

Helping shape future for young learners

The career of West Berkshire Training Consortium's director of curriculum

HAVING first hand experience of the benefits of taking part in a work training scheme set the path for one woman's career.

Claire Richards, 50, is director of curriculum at West Berkshire Training Consortium (WBTC), an organisation she describes as "a family" and working with an "inspirational" team. She will also soon become interim executive director.

Next year WBTC will celebrate its 40th anniversary.

Claire went to Cox Green Comprehensive School in Maidenhead and says that she "quickly decided that I wanted to leave school".

She says that the careers adviser at her school gave her lots of options including colleges for a range of subjects – such as farm management and veterinary nursing at Berkshire College of Agriculture, travel and tourism at Windsor and Maidenhead College and hotel management at Reading College.

"She also found me an interesting 'science' role working for ICI and going to college one day a week day release to get a qualification," Claire adds. "I was offered all positions but decided what better way to start then by 'earning while learning'." She started her career as a youth trainee on the then Youth Training Scheme (YTS), working for ICI in the Plant Protection Division at Jealotts Hill in Bracknell.

It was during this time that Claire first met Tammara Easterling, her mentor from West Berkshire Training Consortium who was, at that time, managing the scheme she was on.

"During my time on the scheme I continued to develop the basic requirements of employment, getting to work on time, how to present myself, working in a team and communication," she says. "I had worked in retail from the

The Interview:

Claire Richards from West Berkshire Training Consortium talks to Newbury Business Today's SARAH BOSLEY

time I could have a Saturday job so I did understand the basics but this was a whole different level.

"I achieved my Ordinary National Certificate and my Higher National Certificate in applied biology while on the scheme – this did not come without its challenges.

"I hated exams and had to do numerous ones to achieve my qualifications but I persevered and with all the support in place managed to achieve these quickly."

Claire says she "was lucky enough" to secure employment at ICI after her traineeship and then got involved in the programme herself, by becoming a supervisor and mentor for the new trainees.

"I obtained various qualifications and started assessing apprentices as part of my role," she explains. "I had excellent line managers during my time at ICI and I worked up to a manager role within the Product Biology Department.

"I was also given the opportunity to continue to study and achieved my Higher National Certificate in business and finance at Thames Valley University.

"I never gave up my love for training and supporting new trainees and apprentices, going on outward bound experiences, which included many activities that challenged me and took me out of my comfort zone."

Claire got married in 1999 and then had her first son, shortly before her role at ICI – then Syngenta – had become redundant.

She saw this as an opportunity to embark on a different career path, but one which still encompassed training.

"I contacted Tammara at this time who was now the managing director at West Berkshire Training Consortium, but she didn't have any roles available so I started to look around," Claire says.

"I found a role at the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce and started as a training coordinator within their apprenticeship team.

"I had a caseload of learners and ended up assessing NVQs and delivering training across a range of topics.

"It was my dream job with an amazing team and I soon progressed to team leader where I continued my love of learning by achieving various other qualifications as part of my role."

It was during some business support at the chamber of commerce that her path crossed with Tammara yet again – a position had become available at WBTC.

Claire, who enjoys aqua aerobics two or three times every week, had just had her second son and was looking for a role with part time hours. She went along for an interview and in May 2005 became a training coordinator at WBTC, again assessing learners and delivering training.

"I continued to learn and develop and achieved my Diploma in Teaching in the Life Long Learning Sector with Greenwich University," she adds. "During my time working at West Berkshire Training Consortium I have been lucky enough to progress through a number of roles, this has enabled me to have a truly operational understanding of what we do.

"WBTC is a family, what we do for our learners really makes a difference, the team are inspirational and a pleasure to work with, always looking for ways to differentiate what we do."

She says WBTC is "a local provider who truly values its relationships with employers and learners alike, with a vision to inspire them to fulfil their full potential by delivering career skills fit for the future".

Outside of work Claire says her life revolves around her family – she has spent numerous weekends on the side of football and rugby pitches. She also manages to enjoy walks with her Labrador Dexter and her husband.

"The future continues to bring with it many opportunities," she adds. "WBTC will be celebrating 40 years in 2023. It has been providing apprenticeships and training to organisations and people across West Berkshire since 1983 and has trained in excess of 15,000 apprentices across a range of occupations. Learners and employers really do benefit from our individualised approach and one-to-one support.

"We will continue to look out for new opportunities which will enable us to further develop the charity's vision and objectives to provide sustainable employment opportunities with employers and deliver high quality training leading to career progression.

"I am really looking forward to my next chapter at WBTC knowing I have the grounding from some truly inspirational leaders and a team who truly believe in what we do and go the extra mile to make a difference."



West Berkshire Training Consortium director of curriculum Claire Richards





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