

Childcare Works case study: Li'l Angels Shotton, Flintshire

Hear how the Childcare Works (phase 1) project supported Gary Sibbald in his placement with Li'l Angels Nursery Owner and Manager Sue Evans.

Sue Evans, Nursery Owner and Manager

"We had been through a difficult patch but we always remained in ratio for the staff we had. I asked if we could join the scheme because I thought it would be good for us as well as the nursery.

"I'm 55 but most of my staff are aged 30 downwards. I was the golden oldie! It's good to have a range of ages who can bring something different to the job. More mature ones bring life experience.

Gary joined the setting as part of the project, working 16 hours a week for 12 weeks.

"He loves it and calls the children the "little people".

Gary was offered a permanent job with the nursery and has now increased his hours to 25 a week but he's always willing to do extra.

Gary is also the only male nursery practitioner at the nursery.

"It's successful for us because a lot of our children are without dads or they have lost their granddad, so to have that male figure is lovely for them. With some of the activities, the children may not be keen to do with us, but with Gary, they will do them. They like to do construction and art with Gary.

Gary has had a real impact on some of the children too.

"When he first started we had a little girl who was three who didn't really talk. On Gary's first day this little girl started talking and now doesn't shut up! She is also eating. When Gary first started with us, some of the children we picked up from school used to ask if Gary was in today. They were starting to know what days he would be in and would call them 'Gary days'. Some children show him their art and like to draw with him. He's brought a different dimension into the nursery.

"The important side to NDNA's Childcare Works is that participants have skills and experience but don't always realise it. I would say to other nurseries to sign up for it – we would take part in it

again, both for our benefit and the candidate. Everybody wins. The NDNA Cymru team is very supportive and lovely.”

Gary Sibbald, Childcare Works participant – 55

Gary was homeless and unemployed when he was supported by Flintshire Council and the NHS. He signed up for the NDNA Childcare Works programme and hasn't looked back.

“Flintshire Council were compassionate and understanding. I did a four-day course to get my confidence back. I had the mindset to do something. It was about taking small steps. You have got to believe in yourself before you believe in anything else.

“I was told about the Childcare Works project in which we got paid to learn. I had never considered childcare as a career but I had kids and had been around the world, and used to employ people myself.

“The project was brilliant, inspirational. NDNA Cymru moved the goalposts to help me during the project. It was the first time they had done it for my age group and I didn't know I was going to be the only man to do it!

“I was getting two buses in the morning to get to the courses in Mold for 9am. The first week I told NDNA that I didn't think it was going to work. I was living in a temporary flat the council put me in but had to get up very early. Sarah from NDNA Cymru changed the start time to 8.30am so I wasn't waiting outside in the cold.

“I am creative and enjoyed learning. It was the right pace. I did subjects like paediatric first aid, safeguarding, and duty of care. It opened my mind – if you see something and are not happy with it, you can't just leave it to someone else, it made me question myself.

“I was taking part in the courses, then Sarah found a nursery close to me which was half an hour's walk. NDNA Cymru paid for my uniform. I went in to see Sue to say I was looking for 16 hours per week – just to give me a foot in the door. She took a chance on me and now I have a permanent job. I have also got a bigger flat in the same area. It's being renovated. I enjoy painting and writing there.

“All I can give back is my time and that's what the children want. It's hard but not rocket science to keep a child happy. I just go down to their level. I talk to them and I treat them as little people.

“I was nervous the first time. They put me in a room after going through the procedures with Sue. I owed it to NDNA Cymru and to myself. Being a bit older I have my common sense. I was nervous but the kids called me daddy or granddad which I take as a compliment! It's instinctive, not something you learn.

“Some days I feel very humbled and am nearly in tears. At the end of my first week, Sue said she needed to speak to me before I went home. I thought I had done something wrong. She said – well done, we had concerns about a little girl because she hadn’t spoken for a month but from my first day, she’s interacting. Her parents had noticed a difference.

“I would recommend this to anyone in a similar position. I thought it was a career for younger ones. It doesn’t matter being older, we have more to bring to the table such as knowledge and life experience.

“It has given me confidence and changed my life. Outside of here, I am occupied with the local community. I am tired at night and I sleep. I feel fulfilled, I have got a purpose. I love it. It’s a passion now. Some of the children have gone now but when I see them outside nursery they say: “There’s my teacher!” I have influenced them in a positive way.”

Further support

Email: childcareworks@ndna.org.uk

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