

How a diverse workforce supports fair and effective policing

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Spotlight on a role: Positive Action Lead

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I had a long career before policing, working as a senior manager in retail. As a Black, gay woman with a hidden disability, I've always been passionate about supporting a diverse workforce. Working in environments that were not diverse, I changed the way that we recruited staff from hard-to-reach communities to better represent our customer base. Little did I know that at the time, I was taking steps to promote positive action.

I've spent the past five years in policing. I started as a police community support officer (PCSO) in Hertfordshire and realised very soon that I was engaging with diversity and making a real difference in the community I served. My interest soon turned to creating various support networks within the force, and I worked hard to make a difference and bring people together. This fuelled my interest in positive action, and I became a mentor.

I then became a police constable and recently transferred to Bedfordshire Police as the Positive Action Strategic Lead. For me, positive action begins with recognising that we are not all the same. We live in a world full of diversity, and we need to be actively inclusive to ensure that doors are opened for people from all minority groups within our force. Positive action gives everyone the same chance to join the police, stay and thrive. It isn't about numbers or box ticking, and it's not about lowering standards or giving some people a leg up. It's about finding, supporting and holding on to the right people for the job, regardless of their background.

Our goal is to work together to create a fair and more effective force. That's better for us as individuals, better for us as a team and better for the people we serve. Having a greater balance helps us to forge and maintain good relationships with our communities. This is achieved through attending local churches, mosques and youth clubs, public speaking through radio and online chats, and building relationships with community leaders while getting a better understanding of their needs.

I support recruitment by attending the online recruitment and information evenings events targeted at Black, Asian and minority ethnic candidates. I am also a mentor, and will support candidates one on one throughout their process and journey. I use social media to share the work I do and the events I am going to be at, which raises the profile of positive action and increases interest from prospective candidates.

The role of a positive action lead is not just about recruitment, it is about the culture of the organisation and how we develop, progress and retain our staff. This, in turn, will build a stronger, more representative workforce that is ready to serve our communities. You don't need any specific skills to promote positive action. You just need to be passionate about equality and recognising difference, and you need to have the drive to want to bring about change.

There are plenty of training opportunities that are easily accessible to support anyone interested in positive action, including diversity and inclusion, equality and ethics, race, religion, sex and sexuality. So, whether you want to offer support occasionally or make it a full-time job, you just need to commit to being inclusive, treating everyone as an individual and respecting their differences.

Everyone should be on a level playing field before, during and after joining the police. Positive action helps us achieve this and it is everyone's responsibility to 'be you' and to 'be inclusive'. Positive action has to be the responsibility of all. It has to be the thread that runs right the way through the organisation.

- This article was peer reviewed by DC Jaspreet Athwal, Nottinghamshire Police.

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