

Meet Gary Richardson – Specialist Residential Worker

With 20+ years of experience in Children's Services ranging from National Children's Homes & YMCA to his current role as Specialist Residential Worker, Gary is passionate about the service we provide to young people with learning disabilities and their families.

Gary joined the Peterborough City Council Children's service in 1998 as a Residential worker in one of our Mainstream Residential units.

In 2007 Gary moved across to Cherry Lodge to work as a Residential Worker with Children with Learning Disabilities.

Over the course of his 13 years at Cherry Lodge, Gary has been supported by his line manager and colleagues to work towards and achieve his NVQ 3 and NQV4 and Diploma in Children's Social Care.

"It can be difficult to turn off at the end of the day when you are so involved with a young person, it's not like leaving the office and turning off your computer. But, although challenging, the role of Support Worker is a truly rewarding role and no two days are ever the same. I truly love my job"

"The job never goes away – there will always be children and families in need of the support that we can give – that sounds like a negative but it's what drives me to strive for each child to have the best opportunities and be best prepared for when they leave the service at 18yrs old. To give life lessons to enable the best level of independence achievable for each individual."

"We work with a multi-agency approach - Medical, Educational, Speech and Language, Social Care professionals, parents and extended family – working together to constantly review and plan next steps to ensure each young person has opportunities to reach their full potential. For some this may be personal care for others semi independent living skills."

"One example of just how rewarding my job is, was a young person who when he came to us could only eat pureed foods – after more than two years, myself colleagues and parents had been working with the young person slowly introducing different foods, textures, flavours, I received a phone call on Christmas Day from his Mum to say he had eaten his first ever Christmas Dinner! To know that we had helped that young person achieve such massive steps was incredible!"

"Young people with learning disabilities need to be given opportunities. If non-verbal, it's not as easy to know if we are getting things right. We need to pick up on other cues e.g. body language and behaviour this takes experience but a supportive working environment means there is always colleagues you can turn to for help. Everyone makes mistakes – and that's ok so long as we learn from them."

“Sometimes a child just needs a friend, someone to listen to them, just be with them.”

“People say to me that they couldn’t do my job, but equally I couldn’t do theirs – this is the right job for me.

What sort of person should apply to be a Support Worker?

“That’s a difficult question to answer – an awareness of other people’s feelings, compassion, determination, the ability to see every one as an individual, a willingness to learn and be in it for the long haul – results in this job often take a long time”

Peterborough Pathways Support Worker

Without the work that the Peterborough Pathways Support Workers do, life for our families would be difficult and limited.

“Working as a team we strive for the best possible outcomes for the individual and their family.”

Whether the young person has complex medical needs and/or learning disabilities, life experiences such as swimming, going to a play park, visiting a cafe can make a huge difference to the young people and families we work with.

A family unit that includes a child with learning disabilities is challenging for the young person, their parents, siblings and extended family.

Respite Care could be offered so that the parents can get a night’s sleep or focus their attentions on the young person’s siblings.

Youngsters need a package of involvement to enable families to do everyday things that a lot of us take for granted. Support Workers enable this to happen by assisting with physical, medical, psychological, issues – sometimes just being a friend is all that is needed. It is important to involve the children that wouldn’t normally experience things because attention is focused on the youngster that requires extra support.