

"My biggest concern was my first day back on the ward. But I felt incredibly supported."

Willow was previously a registered nurse. She enrolled in the Return to Practice programme because she has never found a job that excites and enthuses her as much as nursing.

Willow Maart

Return to practice staff nurse

Employer or university

York Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

Willow Maart - Return to Practice Nurse

• What attracted you to nursing when you first trained?

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I feel that I have always had a natural propensity for caring and nurturing. When I was three, my sister was born with a congenital heart problem. I remember at that early age wanting to understand why she was ill, to help her and to stop her lips from being blue!

When I was 16, my father was a victim of a road traffic accident. I clearly remember standing in the ICU, watching all the tubes, listening to the alarms and being in awe of the nurses who cared for him and supported his gradual recovery.

It was at this time that I made my decision to become a nurse. I got a job in a nursing home and did my school work experience in a local hospital. Whilst waiting to begin my nurse training, I did live-in voluntary work for Leonard Cheshire, a UK charity for disabled people.

Why did you leave?

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I was a single parent, with no family close by and managing shift work felt like an impossible task. Ultimately, the need to raise my children and support them through parental separation outweighed my personal career aspirations.

But the decision to allow my nursing registration to lapse was an incredibly difficult one.

Why did you decide to return?

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My children are now 19 and 16. I have two stepchildren and a partner who understands my need to return to nursing and has supported me all the way. I have never found a job that excites and enthuses me as much as nursing! I have missed the learning opportunities, the care, the science, the team work and support that being part of the NHS offers.

• What were your biggest concerns? What support did you receive?

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My biggest concerns were my self-confidence, the length of time I'd been away from nursing, changes within the NHS, technology, new drugs and equipment, and whether or not I'd cope with it all. When I was accepted onto the course, my biggest concern was my first day back on the ward. But I felt incredibly supported. I had saved up to manage financially at home, and was supported by my partner. I had my course fees paid and got a one-off payment of £500. I used this to pay for fuel to university, books and work shoes and to service my bike for transport to my placement.

My university lecturers were fantastic, especially Michaela Brown from Sheffield Hallam Return To Practice (RTP). Nothing was too much trouble for her, and she helped me to find the confidence I needed. We keep in touch and I am hoping to go back and talk to her new intake of students about my experiences.

My mentor, Lindsay Truscott, on placement could not have been more supportive either. I was incredibly lucky to find a team who wanted to teach me and supported what I was doing. So many people commented on what a great thing it was to come back and how brave I was!

Lindsay would always find someone for me to work with if she wasn't on duty and organised days away from the day job for me to experience different aspects of the directorate. I was actively encouraged to talk about my worries which helped immensely.

I have been lucky enough to secure a job on the post-anaesthesia care unit (PACU) where I had my placement, and this support has continued. I have been placed on a Preceptorship and offered training on a regular basis. There's never a time I don't want to go to work!

What advice would you give someone thinking of returning?

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Go for it! Step out of your comfort zone and give it a go. The amount of effort and enthusiasm that you put in will pay off. It is quite honestly one of the best decisions I have ever made!

Interested in returning to nursing?

We'll send you free, expert advice on restarting your nursing career.

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