



Aaron Phillips
Physiotherapist

After living in Japan for over a decade Aaron Phillips has 'returned to work' with a role in physiotherapy at our Trust: "Reach out" he says: "there is so much support out there and so many wonderful people who are happy to guide you on your journey."

Aaron qualified as a Physiotherapist in 2006 and soon after decided to do some travelling and took an opportunity to spend a year in Japan, not in healthcare but a teaching role.

"I loved my life in Japan and one year somehow turned into twelve." Says Aaron. "It was an amazing experience. The skills and core principles I learned in physiotherapy provided a wonderful foundation for teaching and in many ways all other aspects of my life."

"My thoughts always came back to physiotherapy and on my return to the UK I thought the best way to re-acclimatise to an NHS environment was a TA position. It would help me to build my confidence in working with a wide range of healthcare professionals again."

Aaron applied for a position at University Hospital Lewisham (UHL) and during his interview Emma Tilley, Lead Occupational Therapist, said something that made a huge difference. "Emma said that although she believed I would do well in the position, it might not be in my best interest. She then did something that I will be forever grateful for – she took the time to have

a genuine conversation with me about what I wanted to achieve and simply asked: "how can I help?"

Emma did not know much about Return to Practice herself at that point but took the time to research the subject. Aaron was introduced to Health Education England (HEE) and their resources made all the difference.

Aaron says: "HEE really helped me to understand what I needed to do - identifying my unique needs and creating a curriculum completely tailored for me, designed to get me back to practicing as a Physiotherapist." Aaron eventually joined the Respiratory team for a period of five weeks. The key at the outset was having clear communication as everyone was still feeling their way through what a 'returnee' needed.

Carol Montgomery, Adult Physiotherapy Lead, was very open and enthusiastic about the process from the start. She made time to plan the placement with me, ensuring it was in an area that would be beneficial. There was also a focus on me being around at the same time as other undergraduate student placements to maximise IST and learning opportunities. And being flexible around dates I could be released from post I was in.

Being a returnee, Aaron says, is not about just topping up your previous experience here and there and being thrown back into a role.

I knew that I had put in the time, the hours of study and preparation, and there is nothing like doing the job to fully learn how to do the job!

"Also the last time I was in this environment I was as a student. I make reference to this as I knew how important it was for me to be able to make that shift in attitude, responsibility and self-perception from student to Physiotherapist."

Aaron recently interviewed for a position as a Band 5 Rotational Physiotherapist with the Trust and is thrilled to have been offered the role.

Aaron says he developed so much during the placement that it: "100% validated his decision to return to the UK, to healthcare and physiotherapy". He adds: "I can honestly say that I learnt from and was supported by everyone on the team. They made me feel safe to learn and develop, and at the same time challenged me.

"I am always happy to talk to anyone who wants to find out more about my experience. Whether you're already on your own 'return to work' journey or thinking of taking those first steps.

