



I first heard of Watford Mencap when I was working for John Lewis and they were our charity of the year. I saw their promotional DVD and was moved by the way they really focussed on the specific needs of each individual with a learning disability. The idea of charity work had always been at the back of my mind and I realised I wanted to help this charity. I had worked in social services and had some experience of supporting people and thought it would be a great opportunity to apply my administration and caring skills to a worthy cause. I applied to the John Lewis Golden Jubilee Trust and won a 6 month fully paid secondment to Watford Mencap.

Watford Mencap gave me extensive induction training. I visited all of the homes, the Children's Centre and went along to many of the activities. Staff spent time describing the work that they did and introduced me to the clients whom they knew very well. During my secondment I prepared a series of case studies about staff, clients and corporate supporters. I thoroughly enjoyed meeting some fantastic people and my case studies were used to promote Watford Mencap's vital work in the community. At the end of my secondment I decided to retire from John Lewis and work as a part time fundraiser for Watford Mencap. After 18 months I wanted to get back to working with the people that Watford Mencap supports.

I applied for a job as a Community Support Worker and was offered the post. I love my job and getting to know the clients. My manager has supported me to do some really good training which has helped me provide person centred support. During the last few years I have supported and got to know a number of clients really well. Every client is different and it takes time to get to know them. One lady that I support has communication issues and Down's syndrome. To help me understand her special needs I did a course on Down's syndrome in my own time. When I see her now I understand her needs so much better and we now regularly play games and go out in the garden.

I support another younger lady who really needs help sorting out her household chores but also enjoys socialising and needs support to go out in the community. She loves shopping and my training helps me support her with keeping to a budget.

More recently, I have been supporting a younger lady to undertake an administrative role in Royal Mencap's Raising Your Game programme. I was interviewed by the client and Royal

Mencap. My training and mentoring from Watford Mencap helped me to really understand her specific needs and she chose me to be her Support Worker. We meet regularly and I support her to do research on the internet, enter information onto a database and attend meetings. I work with her and help her to find ways to remember the things that we have done. She has achieved so much since we started to work together. She has learnt how to accurately input information into the database and travel to attend meetings in Birmingham, sometimes returning on her own.

I love my job and the way that Watford Mencap arranges my work so that I regularly see the same clients. This works really well because you build up a rapport and relationship. The regular contact means you know the client and their carer and their circumstances. You understand their world and what is going on and can make everything you do even more person-centred around their needs.

Lesley Blee

Support Worker