

Case study: Childcare Works Project - Trainee Nursery Assistant Experience

Sharon Cale participated in NDNA Cymru's 16-week Childcare Works programme that was delivered in RCT from October to February 2024.

The programme was funded by The Moondance Foundation and supported 5 Trainee Nursery Assistants.

The trainees completed 4 weeks of training, followed by 12 weeks on placement in a childcare setting.

Amy completed her placement at Little Nightingales Nursery in Rhondda Cynon Taf and this case study shares her journey and experience of participating in the programme.



Before starting the Childcare Works programme with National Day Nurseries Association I had not worked for over ten years. I had spent thirteen years looking after my own children, doing school runs and volunteering at their school as well as working online as a Sales rep for a make-up company. I had been trying to work out what it was that I wanted to do but I found it hard to focus on any one thing. Whilst volunteering at my children's school I realised I did not want just any job; I wanted a career. I wanted something that would be community based and that had the possibility of progression within its structure.

With three young children at home, I wanted to use my time outside the home efficiently and work towards building a career for myself. After years of not working, I wanted to use my brain for something other than being 'Mam' although that would always be my number one priority. I wanted to use my brain more but felt that the qualifications I already had were not vocational or focused enough on any specific area or sector. I was at a complete loss on where to start. What did I want to do? How would I gain experience and qualification that were relevant? Was I too old to start over? There were at least another hundred questions running through my mind!

From being at home with my children I felt that my world had gotten smaller in some ways. Although I felt extremely lucky to be at home while my children were younger my confidence about going into a new working

environment had disappeared entirely. I spent much of my time online looking for something I could do with qualifications I already had, I went to jobs fayres and tried to make my CV relevant to anything that caught my interest. I never applied for the roles that interested me though. I lacked experience and felt I would not stand a chance.

Thankfully, at the end of the summer last year, I went to another open day organised by Communities First. There were several speakers throughout the day from various community-based companies in the childcare sector. National Day Nursery Association was one of the companies and it ticked all the boxes for me. Community based, career progression, flexible, support while learning and earning certificates in relevant topics and most of all experience in caring for children outside of the home in a registered setting. It was a perfect fit for me with my children still being quite young plus I had experience with my own children over the last 13 years, so I applied for one of the 5 available places on the program. I am the first to admit that I am notoriously bad at interviews! My self-confidence and faith in my own abilities was low, through the floor at this point. This was my first hurdle in the process, making myself attend the online interview and getting through it coherently! Thankfully, the interview was very informal, and I felt very at ease speaking with Claudia, the Project Manager. I tried to not get my hopes up after speaking with Claudia because after finding out more about the program I really wanted to a place. The interview went well and a few days later I received a call saying I had been successful. I honestly thought I would not get one of the places, I even said the words 'are you sure?!' I was elated, nervous and excited. I felt like a weight had been lifted and finally there was a way to move forward and build something for myself.

The way the course was set out was helpful to me. The first four weeks of training was online and that helped me to ease myself back into using my brain. It improved my confidence tenfold and helped prepare my children for when I started placement. The other trainees were lovely, and we clicked almost immediately. As well as adding some much-needed structure to my daily life I also successfully completed certificates in Emergency Paediatric First Aid, Health and Safety for childcare practitioners including Manual Handling, Food Safety -Early years, Allergy Awareness and Safeguarding, as well as many other modules. The course content was varied and interesting and made easy to understand. The first four weeks flew by, and I felt ready to begin my placement thanks to the training we received.

My placement was at Little Nightingales Nursery in Penygraig. Looking after other people's children is quite different to looking after your own. Having to keep in mind the training I had already received and making connections with the children and staff was nerve wracking. I mostly worked with 1-3 year olds and looking after ten plus toddlers instead of one toddler that happens to be your own works very differently! I loved how every day was so different within the daily routine the setting followed. I helped with arts and crafts (Guy Fawkes, Christmas, St Dwynwen's Day), meal prep and mealtime supervision, toileting, and nappy changing, maintaining the cleanliness of the setting as well as reading and singing to the children in the book corner. Throughout my time on placement, I built some lovely connections with the children there. On the days that I was tired, or a bit stressed with other things outside the setting, spending time with the children helped me to focus and reset my mood and be in the moment with them learning new things. The children at Little Nightingales were amazing and the progress they made in such a short space of time was mind blowing! During my time there a few of the older children left the setting to start school full time or part time. I spent a lot of time talking to the children about moving onto 'big school' and all the new things they will be able to learn

when they start. Although there were fears, nerves, and worries they amazed me at how excited they were to try new things and start the next chapter. In a way they helped me with my own worries about starting something new. My new motto is 'Be more Toddler!'

Overall, my experience of working with National Day Nursery Association and Little Nightingales has been an amazing opportunity and taught me a lot about working with children and about myself. From this experience I have gained confidence, self-esteem and up to date, hands on experience when it comes to working with children and now I know I can manage being in a working environment after being unemployed for so long. Moving forward I will be applying for roles in childcare settings around my local area and hopefully will be able to build on what I have learned so far.

I would happily recommend this program to anyone who would like to work in the early years and childcare as it has been extremely helpful to me. It has been an amazing opportunity, and I am incredibly grateful to be a part of it.

Sharon Cale

Comment from Little Nightingales Nursery, Rhondda Cynon Taf

"I have had three students placed within my Nurseries and they have all been very enthusiastic, reliable and have worked well within their teams, contributing ideas, and effectively working with the children. The project has contributed to their overall knowledge and performance, they are very well supported and managed."

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