

Women in Leadership Case Study

Sophie Murphy, Assistant Reporter

I grew up with three younger sisters and when I was 14 years old, my sisters and I were placed in care. We were originally in a placement together, however, as I was quite settled in the school I was already in, and as I was older I struggled with boundaries as I'd looked after my sisters so I had a hard time letting that go. I was in the placement for about four months before I was moved to a children's residential unit. I was there from when I was 15 years old until I got my own house when I was 16. I remember the unit manager asking me if getting my own house was a good idea as I was young and lots of young people fail going into independent accommodation. But I had lots of really good supportive friends from school (as I was still in school this whole time) and I was determined. So I found myself in my own home and I refused throughcare support as I wanted to do it on my own (in hindsight, I wish I'd taken all the help I was offered).

“Surrounding yourself with good people – friends, colleagues and people you can look up to – is very important, especially if you've been in care because good people help you to make good choices and good choices lead to good results.”

Whilst I was in the residential unit everyone sought me out as I was the 'big sister' figure and supportive of them, so I knew that helping people might be something I'd be good at. I was only in care for a short time, but it was long enough to know what goes on and what it's like. I really believe that you can't let traumatic experiences and difficulties from your childhood impact on your whole life. You need to be resilient and push through and don't let it define you. I use my past as a platform and I won't let it dictate what happens in my life.

Half way through S6 I decided to leave school. I had no clue what I wanted to do as a job but I did have my Standard Grades. I'm not very academically minded and didn't enjoy school or learning in that way. I got a job in retail for a couple of months but decided I didn't want to work in retail my whole life. So I applied to do a college course in travel and tourism, for no other reason than I was interested in it, and I was accepted on to the course. At the same time, I got a phone call from my old social worker who told me about the Modern Apprenticeship opportunity at SCRA.

I didn't really know what a Modern Apprentice was or what it would entail and I was in two minds as I'd got my college place. In the end I decided that I would go along to the MA interview and I remember being absolutely terrified going to SCRA's head office for the interview! When I was offered the Modern Apprenticeship I really didn't know what to do – the college course or the MA? In the end I decided to try the job as I figured if I didn't like it I could always reapply to go to college at a later date.

“I ended up in SCRA by accident really. I didn't know who they were or what they did, even though I'd been to Children's Hearings. I hadn't ever thought about using my experience of being in care to help others going through the same thing.”

I started SCRA in 2013 on a two-year Modern Apprenticeship programme and I still didn't really have a clue what I wanted to do. However, six months into that a full-time Support Assistant post for reception in Glasgow was advertised and I applied. I was delighted when I got the job and SCRA were great as they allowed me to continue with my SVQ (Level 3) in Business Administration which is part of the Modern Apprenticeship even though I was no longer an MA. In that respect the organisational support has been really good.

I stayed in reception until 2014 when I took up another post in Glasgow as Support Assistant, where I remained until June 2014 before moving to become a Support Assistant in Paisley in 2018. My line manager in Paisley was really great at encouraging me and building up my confidence that I could progress and my colleagues were really supportive too. I think having them believing in me and pushing me has really helped me to believe that I have the ability to do what I put my mind to, and it was certainly why, when SCRA were recruiting a number of Assistant Reporters in December 2020 as part of the recovery plan from COVID-19 that I decided to apply.

“When others pay you a compliment about your abilities – listen to them! People don't tend to compliment you if you're no good at something so if they say it, it's true. That's really helped increase my confidence in my own abilities which has made me take a leap into the unknown.”

Whilst I was a Support Assistant I took on a lot of additional duties around the electronic transfer of papers on Objective Connect and IT related issues for virtual Hearings and CSAS, training panel members on how to use virtual platforms – I became the Paisley 'go to' person for all those types of issues.

“Volunteering to do little bits extra here and there really does help to give you different kinds of experience at work. If I hadn't put myself forward and made myself available to help with the virtual Hearings process during COVID-19 I may not have had the skills to apply for my current post. It may seem a small thing but the small things add up and can really make a difference when you apply for a job.”

I think having supportive colleagues and my line manager encouraging me and pushing me has really helped me to believe that I have the ability to do what I put my mind to. When, as part of the recovery plan from COVID-19, SCRA were recruiting for Assistant Reporters in December 2020 I decided to apply, with the support and encouragement of my manager. I decided to apply because I'd been a Support Assistant for some time by this point, I'd excelled in the role and I needed a new challenge. People have always said to me I'd be a good Reporter as I have good rapport with children and families and I think that this, alongside my IT knowledge, is what gave me the confidence to apply and now I'm about to embark on the Personal Development Award as part of my training as Assistant Reporter.

I could go on to become a Reporter and I would need a degree to do this, but I'm confident I'd get the support of SCRA if I wanted to go down this route. I'm not sure at the moment what I want to do, but I know one of my strengths is in communicating with and putting people at ease and the Reporter role is a bit more removed than maybe where my skills might be best placed. Who knows where I'll end up but I'm okay with that and, at the moment, I'm happy with where I am.



“I used to be afraid of the unknown but as I get older I find that I’m quite happy to not know exactly where I’m going to go next and I have trust in the process. I’m quite happy to let my career evolve this way and I’m pretty confident I’ll end up where I’m supposed to be, whatever that is.”

