

# Novartis Believe and Achieve Involvement

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I am completing a 6 month internship with Novartis. This internship is designed to provide employment in supportive environments, for young people with multiple sclerosis (MS).

Having MS and holding down full time employment can be difficult, full of needless worry and uncertainty. What if I am unwell next week? How will I explain myself to my colleagues? How will I explain my absence even though I physically may look well? Will they understand I am not feeling great? Believe and Achieve first came to my attention when advertised via Twitter. The process included completing an application form, submitting my CV and in due course being called for interview. I was delighted when told I had been successful.

From the minute I arrived at Novartis my colleagues have been extremely welcoming. I have been provided with the necessary tools for work, for example, computer training and support. This job is suiting me very well, allowing me to start earlier in the morning and finishing earlier in the day. I can come home in the evenings and am productive, be it going for a walk, to doing my shopping. Simple tasks can become a mountain if overwhelmed with fatigue – one of the most common symptoms of MS. The flexible hours provided by Novartis allow me to plan a more active day with plenty of time for rest in the evenings.

I am working with a core team and a direct manager. There are specific projects I am continuously working on, over my internship. My main projects include the training and implementation of an online learning system. I also work on analysing Global Operational Procedures and their applicability to the Irish company. I partake in regular team meetings. My colleagues help me to prioritise work, and plan towards deadlines. It has been rewarding to see these projects come to fruition. I always feel my work is valued and contributions respected. I am learning every day and it is wonderful to feel productive. I interact with other teams, playing a role on projects I have been invited to become involved with. These have included 'The Societal Costs of Multiple Sclerosis in Ireland 2015' and 'The Cost of Heart Failure in Ireland'. I am assisting the finance department with budget projections for 2016. This has allowed me to reach out to other departments and understand the work they are doing.

Another aspect to my internship, are the friendships I have made. Being a new person amongst an office of 80 people is daunting. I decided to train for a mini marathon with the aim to raise awareness and money for MS Ireland. I sent an email to my colleagues and the response I received was enormous. They helped me to raise €800 for MS Ireland and I am eternally grateful. It became a talking point and ice breaker with many during my first few weeks in work.

Being diagnosed with MS in the prime of your working life is both unexpected and unwelcomed. The desire to keep working and to be active remains the same. Through the Believe and Achieve program, Novartis have allowed me to do this and continue my education in a supportive and facilitative environment.



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