

NAME: SARAH WHEATLEY

JOB TITLE:
Physical Activity Advisor for Sutton and Merton Primary Care Trust

BRIEF JOB DESCRIPTION:
To encourage people who live and work in the London boroughs of Sutton and Merton to become more physically active in order to improve their health.

Qualifications:
MSc in Exercise and Health Science; Falls and Postural stability (PSI); BACR Phase IV; and YMCA FIT exercise teacher qualifications including exercise-to-music, gym, step, aqua, older people and chair-based exercise. I am also a tutor for Later Life Training's PSI course.

What was your first physical activity-related job?
Gym instructor at Cannons in the City of London in 1993.

How did you progress from your first job to your current job?

While working at Cannons as a gym instructor, I undertook as many YMCA fitness instructor courses as possible and was also a keen volunteer teacher at the Central YMCA in Great Russell Street. In 1994, I began working full time for the YMCA where I worked with many great people who have helped to shape my career. One of these was Susie Dinan who, after a chance meeting on a tube several years later, offered me a job!

I had left London to go back to University to take my Masters and then on to working at a YMCA in Singapore. I returned to London in 1998 wanting to work with more interesting and challenging groups. I began working with Susie at Springfield Hospital on a project based around assessing and evaluating physical activity among people with learning difficulties. At the same time I continued to deliver teaching training courses for the YMCA as well as freelancing as a personal trainer and an exercise teacher. Susie, and her developing work on falls, would later prove instrumental in my current job.

I wanted to gain more experience delivering courses, so in 1999 I began work as a sports lecturer at Westminster College. In 2002, an opportunity came up with Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth Health Authority to work on an exercise referral scheme around preventing falls in older people through progressive and tailored exercise. It was a new and innovative field and coupled with the fact that I would also be working with an old friend and colleague from my YMCA days, I snapped up the job. When Health Authorities were disbanded in 2002, my job evolved to my



current role as a Physical Activity Advisor for Merton and Sutton PCT. I still deliver a falls specific exercise referral service but also work with many other groups and projects around encouraging people to take up more physically active lifestyles.

Best bits of job:
Being able to make a difference to people's lives by enabling their uptake of exercise. The majority of fallers, for example, who attend our exercise classes will have an improved quality of life in their final years.

Worst bits of job:
Struggling to fund projects and working within a constantly changing NHS.

What is the most useful training you have received?

In 2001 I attended the pilot of the Falls and Postural Stability instructor course developed by Susie Dinan and Dr Dawn Skelton. This, inadvertently, led to my current position within the NHS.

What training do you feel you would like to have had or would be useful to you now?

The ability to robustly evaluate projects would be really helpful. I hope, one day, to be able to do a PhD around evaluating projects in physical activity and health promotion.

What advice would you give?

Keep learning - the courses I have done have opened up so many opportunities for me, both through work and friendships. Continuous professional development (CPD) is important to keep the work we do interesting, up to date and relevant.

Contact details:

If you would like to contact Sarah Wheatley about any of her experiences above she can be contacted via email Sarah.Wheatley@smpct.nhs.uk