

Real-life story - Stephanie Mascall

Stephanie works as a health trainer (HT) in London. Health trainers usually live in or near the area that they work in and are very familiar with the health and wellbeing challenges that local people face.

Stephanie Mascall

Health trainer

Employer or university

Enfield council (commissioned by Haringey council)



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**How I got into
the role**

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I've always been interested in health and fitness. Long before training as an HT, I'd taken a college course to become a health and fitness teacher, followed by a degree in Sports and Exercise Science in 2011. What really set me on the HT path was becoming an Ambassador Volunteer for Team London at the 639 Enterprise Centre in Tottenham (August 2012 to December 2013).

While I was at the 639 Enterprise Centre, my volunteer coordinator mentioned interviews for a Bowel Cancer Awareness project with the Tottenham Hotspurs Foundation. I applied, was successful, and worked as a Community Health Ambassador. A colleague there was going to do the HT course and I decided that I'd look into it too. In April 2013 I began volunteering as a Health Champion, which is a local requirement to training as a Health Trainer.

The HT course is a City and Guilds certificate at level 3, and I completed this in November 2013. It brought together much of my earlier experience and knowledge and gave me a very good insight into the role. After the course I continued volunteering and was eventually approached by the health and wellbeing manager at Tottenham Hotspurs Foundation to become a public health advisor in partnership with the NHS.

In this role I drove a decommissioned ambulance to various venues in the Haringey and Enfield community, taking all the machinery and equipment for health checks, testing for cholesterol, blood sugar and blood pressure and giving general wellbeing advice and information along with signposting to various services.

The volunteering has been invaluable in giving me a huge variety of experiences and allowing me to develop my networking and people skills! I took up my first paid HT role in September 2014.

- ### **What I do**

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I live in Enfield and work as a Health Trainer (HT) in Haringey, London. HTs are qualified and trained local people who provide motivation, practical support and information to adults to help them to adopt healthier lifestyles. HTs mainly work in a one-to-one situation with clients who might have been referred by other health professionals or have self-referred if they've seen our leaflets or heard about us from others. We use behaviour change approaches to support people to make lifestyle changes in any of these five areas:

- healthy eating
- physical activity
- smoking cessation

- drinking sensibly
- losing weight

At the first appointment I go through a health questionnaire and if the person meets the criteria for referral into a lifestyle service I arrange that, whilst supporting them with regular review sessions. If they don't, we agree a personal health plan and I help them set realistic goals for change. I see people over six sessions and progress is monitored and revisions made to health plans as necessary.

I work three days a week and spend each day at a different venue. This gives flexibility for the clients as they can see me wherever suits them best. These three venues include a leisure centre, a job centre and a health centre. I work closely with other Health Trainers and Health Champions.

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The best bits and challenges

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I really love my job. I see people come in, feeling desperate and having tried lots of other things but feeling nothing's worked for them. As we talk I often see that 'light bulb' moment where the client starts to think 'I can do this'! Even before any change has taken place, sometimes at the first meeting, the client is saying things like, 'Thank you, I feel better already'. I even notice them sit taller, look more interested and, well, just look more confident somehow.

I get a real sense of achievement regularly in this job. I think it's because one-to-one work with clients is so personal, and when someone says a genuine thank you, I know I've made a difference.

Haringey is a very diverse community and a challenge in terms of finding ways of overcoming language barriers with my clients, some of whom bring someone with them to help translate what I'm saying.

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**Life outside
work**

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At the moment, I have a good work–life balance. I have a young son and like the fact that I work one day and then have a day off. This makes me feel that I’m not missing out in any way – at home or at work.

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Career plans and top tips for others

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I am passionate about nutrition and healthy eating and want to be in the best position to share this knowledge. I think one day I’d like to be a self-employed health and wellbeing consultant.

You need to be a good ‘people person’, to be able to communicate with people on all levels, set boundaries, and deal with conflict effectively. The role is extremely satisfying and great if you like to feel in control of your day-to-day work. If you are passionate about health and wellbeing like I am, then this might be the job for you.

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