

Wyre Borough Council, Poulton-le-Fylde

Malcolm Ridsdale, Human Resources Adviser.

Carl Green, Principal Engineer and Project Manager, Cleveleys Coastal Defence team.

Mike Wilkinson, Senior Engineer and Engineer's Representative, Wyre Borough Council.

Obada Wa'el Akram Alsaqqa, IAESTE Trainee from Jordan. Eight-week placement, July to August 2009.

Wyre Borough Council's Cleveleys Coastal Defence and the Promenade Enhancement Project has won 17 awards for its innovative architecture and construction. In October 2008 it won the coveted North West Construction Industry Project of the Year Award. The project is running from November 2005 to March 2010. The design team of civil engineers, headed by Carl Green, has constructed the vital sea defence wall to stop the flooding of the low-lying surrounding land and at the same time created a visually inviting and interactive 'people's promenade'. The public comments book in the visitor centre lauds its aesthetic feats.

Tell us about the project, Carl

It involves installing pre-cast concrete units for sea defence using innovative vacuum lifting. We designed the units to take out the energy from the waves; they are also comfortable for people to sit on. The promenade includes lampposts with tide meters, cameras to check the movements of the beach, storm gates, shelters, solar lighting, an interactive fountain and more.

How did Wyre Borough Council first discover the IAESTE scheme?

Malcolm: The daughter of one of our employees wanted to go abroad on an IAESTE work experience placement. One of the ways to prioritise her application was to raise a reciprocal placement for an incoming trainee in the UK. Since then we've had trainees for the past six years from Hungary, Oman, Panama, Germany, Portugal and Jordan. All have been great.

Do you keep in touch with any of them?

Malcolm: Yes, with most of them. The Director of Neighbourhood Services at Wyre Borough Council went to stay with last year's IAESTE trainee from Portugal at his house in Porto for the Manchester United - Porto game last season.

How is this year's trainee, Obada, getting on?

Mike: Unbelievably well. He not only does the work set but also has a real proactive input.

Can you give an example of Obada's input?

Mike: We operate in an aggressive environment with the sea coming in. Last week the team of site engineers had a short time to prepare the area and install the concrete block sea defence units. The day before, Obada had been doing AutoCAD drawing and could visualise with pinpoint accuracy what they were doing and he voiced recommendations for adjustments. His observations were right and he earned the engineers' respect.

Obada: Yes, I have learned to 'check and re-check'. I hear the word 'check' so much. You don't just do your job and leave; you are responsible. I am in a place where professional work is conducted with precision to a millimetre. When Mike is not on site I give him reports when he returns. I am always the last one to leave the site because I enjoy it so much.

Has Obada come with the relevant academic knowledge for the placement?

Mike: It's the perfect project for what he is studying.

Obada: It is an outstanding experience. As it is a Borough Council there is not just an emphasis on quality; it is for the benefit of the community. When I return to Jordan I will work for a water department. Apart from in Jordan our concern is for collecting water due to its shortage; it is not a problem of flooding.

What is the biggest advantage of having an IAESTE trainee?

Mike: Learning the different ways of doing things.

Carl: The main benefits of an IAESTE trainee are their high level of commitment; they are exceptionally bright and bring new ideas to traditional work programmes. The trainees are also very good communicators at all levels. One of the most important elements to me is that they fit in exceptionally well with our existing teams, often forming long-term friendships and they have an ability to work within the team to get tasks completed.

How has Obada fitted in to the workplace and into UK life?

Obada: I am part of the team on site. Everyone I have met has been kind to me. I have experienced living independently and I live with a British family here. In Jordan it is common to live at home until you get married. Here more people move away from home sooner.

Carl: Obada's English is very good and there are various regional accents on site. I have noticed you have started saying 'Okey Dokey' a lot after being on site everyday.

Malcolm: The things we take for granted are the 'wow' factors for the IAESTE trainees. We took Obada to a village fair the weekend after he arrived and it was the first time he had seen a pig or a cow. He is also very taken by the green countryside compared with the desert landscape at home.

