

Real-life story - Sharon Sipple

Sharon has had a varied career working with young people and families. Her commitment to addressing health inequalities has led her into a role helping children, young people and their families find a lifestyle that will enable them to be a more healthy weight.



Sharon Sipple Health improvement coordinator

Employer or university Nottingham City Care Partnership

Salary range ?25k-?35k

How I got into the role

I studied A levels at school and then worked for the Civil Service before going to University to study History and Economic History. After having a family I did a post-16 teaching certificate and became a literacy and numeracy tutor, I also started teaching A Level History in evening classes.? Some years later I began working for the NHS delivering HIV and AIDS training to all levels of NHS staff and also to the voluntary sector and other public sector organisations.

This led me to work with the Museum Service in Nottingham in a role aimed at increasing the participation of people and communities who did not traditionally visit or use their services. After about five years, I went back to a generic health promotion role with Nottingham City PCT. After a further five years, I needed another challenge and moved into a post teaching History and Politics A Level, and eventually became the Head of Department. Then I got ?itchy feet? again and returned to Nottingham City Health to undertake a Sexual Health and Young People role. In 2012, when there was great uncertainty around posts in public health, I went to work for Public Health England in a commissioning role for screening and immunisations. ?Unfortunately this was not the job for me so I applied for my current role which focuses on childhood obesity.

What I do

I work with children and young people who have a body mass index (BMI) at or above the 98th centile. Tackling obesity in children and young people is a very complex issue involving working with parents or carers to bring about change. Overweight people are not lazy or greedy ? they are like everyone else struggling with the issues and difficulties that life throws at them. There is a real lack of kindness to people who are overweight and I aim to bring a thoughtful kindness to the programme that I deliver.

Children and young people are referred into the programme in a variety of ways. When they enter the programme there has to be a commitment to change. I do an initial assessment with the child and parent or carer in which we identify possible food changes (food swaps and reducing portion size) and physical activity changes they could make. I can sometimes fund three-month memberships for children, their siblings and occasionally parents with local physical activity providers. I can also refer children over 12 years to Slimming World. The changes identified are within the context of their daily lives and the budget of the family. The aim is to see a reduction in BMI by the end of the three months of targeted work.

There is no typical day. I can make home or school visits to meet parents or carers and children, follow up work, and liaise with the School Health Teams and other services. I work with either private physical activity providers or the local authority. Ensuring the success of the programme involves working across the whole of the city of Nottingham and building relationships with School Health Teams, leisure service providers and GP practices.

I have developed a resource pack for the School Health Teams to use to ensure that we are all giving the same messages and I write a newsletter every two months to keep schools informed about what is happening in the Programme. I also compile quarterly statistics and returns.

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The best bits and challenges

The best bits of the job are meeting a wide range of families from diverse communities and seeing the benefits to families when they become healthier and change their lives with physical activity. I also get a real buzz from making the service work and being successful against the odds. To date, over 90 children and young people have graduated through the programme. I have had a very interesting career and wouldn't change anything. ?

Life outside work

I exercise a lot (running especially) and this gives my life a structure and commitment outside work. More recently I have undertaken several sewing courses and I now spend a lot of time making patterns and sewing. In the past I have attended silver jewellery-making classes. These activities require patience and accuracy, which must impact on how I undertake my work role. They also give me time off from thinking about work, helping me to understand the role of the arts and exercise in maintaining emotional wellbeing. I have a strong interest and concern about inequality and inhumanity. ? I do some work with the Holocaust Educational Trust. I am involved in taking young people to Auschwitz on day-trips as part of the Lessons from Auschwitz project. This adds greatly to my understanding of discrimination, bullying and extreme

attitudes. I have also worked as an A-level examiner and A-Level Examinations Team Leader and hope to return to this role when I retire.?

Career plans and top tips for others

If you're considering a similar role, I'd suggest you really understand the political, economic and social context; do hands on work to get real experience and be prepared to work outside your comfort zone ? here is the best learning.

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