

Servita x Shuri Network Mentorship Programme – Our Way of Reducing the Skills Gap

At Servita, we've always prided ourselves on doing things differently. As a digital transformation consultancy working primarily within the NHS and public sector, we're used to operating in complex, high-stakes environments where real progress matters. So when we can make a meaningful impact beyond our day-to-day work, we make it happen - and our partnership with the Shuri Network is a prime example of that.

Like most good things, our relationship with the Shuri Network started with the right introduction. As a consultancy, we're often asked to demonstrate what we've tangibly done to contribute beyond our work itself, and we've always wanted our answer to that question to represent our values. During research for a bid, we came across the Shuri Network and were immediately brought into their mission. James Smith, our Talent Acquisition and Retention Manager, had an existing relationship with Dillan Yogendra on the Shuri board, who kindly introduced us to Shera Chok and Eddie Ola. A couple of conversations later, we'd started to work out exactly how we could contribute, and that's where the mentorship program was born.

Around the same time, we were having some honest internal conversations about where we were as an organisation. We'd made genuine efforts on diversity, and our female representation is something we're proud of, but we had work to do on our ethnic diversity. Being more diverse is an opportunity to bring in different perspectives, new ideas and ultimately build a better business.

When we looked more closely at why we were where we were, we came to two conclusions. First, there is more we can do to be a genuinely inclusive place to hire. But second, and just as importantly, there is a real skills gap within underrepresented communities, particularly within technical specialisms and leadership roles. This is an industry wide problem, and one the NHS knows all too well.

Our first step was to identify someone we felt we could really help. Thanks to the introduction from the Shuri Network, we found exactly that in Ufuoma. As Project Manager at Nottinghamshire Foundation NHS Trust, Ufuoma works as part of a multifaceted team every day made up of architects and engineers and had a clear aspiration to deepen her understanding of what they do at a fundamental level. We were impressed by that drive, and once we understood what she was looking to get out of the experience, we had a good idea of where to start. In day-to-day work, the opportunity to deep dive into other roles isn't something many of us have the bandwidth for, so the intention was to give her exactly that.

After selecting Ufuoma, we agreed we didn't want to just hand her a pile of materials and call it a mentorship. Instead, we built a virtual hospital environment called Project HomeWards - exactly the kind of setup we'd put together on an NHS program and made that the foundation for every session. Ufuoma worked through live, real-time problems within that environment, supported throughout by Holly Duquenoy Lawrence, one of our Senior Software Engineers, and Ste Legassick, our Head of Architecture.

Ufuoma's task was to step into the shoes of an architect or software engineer and make the case, as if pitching to the NHS, on whether to build the HomeWards solution internally or procure an off-the-shelf product. This is a real consulting challenge, designed to give her a platform to showcase everything she'd built and learned, and some genuinely useful feedback to take away. She delivered it brilliantly, and we couldn't have asked for someone more open-minded and positive to join us for the first one. The final day was one to remember; great feedback all round, plenty of laughs, good food and even better company at our Leeds office.

Currently, we're in the middle of our second program, with clear plans to complete a 3rd mentorship program in 2026, and move toward a more formalised, group-based model from 2027, getting more people through while keeping the focus and quality that made the first one work. We've already seen that this programme can benefit the curious; allowing real experience in other roles that is hard to come by

when you're established in a career – and we remain committed to helping members of the Shuri Network however we can.

Diversity across the NHS on the whole paints an encouraging picture, but it begs the question of why so few of those ethnicities are represented at leadership level. As a consultancy operating so deeply within the NHS, we sometimes wonder whether we're a byproduct of that same problem. Our first meeting with the Shuri Network brought that into focus and made doing something about it feel less like a choice, and more like a responsibility. We're not going to fix it on our own - but we can do our bit, properly, with the right people. And that's exactly what we intend to keep doing.