



# What's your story?

Our social care workers share their experiences...

## Caz Dunne

In August 2001, nearing the end of my studies at Trowbridge College in Wiltshire, I applied to Cambridgeshire – mainly because I'd visited Cambridge when I was 18 and had loved the city, and was up for a change! I was fortunate enough to be offered a job, subject to passing my diploma.

What impressed me most was all the support offered to a person coming from another area. The Key Worker scheme enabled me to buy a house within the first year of coming here and they contributed towards the deposit of the house.

“ The young people I work with are so inspiring... ”

I joined Cambridge City Children's team firstly in the Intake and Assessment team for two years, then moved to the Looked After Children's Team for a further two and a half years, finally becoming a senior social worker. It was a busy team and we all worked hard – everyone was really supportive of each other and it felt like a big family of

friends and colleagues. There were many experienced workers in the team who took you under their wing and supported you all the way.

Cambridgeshire continued to support my ongoing career development, paying for me to train and complete the degree and Child Care award at UEA where I managed to get a first class honours degree! Whilst studying I was fully supported by my team, given time off to study and a reduced case load. Whilst in the Looked After Children team I got involved with the 'Just Us' groups. These are groups run across Cambridge for young people in care. When the job came up to facilitate these groups and become the Children's Participation Officer I had to apply and was lucky enough to be offered the post.

I have been doing this work now for two and a half years and absolutely love it! I think I have one of the best jobs in the world! I have a great manager, lots of support, and I get to work with a great bunch of young people in care, making sure they are listened to and that changes can be made to constantly improve things. The young people I work with are so inspiring and it's wonderful to be able to see them grow to realise their full potential.



## What's your story?

Our social care workers share their experiences...

### Linda Clampitt

I started working in the Looked After Children's Team in March 2004. I'd moved up from another county and found the Fenland community friendly. I liked the people in Fenland, and was able to buy a house there as it was very affordable. I had a passion for working with looked-after children – when you see what a difference your work makes it's immensely rewarding.

“ when you see  
what a difference  
your work makes  
it's immensely  
rewarding... ”

As a Child and Family Worker, I was encouraged to attend training to support my development. I discussed with my line manager the progression and steps I would need to take to become a Senior Child and Family worker. In the November 2004 I progressed to a Senior Child and Family Worker and started an NVQ Level 3. In January 2005 I completed my NVQ Level 3 and applied to start the Open University Course to qualify as a Social Worker.

I was successful in this application and started the three year course. During this time I had a baby and felt supported through my placements and through the training department itself. I am very close to completing the degree now and would highly recommend it as a career choice.



Cambridgeshire  
County Council

## What's your story?

Our social care workers share their experiences...

### Karen Cooke

I started my career with Cambridgeshire in 1998. I worked in the Cambridge City team as a Family Aide, providing parenting advice and support to families under the direction of the allocated social workers. I went from working part-time to full-time, became more interested in the role of the social worker, and decided to self fund my enrolment on a Level 1 Health and Social Welfare course with the Open University which gave me an overview of Social Work. In 2001 I successfully applied for a secondment onto the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW), with the choices of either attending the local university or continuing my studies with the Open University, and I qualified in 2002.

“there are many opportunities to undertake training to gain a qualification...”

Working and studying at the same time requires dedication and commitment — thankfully my line manager understood the additional pressures on me and was very supportive. I stayed within that team until 2005, when an opportunity came up to become a Senior Social Worker in the Huntingdon team. Working within a completely different geographical area was daunting, but I found that colleagues and managers were supportive.

At Huntingdon I've undertaken further professional development, receiving support in completing part one of the Childcare Award. I'm hoping to undertake part two next year. I've also mentored new staff and am a Practice Assessor for student Social Workers on placement. Professional development is supported by the Council and there are many opportunities to undertake training to gain a qualification (NVQ, degree, post-qualifying) or just to promote one's own practice.



Cambridgeshire  
County Council

# What's your story?

Our social care workers share their experiences...

## Lisa Cousins

I began working for Cambridgeshire County Council as a Senior Child and Family Worker in April 2004 after three years working as a support worker for children and young people with profound and multiple learning disabilities.

During my first year I worked with looked-after children and young people, in a variety of placement situations. I also spent time working with the birth families and foster families of these children and young people. I held a small caseload, including some fairly complex cases, which led my line manager and I to think about the need for me to progress in a professional and personal capacity.

Being aware that I learn best in a classroom environment alongside fellow students, a full-time taught course seemed most suited to my needs. My line manager and I discussed a secondment to the MA in Social Work at the University of East Anglia. I applied, with a supportive reference from my manager, and was granted an interview in two parts: an academic interview with a lecturer and a manager from a service provider, and an interview with a lecturer and a service user. This was an opportunity to relate to a service user and to give them the chance to assess whether I passed the 'garden path test' (i.e. how would you feel if this person was to walk up your garden path?)

I was accepted and started the course a few weeks later, just days after returning from honeymoon! I began feeling sceptical about some of the teaching methods and found it rather woolly. However, these lessons became very important for me on later placements, as I realised that my defensiveness affected my communication with service users and professionals, as well as my ability to reflect and keep service users' needs in mind. Initially I'd thought reflection was something I did automatically and did not need to think about, but using a reflective journal demonstrated a wealth of information that I'd been completely missing.

I've now finished the MA, and feel I've learned so much. I'm more prepared for the work I am undertaking and I actually enjoyed the experience. If social work is of interest then you will find very little of the course boring. The placements really break up the academic work and are great opportunities to apply your learning.