

Transcript of Helen talking about being a children's centre manager

"My name's Helen Longstaff and I'm a Children's Centre Manager. I started childminding when my daughter was born 13 years ago and I did some qualifications while I was childminding, I did my NVQ, and I very much wanted to get working in the team that supported childcare so I worked with the district partnership team for four years and we were involved with developing new childcare and supporting existing childcare. Then we started on the role-out of the children's centre agenda and I was so excited by it that I decided when the children's centre manager jobs started to pop up that I was going to apply for one.

A children's centre manager is involved with the local community, linking with all of the different agencies and professionals who are working with families with children under 5. The children's centre offers access to any services that a family with children under 5 might want to access. Things like health services, further education, links with job centre plus help people back to employment, toddler groups and pre-schools, local childcare and if there's something that I don't know about that somebody asks me about, then I will go away and find out for them.

A typical day for me might be coming into the office and catching up with my administrator on what's been going on, perhaps giving her some bits and pieces that need to go out to local groups, then maybe popping out to a pre-school to meet with some families, coming back and having a drop-in-and-play session for parents with the toy library coming afterwards.

When I first started childminding 13 years ago there was really no particular route into childminding. It's really exciting now to see new childminders coming on board who are really keen to do qualifications. I've got local childminders who are doing their foundation degree and they're really keen to either just become the best childminder that they can be or to move on further in their career in childcare, but if you're going to work in childcare obviously you need to enjoy working with children but also be organised because there's a lot of paperwork involved these days and that there's a commitment to training and perhaps taking on further qualifications if necessary.

There's a big drive from the Government to up-skill the childcare workforce and so there is funding available from Young in Herts for people to undergo training and qualifications and I think this is really a massive opportunity for all of us working with children under 5 and their families to work together to really provide joined up services for families within their local community and I think that if we get the partnership working right then we've got the chance to really make a difference.

I think it's great if we can get men working in childcare because there's more and more households where perhaps there isn't a male role model in the house and it has been traditionally seen as a female role working in childcare but we are seeing more and more men coming into the field. If we can just break down the barriers and make it more acceptable and encourage men to come in then it's fantastic for the children.

Anyone going into childcare as a career has to know that they're never going to be rich but the job satisfaction makes up for that I think and if you really do want to work with children then starting out as a childminder for instance is a really good first step."