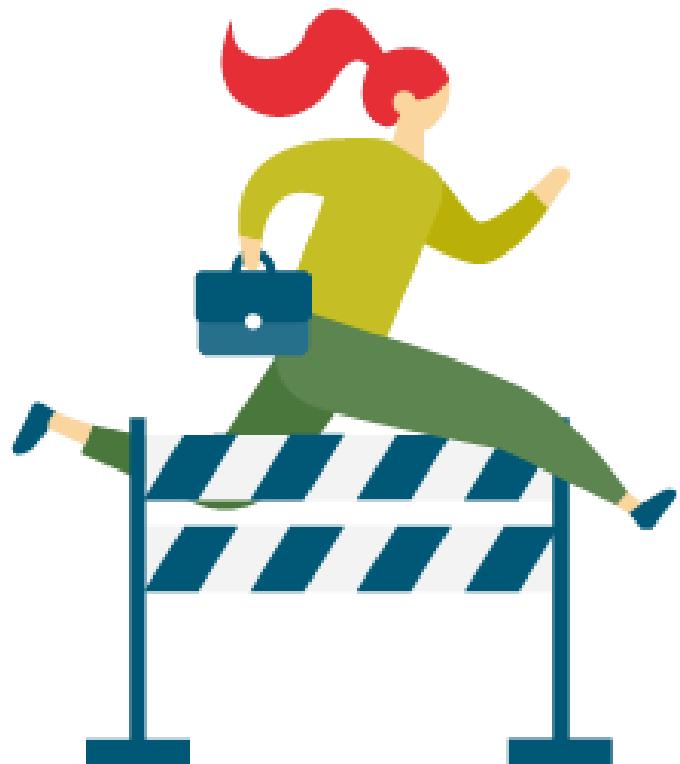
## Life as a Level 3 Apprentice

### Audrey Bennett, Fundraising Apprentice

The apprenticeship has **given me the chance to develop skills and knowledge I wouldn't have gained otherwise**. I've really enjoyed having freedom to move around the department a bit and pick up tasks I want to learn, and it's lovely to see everyone being keen for me to try. It also felt reassuring to be eased into the role rather than having to pick everything up instantly. Settling in has been easy because everyone in the organisation has been so kind and welcoming.

I'm really grateful that Bipolar UK gave me a chance and in return I hope I've been able to give them a different perspective and some fun fresh ideas. When I started, I sometimes felt a bit nervous because I didn't know all the technical fundraising terms or processes, but everyone at Bipolar UK has been patient, and **the supportive environment has helped me to grow and learn quickly**.

My message to employers would be to give people a chance, even if a CV doesn't tick every box. **If someone is hardworking and passionate about your industry, they'll bring valuable skills and a different outlook on your organisation.**



As Bipolar UK's experience shows, apprenticeships can bring fresh energy, new skills and long-term value to any organisation – no matter its size. They're a powerful way to build the workforce you need today while investing in the talent of tomorrow.