

## Helen Charlton

### Helen's Story....

Helen, known as Charlie, graduated with an Honours Degree in Psychology from Glasgow Caledonian University in 2004. Charlie did lots of voluntary and paid work, during her study years, in various youth



and community roles before finding a full-time (temporary) job as a support worker for young people. However, because Charlie couldn't get all the in-work adjustments that she needed her health suffered and the contract ended.

Charlie has a chronic pain condition in her left knee that can vary from day to day and can reduce her mobility. It also affects her ability to sit in a normal sitting position for any length of time. Charlie needs to elevate her knee and needs equipment that is the same height as her chair allowing the knee

to be straight under her desk. She needs a desk that is of sufficient depth to get her leg underneath.

Charlie also needs to get up and stretch out from time to time and sometimes takes longer to get around and to get to work. Flexible working helps. Charlie's experience has taught her that no two jobs are the same and sometimes there may be additional access requirements. By applying more recently for an assessment through the DWP Access to Work scheme Charlie was granted funding for a specific chair and rest for her leg and both have been provided.

It became clear to Charlie when she was job hunting that she needed to change careers as youth work funding involved doing things that she couldn't do.

Although Charlie struggled, as she had quite specialised skills, she was getting interviews by focussing on her transferrable skills, but interview feedback told her she didn't have the necessary practical experience.

After securing a customer service job in the leisure industry and doing well, Charlie's health suffered once more because once again she couldn't get the in-work adjustments that she needed. In her next job giving energy efficiency advice in Stirling Charlie did get the adjustments that she needed and her health and career prospects were looking up. However, it was unfortunate that funding for the job came to an end and Charlie was unemployed again. In 2011 Charlie applied to GCIL after seeing an advert for a Trainee Housing Officer. She attended an assessment day and in her words "a long interview".

Charlie was successful and accepted a 30-month salaried placement within Unity Homes, Glasgow Housing Association, starting in October of the same year. As part of the Professional Careers Programme Charlie was provided with in-work support from the GCIL team. With financial and educational support Charlie completed three housing qualifications during the 30 months; Level 2 Certificate in Principles of Business and Administration, Housing Administration and a Postgraduate Diploma Housing Studies from University of Glasgow.

At the end of the placement Charlie commented:

*"I wanted to see what I could do if I received all of the adjustments that I needed at work and in my studies - I did very well. I graduated from University of Glasgow in November 2014 and I now have the basis of a sustainable (and enjoyable) career and the experience of how making little adjustments can positively impact my working life and career."*

Charlie continued working as an Intern with the same Housing Association for 13 weeks as a Customer Engagement Intern before the distinct piece of work finished in September 2014.

Shortly afterwards Charlie was delighted to be offered a temporary post as a Housing Officer within a Local Authority, where she continues to work. This job is slightly different to the previous housing post where she worked in a generic housing environment. She is now working in a specialist environment where she only deals with rent arrears. Making

the adjustments wasn't easy at first but the training Helen had with her placement organisation and the emphasis GCIL Equality Academy placed on organisational development and learning has helped her identify what she needed to do and plan to do it.

Helen commented

*"Most of my colleagues have worked in social housing for many more years than me. One of the things I worked on when I was on the graduate traineeship programme was my confidence. This has allowed me to bring my youth work, customer service and telephone helpline experience in to work with tenant customers....."*

*"GCIL Equality Academy has given me the support and confidence to develop and market my transferable skills; complete further qualifications and feel positive about finding a suitable job that won't be detrimental to my health, but still have a challenging and fulfilling career. I have been getting really good feedback and I am confident I will get a permanent job soon."*