

## Meet Swakata Sannoh, one of Launchpad's Supported Housing Officers



### **Swakata, you've been at Launchpad for 13 years. What made you join the charity?**

I've always been very passionate about helping people, especially those who are vulnerable. I want to make an impact and I like trying to help people who cannot do things on their own.

### **What do you do in your role at Launchpad?**

I work directly with clients who come through our doors. I sit down with them, assess their needs and work with them to provide the support they require.

Launchpad isn't just about housing, it's also about supporting people to achieve their individual potentials and goals. Our support sessions are client focused; we don't tell people what to do. We work with them to find out what they want to do, and then work with them to identify how they can achieve the targets they set for themselves. It's about what they want and empowering them to meet their individual potentials.

I know they have the potential, but they don't always have the motivation or skills to get there. We are here to provide practical support and encourage them to address their issues.

### **Do you have any particularly memorable client moments?**

Loads of them over my 13 years and I am so proud of what they have achieved!

For example, one gentleman had a drug problem and a criminal lifestyle, ending up in prison for 4 years. But he was a very intelligent and brilliant young man. When he came to us, I was his support worker and he said that he didn't think he would ever be useful to anyone again.

Launchpad provided him with somewhere to stay and I worked with him through our support sessions to help him turn his life around. He wanted to do some form of training. All his family were highly educated; his brothers were a doctor and an engineer. He said to me “I am the black sheep of the family” and he didn’t want to feel like that anymore. He successfully enrolled onto a higher education course at Newbury College and Launchpad funded his travel from Reading to enable him to get there regularly. I kept in touch with his tutors to make sure he was on track.

He did extremely well in his final exams and ended up getting a place on a Criminology course at Oxford Brookes University. I applied for a grant from the St Michael’s Relief fund and was lucky to get some funds for him to buy a laptop and books for his course. When he left Launchpad, I drove him to Oxford Brookes with all his stuff. He kept in touch with me and was a fantastic guy. He was really determined but just needed that bit of support and encouragement.

Another man I worked with had a similar background. While receiving support from us, he got a job with Reading Train Station to clean the trains and platforms. It’s difficult for clients because, when they start work, their housing benefit is affected and they have to start paying more money for rent and council tax. So Launchpad housed him in one of our affordable flats for clients in full time work. He was an exceptionally a hard worker and stated that the more hours he put in, the more money he would get. He was so determined, that a few months after he left us, he had set up his own cleaning company and got his own van.



**What do you enjoy most about working at Launchpad?**

I enjoy working with my team, with whom I have a great relationship. As you spend most of your day at work with colleagues, you have to be happy, otherwise for me, I would not be fulfilled. I also enjoy the challenge. It’s not an easy job; every day is different. Some days are quite hectic, others are much calmer.

Some people come to us with virtually nothing. They are homeless and may have lived on the streets for years. They may have lost everything, perhaps because of some bad choices they may have made or some traumatic experiences in their life.

When they come in to Launchpad, we welcome and talk to them respectfully, give them a key to their new accommodation. On receiving the keys, you can see their reactions; the joy on their faces. Some of them even cry – often this is something they had before but have lost, and all of a sudden, you are bringing their life back and giving them another opportunity. This gives me a lot of joy.

Similarly when they go through our programme and come to leave us, whether it's to go to university or move into their own accommodation, to see the smiles on their faces is a joy to watch. Sometimes, some parents come and thank us for the contribution we may have made to their child's life. It's very rewarding.

**And what about you Swakata, tell us a little about yourself.**

I have a lovely wife and 2 kids. I am originally from Sierra Leone in West Africa but have lived in Reading for 19 years. I decided to go to Russia in 1991 to pursue a Post Graduate study programme. When I finished my study programme, I couldn't go back to Sierra Leone because of the 9 year civil war my country was experiencing at the time. I was invited by my cousin to come and stay with him in the UK in 1994. In 2001, I started a study programme at Reading University and graduated with a BA Honours degree in Community Studies and Youth Work in 2004. Prior to joining Launchpad, I worked for a housing association and two other organisations that supported young people.