

My whole life I've advocated for other people - then one day I realised, I needed support too!



Photo: Nikki Sharpe

Fifty-three year old Employment Lawyer Nikki started her legal career as a Filing Clerk. After a difficult childhood, she had left school with limited qualifications, but enough life experience to know that she wanted a job where she could help vulnerable people. Over her 33 years with her first employer, Nikki achieved great successes; progressing through to Legal Secretary, Legal Executive and then on to Solicitor. Her decision to take voluntary redundancy two years ago, meant that for the first time in three decades, Nikki found herself looking for a new job.

It wasn't easy to get a new position in a firm that would recognise the lifelong experience Nikki had acquired, and when she finally did, things didn't work out the way she had hoped with her new employer.

"I suppose I'd become institutionalised" Nikki recalls. "I'd had the same employer my whole life and I had great relationships with clients and colleagues. I'd worked my way up through the ranks and because people had seen me do this, they knew what I was capable of. All of a sudden, I was in a situation where I was being judged by people with

whom I'd not yet built a rapport, and this is much harder. The firm I moved to were making redundancies and with less than two years employment history with them, it was easy for them to let me go."

After visiting her GP with stress, in July this year Nikki made the positive decision to ask for support from Working Win to relaunch her legal career.

"I remember thinking; you know what - I could do with all the help I can get right now! Over the last few months, I have spent a lot of time thinking about and working out what I want to do, what my values are, what I am good at - and importantly to me, how best I can help other people. Thinking in this way has helped me map out a career that I can be proud of again.

"I might have experience working in employment law, but I'm no expert in finding employment, so taking this new approach has been invaluable to me. Now I'm focused on what I have achieved during my career and in my lifetime and I feel really confident communicating with potential employers about how I can use these skills to support other people."

After taking on a pro-bono case supporting a person with a disability in a dispute with an employer, which yielded a positive outcome, Nikki is now working as a contractor employment lawyer and gradually building a portfolio of clients.

"It hasn't been easy. There were times when I have doubted myself. But I have pushed through and this has meant that I've been able to keep doing what I love and what I am good at. I represent people who have lost employment through discrimination or unfair practices, through no fault of their own. I also work directly with employers so that I can support them to put in the right level of support and structures to keep employees safe and legal. Finally, I've found a role for myself where I can help vulnerable people achieve justice, and where being principled, is actually a good thing!"

Nikki signed up to Working Win earlier this year. Supported by NHS England, the Department of Health and Social Care, and the Department for Work and Pensions; Working Win is a free trial testing a new type of support for people with mental or physical health conditions that are affecting their work or their ability to find a job. If you live in South Yorkshire or Bassetlaw, you can learn more and refer yourself to the trial [here](#).