

Be brave and go for it, says proud *Sharon*

Sharon Harris loves her job. Using her own experiences to help others every day, Sharon has found the perfect place to work as Anna Hinde found out.

Enjoying your job and wanting to go to work each day is something every working person hopes their role will be. For Sharon Harris it's true.

She's been working as a practice partner with the Learning Disabilities Service at Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust for just over a year; she was supported to obtain the role by Mitch Mitchell at Kent Supported Employment (KSE).

No two days are the same for Sharon, whose responsibility it is to make sure the needs of people with a learning disability are at the centre of what

KCHFT does, particularly in the Learning Disabilities Team.

Sharon has a mild learning disability and her lived experience also helps when she is asked to sit on interview panels, create easy read materials and deliver presentations.

Sharon has an important role to play in co-delivering learning disability awareness and champion training to all new employees who work across all the trust's services.

She said: "I use my voice to make the Learning Disabilities Service and others at KCHFT, even better."

Sharon previously worked as an administration assistant, but changes where she worked resulted in Sharon being out of work for a year before she met Mitch.

After helping to run the reception desk at an event, Mitch told Sharon he had the perfect job for her – her career with KCHFT was about to begin.

Sharon explained: "Mitch showed me the job description and helped me with the application form and making a video

for the interview panel. My dad didn't think I could do this role, but I thought 'I can do this' and I am pleased I did. I am really proud of myself."

Sharon's role takes her all over Kent, from her main office in Gravesend to Folkestone and Dover, where she provides teams with a learning disability perspective.

For example, she has been involved in redesigning the letter relating to cervical screening tests to make sure women with a learning disability fully understand the importance of the test and don't disregard the letter.

She said: "I was so excited to find out I had the job and happy. Everyone I work with is really nice and understanding. Mitch was very helpful too."

And Sharon's advice to other people with a learning disability who are looking for employment? "Try using Kent Supported Employment. It will help you like it helped me, with the forms and at the interview. Be brave and go for it."

Becoming an inclusive employer

We are working with the Kent Supported Employment (KES) to become a more inclusive employer.

This is part of the NHS learning disability pledge, which encourages more NHS trusts to remove barriers to employment for people with disabilities.

In the past 14 months, KES has provided training and workshops to Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust staff and helped to 'job carve' a number of full-time roles into part-time roles that can be offered to people with a learning disability.

To date, four roles have been created and filled. Two people were recruited to the Community Paediatrics Team through the job carving process.

Lesley McWilliams, Operational Administration Manager for the service, explained how the process had benefitted everyone: "The two young people we recruited have both discovered their own strengths and their confidence has grown; they are a huge asset to the service and their presence has changed the dynamics in the workplace."

KES also supported six people with learning disabilities to gain full-time employment with the Facilities Team.

Head of Facilities Rachel Gilhooly said: "I would encourage anyone to consider recruiting staff with learning disabilities. Not just as a diversity tick box, but because our recruits have a real desire to work and to do a good job."

For each of these roles, KES helps KCHFT's Resourcing Team write job descriptions and person specifications, advises on the application process, and for some posts provides candidates with job coaching.

Nicola Rutter, Head of Employee Relations, said: "We understand some of the traditional barriers that people with disabilities face when moving into work and we have been working with KSE to remove these."

"We also recognise that we need to widen our talent pool and by employing more people with learning disabilities we can improve the diversity of our workforce."

"By removing barriers at recruitment and selection processes, we are on the right road to establishing ourselves an employer of choice in Kent."

For more information about Kent Supported Employment visit www.theeducationpeople.org/our-expertise