

# Care in Scotland it's life changing work

Andrea-Maria McGowan, Senior Family Development Worker

"I believe working in any job within social services is important."

Andrea-Maria really enjoys her job and says that working in social services is one of the best jobs you could ever have.

What type of service do you work in?

I work for the Quarriers Together We Can Service. The service is a Public Social Partnership made up of a variety of different agencies including Children 1<sup>st</sup>, Barnardo's, North Ayrshire Council, Women's Aid, NHS, The Breastfeeding Network, and the Ayrshire Community Trust.

The service support families with children prebirth to five for six months providing individualised support that suits the family including behaviour management, practical skills and routines.

Our service support families with addictions, domestic abuse issues or any other vulnerability including mental health issues.



### Have you always worked in social services?

Yes, I left school and went to college to complete my HNC in Childcare. From there I went to university to complete my degree in Education and Social Services. Afterwards I began working with adults with disabilities and in social care for the past six years.

## What made you choose the career you have now?

My parents were foster carers so I grew up in a busy household working with children from a variety of different backgrounds including domestic abuse and addictions and I could see the impact it had on them.

When a job for Together We Can came up, I went for it. At that time I was working as a bank Family Development Worker. I wanted to be involved in the early intervention and prevention services. Our service aims to help children and families before they reach crisis and help prevent the children from being taken into care. After working within the service for nine months the opportunity to become the senior arose.

#### Can you tell us more about your job?

It is my job to directly supervise three family development workers as well as supporting a few families.

My job role includes supervising, helping and guiding staff. I deal with child protection concerns and help support staff through the process, I work with individual families and help the project manager with the day to day running of the service ie meetings, budgets, reports.

### What are you working on at the moment?

Currently our project is going through a merger and tender process. This means our service is merging with another Quarriers Family Support Service in order to be funded for next year. A large part of my role is supporting my staff and with this includes helping them work with the other team and become comfortable with each other. I also have to ensure that the families feel comfortable with the change in the service. Another part of the merger process is gathering evidence and information. This includes writing reports for funders, gathering statistics, writing case studies and ensuring outside organisations understand the service and the vital role we play in supporting our families.

#### Who else is in your team?

My team consists of three family development workers, a project manager and an administrator.

## Do you work with other professionals in other sectors?

As a family support service we work with a wide range of professionals including health visitors, early intervention social worker, children and families social workers, service access teams, other family support services, Women's Aid, criminal justice, addiction service and early education staff and many others.

## What part of your job motivates you and why?

I really enjoy my job and there are many different things that motivate me. I think the biggest motivator has to be the difference our service can make to individual families. As part of my job I regularly speak to families who have worked with the service. When they tell me the difference it has made to them, even the smallest change and the impact that has made to a family as a whole.

#### What are the best bits about your job?

Similar to what motivates me, the best bit of my job is the families we support. I am passionate about helping others and having that chance to see where a family starts and where they want to be at the end of the service.

I also say the best part of my job is "hugging babies". I enjoy seeing the children and the difference that we can make to them. The children are the most important part of what we do, as they are our future and helping the families now will help them develop and grow and hopefully help them parent their own children in a supportive and loving way.

## What are the challenges that you face in your job?

My job can be very busy and this can be a challenge but I think the biggest challenge is overcoming barriers with some of our families. As a service many of our families can be suspicious of us and feel that we will have their children removed rather than support them. At times barriers cannot be removed and the family will not work with service which can be frustrating as I know my staff will do everything they can to ensure the families are supported in the best way to suit them. I think it will take a lot more work to remove the stigma of any service intervention for many of our families but over time I hope this perception will change.

In what way is your career in social services rewarding?

I believe working in any job within social services is important. When I worked with adults with disabilities I always said we were in the most privileged position, as we were spending time in people homes, we were part of their lives and could make a positive difference. I think this applies to all jobs within social services as we are working with people and impacting in on their lives. I believe seeing a positive difference is the biggest reward you will ever get and knowing that you are there when people need you the most, when they are at their most vulnerable is a truly rewarding place to be.

Can you explain the skills and qualities you think are needed to do the role you're doing?

There are many skills and qualities you need to work with children and families. You need to be caring, empathetic, non-judgemental. You need to be able to observe a situation and assess what is happening. You need to understand how people think and behave and also you need to enjoy what you do and work with other as part of a team.

Has your job opened up new learning and development for you?

Since starting this job I have been on many different training courses teaching me about a variety of different aspects of my job such as child protection, addiction, mental health, working with victims of domestic abuse, recognising the signs of domestic abuse, child development, understanding behaviour and so many more. Working in the children and families sector provides continuous learning and development. It is an interesting field with so much to learn from. The job itself is ever changing and developing which is important in this line of work.

#### How do you see your carer progressing?

I enjoy working for Quarriers and have done so for six years. I have recently started as a senior and hope this will develop further. I am unsure how I see my career progressing as there are many avenues I am exploring in terms of what's next. I sometimes consider progressing in managing children services and sometimes I consider moving into social work. The field is so vast that it will allow me so many opportunities in the future.

## What would you say to someone thinking about a career in social services?

I would tell them that working in social services is one of the best jobs you could ever have. I would explain that although we cannot offer high wages like other careers but the positive difference you can make to people is far more rewarding than financial gain. It is a great experience and will teach you so many different things and allow you so many different opportunities.

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