

WIRED FOR SUCCESS

ECA Women into Electrical Contracting Initiative



CANDIDATE
BIOGRAPHY

Hoa Chi Luu

Hoa is a single mother from New Eltham, aged 35. She has a 12-year-old daughter, Kira, with cerebral palsy, a disease which affects mobility and balance. Originally from Vietnam, Hoa came to the UK with her family when she was six, and left school at 16 with four GCSEs. Hoa tried college for a while but then chose to go into the workplace instead, and undertook casual work 'to pay the bills', before having her daughter.

Her main role for the past 11 years has been supporting and caring for Kira and helping her to reach her childhood milestones, including walking, attending school and getting around on her own - a stage she is now at.

Kira has just started secondary school and Hoa now has the free time to get back into work.

Hoa would like to be a positive role model for her daughter, encouraging her to work hard at school so she can have a better future; and she is a firm believer that people should be able to work for a living. Now that her daughter's care is not so demanding of her time, Hoa wants to find a career with prospects and feels that the ECA Wired for Success Initiative is a 'gift', "because it fits her life and the idea of working on electrics instantly appealed to her."

She can see the opportunities that being a female electrician offers, for example setting up a business specialising in new 'markets' where women tradespeople are preferred, due to cultural sensitivities.

"This will help me set a good example for my daughter, Kira, now that she is able to do things for herself and have a normal life around her disability. All the time I've been with her I've not been working, and it's not good for her to see that."

HOA CHI LUU

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CANDIDATE BIOGRAPHY **Julie Dickman**

Julie, 51, lives in Shooters Hill with her boyfriend and has three grown-up sons and a 6 year old grand-daughter who she looks after for her son during school holidays. She left school in 1975 and went straight into work, which was easy to come by back then. She gained all-round office training while working within the communications department of a City law firm for some time, which was followed by other office posts.

After having her children she did any job she could get, from bar work to cleaning. Despite her reception/frontline knowledge and experience, Julie finds she is overlooked for jobs on the grounds of her age and because she doesn't fit the corporate profile; understanding from what the employment agencies say that City firms only want 'pretty young girls to work in front of house roles'. She is currently unemployed, despite applying for 50 to 60 jobs a day online, and is desperate to find work and to get off benefits.

Julie is a very keen DIY-er and has had some experience of the trade sector, as her father was a self-employed painter and decorator and her brothers work in the building trades. She saw that her father had a good career and, with his strong work ethic which she greatly admired, he always had jobs and money coming in to look after his family.

Julie describes herself and other women in this situation as part of the 'forgotten generation' – too old to get a job but too young to not work. By undertaking the ECA Wired for Success Initiative, she wants to inspire women of her age, showing them that it is still possible to get back into work and stand on your own two feet.

She believes that as adults seeking to get off benefits, females are completely overlooked under the current system when it comes to getting the chance to train for work in the trades - she says, "When I go to sign on - which I hate - there are no options for women. The men are told 'We can train you to be gas fitters', but women are only given computing and office training, which I've done, and passed, and I still can't get a job."

"I feel like part of a forgotten generation. If I do this, this will be a good profession; I can get work out of it and I will be able to afford to go to the shops and buy a loaf of bread and pay my rent in full. At the moment, I have no money, I can't see any prospects, I'm 51 and I often think I'm going to die like this."

JULIE DICKMAN

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CANDIDATE BIOGRAPHY **Kate Frimpong**

Kate, originally from Ghana, is a 23-year-old single mum living in Lewisham with two pre-school age daughters, Loriah (3) and Nev e (18 months). She left school in 2004 following her GCSEs and also went to college to study travel and tourism, while working in retail to pay for it. More retail work followed and then a job as a receptionist, which she recently left to have her first daughter.

Now that both her children have started nursery, Kate has the time to dedicate to learning a vocational skill; something she has wanted to do since she was a teenager. She has always enjoyed 'practical' things and says she is keen to also do the things that men can do.

Kate comes from a single parent family of five children. Now with two young daughters herself, she openly admires her mum and recognises how hard she worked to bring up her children without a father.

As female unemployment hits the 1 million mark, the highest since the late 1980s, Kate sees the ECA Wired for Success Initiative as something that would suit her circumstances regarding her family commitments and give her a real opportunity to find a job at the end of the two year course. She is determined to achieve success for the sake of her children.

"I have seen how my mum keeps pushing and never stops when raising five children by herself. I too will keep pushing myself and not stop until I get where I need to get with this course."

"I'm doing this to make sure my kids have a better life, and to try to achieve something for them. They are my motivation to achieve something in life."

KATE FRIMPONG

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CANDIDATE BIOGRAPHY **Nicole Briscoe**

Nicole is a single parent in her 40's from Herne Hill, with three children aged between six and 26. Nicole discovered she had a natural talent for electronics and electrics when, as a young teenager, she took apart and fixed her cassette player and liked the analytical process involved. She followed up this interest by studying and completing a qualification in electronic engineering before becoming pregnant with her first daughter, Kellie-Marie, now 26.

As a mum with a young child, Nicole wanted a fallback career in case by the time she tried to go back to electronics her qualification was no longer relevant. As such, she took courses in reception work. This was followed by a 'Computers for Women' IT course and she then went into software engineering, taking an Access course at London South Bank University followed by a degree in software engineering. By the end of it, Nicole says she studied for the best part of seven years, and when she wasn't studying, she was working and caring for her children.

Unfortunately, the courses Nicole took led to employment which was not flexible enough for a young mother, she says, "There are a lot of opportunities you don't have access to when you have a family to care for. It is important to be there for your children, especially when they are young, and to spend time with them rather than them being looked after by someone else."

Looking back, Nicole recalls how hard it was studying, working and caring for a family, but she is pleased she always insisted that her work let her put the children first, and allowed her to spend time with them. She felt it was important to be there for them, especially when they were young to help with homework and issues around school, to go to parent-teacher meetings and watch them in their plays.

Now that her children are older, Nicole is looking for a career; she doesn't just want to do the usual short course that leads to nothing. Once she has completed the ECA Wired for Success Initiative, she would ultimately like to become an NVQ assessor, so she can combine her desire to teach and help people to achieve with her love of all things electric. "No matter what happens, you always need electricians. It's a great environment," says Nicole.

Nicole was so enthused by the initiative that she encouraged her daughter Kellie to apply. Both mother and daughter were successful and are both involved in this initiative.

"I had no doubt that I wanted this because, as well as it being practical, for me it's about the flexibility and the fact that I can have a path that lets me manage my family needs."

"There are a lot of mothers who would like to take a course and do training, but the opportunity is just not there, because they have to think about their children. So this kind of thing is really, really important."

NICOLE BRISCOE

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Kellie-Marie Briscoe-Walker



Kellie-Marie, 26, lives in Herne Hill with her mother, brother (20) and sister (6). After leaving school, she followed her practical and creative side and went to college to study fashion and textiles, before work and money called. After beginning her working life in retail, she took several temporary roles in the City. She was then made permanent at one of the firms and worked in HR for 6 years, where she learned on the job, making use of her love of maths in areas like accounting and payroll.

Kellie-Marie's job ended and she was looking for other work when she was encouraged to sign up to the ECA Wired for Success Initiative by her mum, Nicole Briscoe, who is also taking part. Nicole says that she knew it would be ideal for her daughter, because Kellie 'shines in this kind of environment.'

Kellie-Marie says she had already found herself disheartened with life at a computer in an office environment, and wanted a career which would allow her to get out and about and get to meet new people. Excited about nurturing her practical side and continuing to keep her maths skills fresh, she is looking forward to the challenges of the course and all it entails.

Kellie-Marie hopes to work for an electrician to gain the experience and confidence needed to set up her own business – possibly with her mum!

"I'm looking forward to getting out there and showing men how it's done! I'll just do the job in half the time, more tidily, and then walk out again!"

"I think there is already a market for women to do this work and, because we're the first group, hopefully a lot of work opportunities will come our way."

"My friends think it's slightly unusual, but they said, 'it suits you'. It's a surprise, but a good one."

**KELLIE-MARIE
BRISCOE-WALKER**

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CANDIDATE BIOGRAPHY **Stephanie Skervin**

Stephanie is 30 and lives in East Dulwich. While she loved school, and successfully gained seven GCSEs, she felt she didn't get the grades she wanted in sixth form to continue studying, so decided to get a job. After a year however, the company Stephanie worked for went into liquidation and she was made redundant at the age of 19. This prompted Stephanie to return to university, where she completed a two-year HND in Marketing and Advertising.

Stephanie found it difficult to secure work in this area and after a year and a half of being unemployed, she went into youth work before going back to education to study a masters in Sports Management, alongside working as a receptionist. However, she was made redundant again for the second time in her life following a company restructure. The loss of income made financing her studies impossible and Stephanie took out a career development loan.

Throughout her adult life, Stephanie has found it hard to find work, but has not let it deter her, continuing to gain high level qualifications and seek out career prospects. She faces the problem that although she has qualifications including her Sports management specialism, she lacks the experience that employers demand.

At the beginning of 2011, and prior to starting on the ECA Wired for Success Initiative, Stephanie took a Level 1 Certificate in Construction Learning, which included bricklaying and elementary plastering. This sparked her interest in becoming an electrician and now she wants to get trained, qualified and set up her own company. She is realistic though and would like to work for a company first to get experience. In her grand scheme, Stephanie would also like to learn other related skills such as plumbing, so she – and her future business – can offer an all-round service.

According to Stephanie, "This initiative just shows what is achievable; some people would not want to go into a male-dominated industry, and that's because of fear. And we have to find a way to combat that fear, because a lot of the top industries in the world are dominated by men."

"Alan Sugar is an inspiration because he's come so far. I like it when people who are not born with a silver spoon in their mouth, make their lives better for themselves."

"A lot of people aim for the middle level and they don't aim for the sky. The other day, I saw a man with a white Lamborghini. He didn't look over 40 and I don't know what he does as a career, but he probably works hard. People work for what they have."

STEPHANIE SKERVIN

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CANDIDATE BIOGRAPHY **Sue-Ann McCook**

Sue-Ann, 30, is divorced and lives in Deptford with her two children, a boy and girl aged 8 and 10. Originally from Trinidad and Tobago, she moved to London at 17 and began studying business at Lewisham College, where she met, and soon married her husband.

She was later encouraged, by her mum, to become a midwife, so took an Access course to Nursing and Midwifery. But her heart wasn't in it and as her family circumstances changed, when her son and daughter came along, Sue-Ann went for locally-based jobs. This led her to do a variety of different roles from general sales to pub work, all of which she made fit around her childcare. Most recently, Sue-Ann worked as a part-time agency teacher and mealtime assistant for special needs children – a job with hours that accommodated her family commitments; something that is vitally important to her.

Sue-Ann comes from very practical, working-minded parents; her mother is a seamstress and baker, while her father was a 'Jack-of-all-trades', over the course of his working life running a bakery, a driving school, a tailors and a mechanic shop. He strongly believed that people should be multi-skilled.

Sue-Ann often wonders whether she might have become a mechanic if her father hadn't died when she was so young, rather than being pushed into midwifery; she certainly felt more at home in a garage than a hospital. But while Sue-Ann was never a 'girly-girl', she had not considered working as an electrician before as, in Trinidad and Tobago, girls are pushed towards traditional roles. But this doesn't daunt her, and Sue-Ann is keen to get onsite with all her male colleagues.

After completing the ECA Wired for Success Initiative, Sue-Ann would like to start off working for a firm to build up her experience and confidence, as well as the capital that she will need to ultimately start up her own business. She believes, after so many years and false starts, that she has finally found her calling.

“If there is no job in a particular area, find something else. My parents said it was important to develop new skills or use the skills you have so you are not stuck in one spot. Because, if times change, you need to be able to do something else.”

“I want a job that I'm excited about getting up and going to every morning! There are a lot of women who are at home, but who would like to be doing something. They just don't have the opportunities, financially or because of their family commitments. It's very hard to find a job when you have children.”

SUE-ANN MCCOOK

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Vicki Van Eck



Vicki is 43 and lives with her partner in Surrey. While she did not have a close relationship with her father, an engineer, Vicki found that as a child she was very interested in his work. And by the time she was five, she knew what she wanted to be when she grew up! Despite an aptitude for practical subjects and declaring her wish to pursue an engineering career, her careers teacher tried to talk her out of it, saying she should pursue hairdressing or secretarial work instead. Vicki went her own way and got a place studying a degree in mechanical engineering at Southampton University, where – as a woman in the 1980s – Vicki says she encountered a lot of prejudice as only one of two women on the course, “I got a lot of strange reactions from both sexes when I told people ‘I’m an engineer’ – they didn’t know how to deal with it or how to engage with me. I got the feeling that they thought I was strange – possibly because I was young and blonde!”

After graduating, Vicki worked as a technical support engineer for 15 years, including three and half years working in Boston, USA. But she was made redundant in 2001. The redundancy affected Vicki severely as her job was her life, and she had lost the thing she loved most – as well as the only job she had ever known.

She was offered work in a wine shop where she was quickly promoted to store manager and then Relief Manager for South East England. Vicki worked 90 hour weeks trying to regain her former lifestyle but the long hours took their toll and Vicki suffered a nervous breakdown. Her depression was exacerbated by her not being able to work during her illness. Of this experience she says: “I found it very hard because I was a very active person, and stopping working was more depressing than not being well.”

Vicki has now recovered and is ready to learn a new skill and embark on a career again. She sees the ECA Wired for Success Initiative as an important a stepping stone back into work, and looks forward to gaining a new set of skills while working with the talent she already has.

“At university in the ‘80s, people looked at me strangely because I wanted to do a man’s job. They never considered it was because I was actually interested in the subject itself.”

“I want to give other women confidence; they shouldn’t be frightened, or scared, or ashamed because you want to do a different sort of job.”

VICKI VAN ECK

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Josephine Blackwood Demirkilic



Josephine is a 42-year-old single mum, originally from Birmingham but now living in Sydenham. She has two young girls, the youngest of whom has just started primary school.

When growing up, Josephine's parents instilled in her a strong work ethic. Her mother worked as a cleaner across Birmingham, while her father was a factory worker who then moved into property development following an injury. It was her father's work in property that sparked an interest in DIY when, as a young girl, she would accompany him on visits to his properties and liked to watch the gas fitters and radiator installers at work.

When she finished school in the early 1980s, many of her friends went to have babies, but Josephine went into the government training scheme which was in place at the time. It led her into the catering industry and work as a secretary, which she feels she did simply because it was 'expected' of women at the time.

She left the world of work to take care of her children but, wanting to be independent around the house, she went on a plumbing course – where she was the only woman. She did this to foundation level, as she then needed to find an employer to progress further.

Josephine is excited about the opportunity the ECA Wired for Success Initiative will provide to build a career in the electrical industry, giving her the chance to work towards having a better life and being able to provide for her children. Now, with a course that fits around her childcare arrangements, she feels like she's on the right path and is looking forward to expanding her horizons for the future.

"I think this is about a change in mindsets, because you limit yourself to certain careers or what you think you can do, but when you change your mindset, you think 'Why can't I?'," says Josephine.

"When you question what makes you tick and what you really think, you've got to be honest with yourself. I want to be honest with myself, and I don't want to go with the crowd. I want to do what feels right for me."

"I'm a single parent, there's only me, my kids rely on me and I want the best for them. I don't really want to struggle the way my mum struggled. She wanted her own money and always made it clear to me not to depend on anyone else."

**JOSEPHINE BLACKWOOD
DEMIRKILIC**

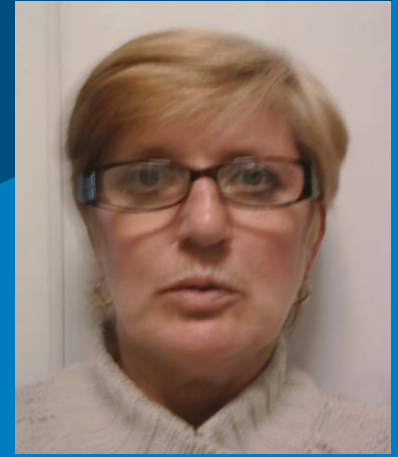
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Carolann McFadyen

Born in Scotland and raised in the North East of England, Carolann is a 46 year old mother of one boy, her eight year old son Fian, who lives with her in Essex. Carolann grew up with mechanical terms like 'pile driving' and 'ground cages', courtesy of her father who was a civil engineer. He represented a technical, craft-based world which she says feels natural to her.

Not a lover of the classroom routine, on finishing secondary school and completing her GCSE's, Carolann and her sister moved to Spain to work and see some of the world. She found employment selling timeshares, and stayed living and working in Spain for over ten years.

After the age of 30, Carolann travelled around the world, and then continued working in the timeshare business and travelling until she was ready to move home. Back in England she worked again selling timeshares through telemarketing. Her son was born in 2003 and a year later she started working as a sales advisor for a national retailer in Romford. She spent 5 years with the company, but left to seek a better living due to a lack of promotion opportunities within her role.

Since 2009, Carolann has been searching for work, but found it impossible to find a job, experiencing an all-too-common situation for those seeking employment at the present time: "You don't even get responses to the applications you're sending off; its so disheartening."

While out of work, Carolann spotted an opportunity that led her to then pursue a plumbing career. As well as feeling at home with the practical nature of a manual trade, she observed that when the block where she lives was being refurbished, many of the elderly residents expressed their preference for female tradespeople. Prior to winning a place on this initiative, she had signed up to train as a plumber on a course she found through the job centre. It was all ready to go, but with the change of government came changes to funding arrangements and the course was pulled.

Learning a trade for Carolann made perfect sense - "I would rather have tools and hammers in my hand than kitchen utensils, because I just don't have a clue when it comes to domestic work. I do all my decorating and my Mum's, including laying my laminate flooring. For as long as I can remember, I've done the decorating. "Carolann wants to be working so she can give her boy a better life, because she has always provided for him and never had to rely on benefits before. She hopes to work alongside someone after she qualifies to build up her skills and knowledge, but is confident that this will lead to the opportunity for her to start off her own company in the future, employing teams of qualified men and women to provide a multi-disciplinary trade service covering electrical, plumbing, heating and decorating.

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"You hear in the news that there are millions of people in the country on the poverty line now. Very soon, people won't be able to afford to get their hair and nails done in salons because it will be a luxury; but homes always need tradespeople. Be an electrician; be a plumber; be a decorator. Get a trade!"

"The more women that know about this initiative, the more a light will go on. Women shouldn't be held back thinking this is not a job for them. Why isn't it? I think it's about time we got rid of the barriers."

CAROLANN MCFADYEN



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Jahmena Wilson-Duhaney



Currently unemployed, Jahmena, 25, is married and lives in Croydon. When growing up she wanted to become a lawyer, and went to sixth form college to pursue her dream.

However, while taking her AS-levels, Jahmena decided to become the guardian of her youngest sister, the baby of the family, as her parents were unable to care for her. This meant Jahmena's education took a back seat while family commitments were attended to.

However, when the situation settled, she decided to study for a nursing diploma at Middlesex University, but by the second year the time commitments were simply too challenging for her to be able to look after her family and study at the same time. Now her daughter is starting primary school, Jahmena is now more able to get back into work.

Jahmena is determined to be in control of her future. She is very excited about the ECA Wired for Success Initiative as she sees it as an opportunity to train for a career where, one day, she can be her own boss. Being able to structure her work around her family is extremely important to her, and ultimately she would like to start up a female-oriented electrician's firm to provide services for those who'd prefer a woman to carry out their electrical work. Most importantly for her, she wants to be able to get off benefits and build a bright future for her and her family.

"This opportunity is amazing. I really think there is a massive gap in the electrical market that someone like me could fill. I'm looking forward to learning a new skill and being able to fix things as at the moment, I've no idea!"

"I hate being on benefits, so something like this would make a massive difference. I just want to be in control of my life; I don't want to sit at home waiting for handouts. This Initiative is really empowering."

**JAHMENA
WILSON-DUHANAY**

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Charmain Luke



Never one to sit still, 43 year old Charmain “loves a challenge” and by her own admission “being very, very busy.” Nothing fazes her; pride and positivity ooze from every pore.

This mother of six and grandmother of three hails from West London, where she lives with her husband and family. A firm believer in the power of knowledge, Charmain has continued to study throughout her life and has worked in roles that combine a hands-on approach with her passion for people. Charmain’s ‘can do attitude’ and hard work have served her well and allowed her to excel and progress up the ladder in everything that she does. Starting out as a Nursery Assistant, she graduated to qualified Nursery Teacher and following a number of years in retail, where she honed her managerial skills, she again returned to study and became a social worker.

Currently, she employs all of her past experience and skills as an L&Q Champion dealing with everything from burst pipes, first aid, and liaising with contractors on her estate to setting up her furniture recycling initiative for residents. Charmain’s people skills have united her community and through talking to the local children, she now has “zero anti-social behaviour” on her estate, a fact which she is rightly proud of. This superwoman also finds time to bake with kids on the estate and is such an integral part of her community that she has been asked to put herself forward to become a parent governor.

Charmain cites her social worker mother as her role model – another lady who didn’t let time pass her by - who brought up six kids on her own and “somehow always managed to turn a negative into a positive.” This sunny disposition runs in the family as Charmain’s husband, a semi-pro footballer, had to stop work a few years ago due to a debilitating eye condition, which leaves him partially sighted. Always looking to the positive, Charmain helped him to keep up his love of football by teaching the game to the kids in their community. It has to be said that she has a bit of an inside track, with one son a qualified electrician and another currently in training. She feels that her interaction with contractors within her role as L&Q Champion has given her an appetite to learn more – not least so that she understands exactly what they are talking about.

Given her love of studying and the fact that she throws herself into everything that she does, her family were not surprised that she wanted to join this initiative and are incredibly supportive. As a very close family and a mother who believes in “old fashioned values” Charmain is looking forward to being a good role model and to joining her kids in their after-school homework.

Once qualified, Charmain hopes to work for herself and perhaps one day set-up her own business.

ECA's Wired for Success demonstrates the power of working in partnership with like-minded organisations to encourage diversity in a non-traditional industry. Conceived and spearheaded by the ECA's Skills Ambassador and outgoing President, Diane Johnson, it aims to break down the barriers which prevent women from entering the electrical industry, while helping to provide a solution to the skills crisis within the electrical sector. This pilot programme offers a blueprint for success which we hope will be replicated by housing associations, business and organisations, across the UK.

“Never say never and never say you are too old, you can do anything if you put your mind to it. There is so much leverage in changing careers it can open new doors.”

“There are not a lot of women in industry and I would like to be a role model. L&Q have put a lot of faith in me and I want to repay that.... I hope that by taking part I will inspire other women to make a complete change and to try something new. I have already spoken to women on my estate and they think it is great.”

CHARMAIN LUKE



Representing the best in electrical engineering and building services