



Constructing Futures

Natalie lives in Petersfield with her partner and 3 children. She had been working in the care industry full-time since finishing school, which she enjoyed initially. However, she was after a new challenge, something to break the routine, and she liked the idea of working outside. She decided to move into health and safety, planning to become a health and safety officer in a care home. She heard about the CSCS card course through her housing association, Radian, and thought that the health and safety elements of the CSCS card course would be a good introduction to the subject. It would also give her valuable knowledge about the construction industry. So Natalie did a Construction Skills Fund course at the Future Skills Centre in Bordon.



Natalie's 2-week CSCS card course included a 3-day plant/heavy machinery taster session at the Construction Industry Safety Training Centre (CISTC) near Farnham. "This inspired me," she said, "I got on a forward tipping dumper and thought this is so me! It felt very natural." Natalie passed the health and safety level 1 qualification, and the CSCS touchscreen test, and came away with her green labourer's CSCS card. However, she then lost her job in care, and had to use the money she'd saved up for her next step into health and safety – taking a NEBOSH qualification – to pay some bills.

"I got on a forward tipping dumper and thought – this is so me!"



Fortunately, she managed to keep some aside and used it to do a 3-day course at CISTC which got her a machine ticket for driving dumpers. CSF coordinator Carolyn Jay then organised 5 days unpaid work experience for her with construction company Mildren at Segensworth near Fareham, where Mildren were just starting to build some commercial units. Natalie started on 17 December, under the supervision of site manager Stewart Johnson. Stewart kept an eye out for her but there were no issues at all. Within 2 days, the team she was working with asked him to take her on permanently as a machine operator/dumper driver. "I was very nervous when I went onsite to begin with," she said. "but the team made me feel at home immediately. My gender made no difference whatsoever."

Natalie is now a Mildren employee and is keen to progress. She's learning every day and knows she needs to get more experience, but for the future, "I want to get all the tickets – roller, telehandler, excavator – the lot." Stewart sees Natalie's potential: "She could certainly drive more machines, and if she keeps learning, she could progress even further, maybe into site management."

"The team made me feel at home immediately. My gender made no difference whatsoever."

Reflecting on the change in her life, Natalie said: "The CSF course changed everything. I used to lie in bed not wanting to get up. That's all gone now. I come in to work happy and go home happy. It has been life changing. I've found my feet in my new career and I'm so grateful to Radian and CSF for this."

Natalie's message to any women considering a career in construction is this:

"Don't be scared to go and do what you want to do – you'll be surprised how much construction has changed. I want women to know this – it might suit them perfectly. I do get a lot of people looking at me driving a dumper around – but mostly they just want to know why I chose to do this."

Stewart added: "Many women are intimidated about coming on site. You don't need to be – just be yourself. We don't treat Natalie any differently – she's one of the team, and she just gets on with it."

"Many women are intimidated about coming on site. You don't need to be – just be yourself."