

Welsh Women of the Year Finalist & winner of the Wales Care Award goes to.....



Helen Shepherd! Helen, mum of 2, scooped the prestigious Wales Care Award for Leading Practice in Learning Disability Services 2008 and was also a finalist for the Woman in Innovation Award in recognition of her achievements in innovative practice in Wales. Rhyl & Vale MiC get the story behind Helens amazing rise to fame!

Rhyl based Procare Wales began life in 2001 and is now a leading provider of specialist support services to people with learning disabilities, physical disabilities and challenging behaviours, providing 24 hour support to enable people to pursue the lives they choose. The Bangor Centre for Developmental Disabilities (BCDD) which originally started out as a University initiative, now provides residential educational placements to young adults in our specialist community colleges.

Vital Stats:

Name: Helen Shepherd, aged 32
Profession: MD of Procare Wales & BCDD
Married to: Darren aged 32, a Hospital Social Worker
Children: Solomon (5) and Noah (8 Months)

How would you describe yourself? Ooh that's a tuffyy...Hard working, fair, loyal and ... hard working!!

How would others describe you? Passionate about equality and fairness. Hard working (I hope)

Background

I left school when I was 15 and started work in a day service for people with learning disabilities, I remained there until I was 18 at which time I suffered a prolapsed disc due to lifting a client from a wheelchair (at this time manual handling practices were very primitive). An MRI scan soon discovered that I had a condition called Spina Bifida Occulta and two lumber prolapses. Time to rethink my career....I decided that whilst I could still work relatively pain free, I would continue to do so, however I changed direction to working with older people in a less physically challenging role. I soon realised that I needed to get back to working in the field of learning disabilities and I applied for a managerial role within a local care agency, I quadrupled the turnover within the two years that worked there and decided that I should set up my own services which would allow me to put my efforts into running a service that I could be proud of. At the age of 24 I became registered with the CSSIW as an approved provider of care services in Wales.

How do you manage your working week?

Up at 6am courtesy of my husband bringing me a cup of tea. Feed the baby, shower & dress, wash and dress the kids. Breakfast for the whole family. Quick tidy around and out of the house by 8am. Run out to the paddock and bucket feed the horses. Take Noah to my mums and then Solomon on to school for 8.45am, back in the car and at the office by 9am. Work usually consists of behavioural programmes, professional meetings, KFC, Report writing, management meetings, client visits. 5pm Collect the boys from my mums. Home for 5.30 and throw something at the oven. We all go out to feed and groom the horses then back in for 6pm to have tea. 6.30 boys get bathed supper for sol and bottle for Noah at 7pm then its off to bed with a story. 7.30pm - I get tacked up and go for a ride on the beach on my beautiful warmblood or my thoroughbred mare, or I sit and watch TV for an hour or so, either way its Darren and me time until about 10pm when we both lapse into unconsciousness ready to start all over again when the 6am alarm sounds.

Have you always worked since you have had your children?

Yes, I never really stopped, when I was pregnant with Solomon the company was only in its fourth year and there was no way I would have left anyone else in charge at that time, I was in work on my due date and luckily Sol hung on for two weeks, I was still in work when he decided to make an entrance! I had three weeks off with Sol before returning to work full time, I would not recommend this to other people and I learned my lesson second time around and took three full months off work before returning three days a week which I continue to do.

Which areas in your working life do you think are most challenging?

Continual professional development, it is essential that I stay at the forefront of my field in order to provide a valuable and ethical service to my clients, I have by business degree and a Masters degree in behaviour Analysis, by September I will have begun my research PHD which will be heavily focused on Adult LD provision.

What level of support do you have at home to make your working week easier?

I am very lucky in that I have been with my husband Darren since we were in School, we know each other inside out and he totally supports me. I also have the huge benefit of my mum to look after the children when I am working. When my eldest son was born I was torn about leaving him and so the natural solution was for mum to give up her part time job and look after him, the childcare fees I would have been charged by a nursery covered her wages and we were all happy.

How do you manage to achieve your work/life balance?

I have an exceptional team at work who I know I can rely on to keep the day to day business running. I am now at a point in my career where the company is successful and I can work more flexibly allowing me to mould work and home into a more seamless balance.

Where do you imagine yourself in ten years' time?

In a hotter climate I hope (and I don't mean Global Warming). But seriously, having recently won the Wales Care Award in LD I hope to be leading the field of expertise in the area of behavioural support and intervention for severe challenging behaviours, I hope that ProCare will continue to be recognised and held up as an example of excellence in service provision.

