

My Working Day



Robert Zapala is a Home Support Worker for RehabCare's Slán Abhaile service in South Dublin. The service, which means "safe home" in Irish, is funded by the Health Service Executive and currently caters for 84 people in areas of Dublin and Wicklow.

I**N THE MORNINGS, I WORK FOR THE SLÁN ABHAILE** service which is for people who have recently left hospital so they are usually elderly. I leave the house at about 7.30am, depending on where my first client lives. My job involves care work so I help clients to shower and dress, make their breakfast and do anything else that they need. I spend an hour with each person and sometimes I go back in the evening and help them to go to bed. I also work at the weekend and, as I often see the same people, I get to know them very well. We have a chat when I arrive and before I leave.

I have a break from 10am to 11am and I either go shopping in Dundrum or Goatstown or I read. I like John Irving's novels and really enjoyed *A Prayer for Owen Meaney*.

In the afternoons, I work for the Home Help service, which is also for older people. I usually finish at 3pm or 4pm and I like to be active so I usually go jogging or to the gym. On

Wednesdays – my day off – I go swimming or go for a walk if the weather is nice. In the evenings I like to cook for my partner – Irish food is simpler and much healthier than Polish food.

I like my work because the people I meet are very nice. As they are older, they have experience of life and sometimes give me advice. They tell me about their lives and I have learned a lot from them about Ireland.

I came here from Poland five years ago. I'm from a small village called Piotrkowace which is a few hours from Krakow. The economic situation there was poor. I used to work in a hospital but I couldn't get a good job and I wasn't very happy.

I came to Ireland alone and my plan was to stay for good if I got a job. To begin with I did a variety of jobs. I worked in a restaurant, a hotel and a shoe shop, so I was very happy to get a care job again. I really like to do care work for RehabCare because of the contact with people. ■

Jackie Flynn is the Learning Centre Co-ordinator at Haven Products in Hillington, Scotland. Momentum's social enterprise firm, Haven Products, works to create meaningful employment opportunities for disabled people. Around 80 per cent of its workforce have a disability.



HOW DO I EXPLAIN MY TYPICAL WORKING day? The short of it all is that I have no typical day, which is what is so appealing about the job. In order to understand the nature of my role, I feel it would be beneficial to explain a bit about my background.

Prior to becoming the Learning Centre Co-ordinator for social enterprise firm, Haven Products, in January 2008, I graduated – after five long years – with a law degree with distinction. During my studies, I developed a flair for working with other adult learners and began to tutor in this field. After graduating, I pursued a career in education. I then returned to study last year to gain my CPD Certificate in Adult Teaching and Learning due to the sense of achievement I experienced when working with adult learners. No easy task, especially as I am a working Mum of eight children.

I was delighted to be appointed as Learning Centre Co-ordinator for Haven Products which has a workforce with a range of disabilities. As you will have gathered, I am used to challenges, hard work and a dynamic working environment.

One of the first tasks I carried out was to circulate a survey to get a feel of what the employees wanted to learn.

Since then, employees have benefited from sessions in confidence-building, interview skills, IT training, welfare rights and British Sign Language tasters.

My other duties involve report-writing, applying for funding, attending management meetings and liaising with a variety of organisations.

However, the extremely rewarding part of the post involves working with the employees themselves. I operate a drop-in service where people can come in for a chat, receive help with form-filling or practise their IT skills. At present I am working closely with some employees on a calendar project which outlines Haven's history.

There is a lovely, relaxed atmosphere in the centre and a lot of laughter, which is great in contributing to a positive learning experience.

We work in partnership with a local college, which sends their tutors to the Centre two days per week. We currently have 12 learners undertaking Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) qualifications in IT, literacy, numeracy, problem-solving and communication. In addition, adult literacy tutors work with our employees two days per week.

I can honestly say that there has never been a dull day. I consider myself to be an energetic person – I often run 10k before going into work – and enjoy the challenge of my role. There is no doubt that it is extremely varied and, as an adult who returned to education later in life, I am determined to make our employees' learning experiences positive ones. I believe that my qualifications are being put to good use and my life experience allows me to form positive relationships with a workforce which I enjoy working with immensely. ■