

"Seeing people change their lives for the better and knowing I've helped them do that is the best part of my job."

Gareth struggled for 13 years with severe anxiety, but, after receiving life-changing treatment, he decided to make a difference in people's lives by becoming a cognitive behavioural therapist himself.

Gareth Stephens

High intensity cognitive behavioural therapist

Employer or university

South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust

Salary range

£30k-£40k

Gareth Stephens

How I got into the role

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I suffered from severe anxiety when I was younger and was unable to work between the ages of 24 and 33. I tried different treatments and medications but my condition only got worse to the point where I was severely depressed.

One day, I saw a documentary about one of the anxiety disorders that I was suffering from and for the first time heard people talking about the same issues I had. A specialist in London provided me with two diagnoses and, after some perseverance to get funding, I finally received the life-changing treatment I needed. After 12 weeks of treatment in the Anxiety Disorders Residential Unit, I went from being virtually housebound to being able

to sit in a café, go swimming and walk down a busy street with people around me.

The world went from being a place filled with threat, to one of possibility and excitement and I realised then that I wanted to make the same difference to other people's lives.

I decided to train as a psychological wellbeing practitioner. It took two years, I worked four days a week in an NHS service and spent one day at university. After this I found another training role, this time working three days a week at an NHS service and the rest of the week at King's College University London, completing a diploma in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy ^[1] (CBT). I'm now a high-intensity CBT therapist at South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, the trust that treated me!

What I do

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My days are always very busy. I have four hours of clinical work, which is either spent in face-to-face sessions with clients, or conducting telephone assessments. The rest of my day is spent completing admin, attending meetings, receiving or providing supervision or attending training. The most important part of my job is making sure that I provide the best quality treatment possible for my clients.

The best bits and challenges

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I feel proud to work for the same organisation that gave me such excellent care. During the low points of my anxiety, I never thought that I would be able to earn enough money to own my own home or car, or even to go on holiday. To be working in a role where I am able to help people with similar problems to the ones that I had is unbelievably rewarding. Seeing people change their lives for the better and knowing I've helped them do that is the best part of my job. As my days are very busy, the challenge is staying on top of everything and prioritising tasks, particularly if a client has a risk issue.

Life outside work

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My job can be quite stressful so it's important to have interests that help me switch off. I enjoy running, hiking, cooking and going to the cinema. I'm originally from Bolton and often catch up with my family at the local café for a fry-up!

Career plans and top tips for others

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A major myth is that a CBT therapist can 'read people' or is always analysing, but this is not the case.

Supervision and attending workshop sessions provided by my employer, along with reading in my own time have really helped me develop at work. I want to continue developing my skills to become the best therapist that I possibly can. I hope to further my skills by training in interpersonal psychotherapy, compassion focussed therapy and schema therapy.

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Links

[1] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Cognitive_behavioural_therapy