

Starts At Home Day: Kate Shaw

August 2024

Kate Shaw is an Area Service Manager for Sanctuary Supported Living, overseeing services in Cambridgeshire. To mark Starts At Home Day, which celebrates the difference that supported housing can make to people's lives, Kate has shared the story of her 15 years spent supporting others with Sanctuary Supported Living.



Kate started her career at Sanctuary Supported Living in 2008 as an Area Administrator, with little experience in the sector. She was considering becoming a social worker, but during her induction, she saw the difference that Sanctuary Supported Living was making to people's lives, and she wanted to be part of it.

She soon applied for a Hostel Coordinator role (now called Specialist Project Worker), which gave her the opportunity to work directly with customers and gain valuable experience. She then progressed to Local Service Manager, where she oversaw a large area of Housing Management and Agency-Managed services.

In 2018, she became an Area Service Manager, responsible for all of Sanctuary Supported Living's supported housing services and retirement communities in Cambridgeshire. She ensures that all the services she oversees are safe, compliant and on-budget - and most importantly, provides day-to-day support to her team of service managers, to help them deliver the highest-quality support to our customers.

Kate loves her job as an Area Service Manager, as she enjoys making a difference and seeing the impact of her team's work. She has worked with a variety of client groups, including young

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people, young parents, mental health, and homelessness, but her current focus is supporting the residents living in the retirement communities within her area.

She said: “I love being part of such a supportive, friendly and collaborative team, and having the privilege of managing a fabulous team too. Our staff regularly go above and beyond to ensure our customers are happy and their needs are met. I really like meeting people too – a five-minute conversation can make a huge difference to someone’s life.

“I’m also one of Sanctuary’s Mental Health First Aiders, so I’m available to offer a listening ear and signposting for any member of staff who feels that they could use some extra support with their mental health.”

Kate also values the relationships and partnerships she has built with the local authorities, commissioners, and other stakeholders. She added: “Sanctuary Supported Living is a great place to work, as we give a lot back to our local communities, and we put our customers at the heart of everything we do.”

But Kate’s role is not without its challenges. She said: “My team and I always want to do our best for our customers, so it can be frustrating when we want to help, but it’s something that’s out of our control. My role can also be very busy, with lots of deadlines and different tasks all needing my attention. Spending regular time with my team makes all the difference – knowing that we’re working together to achieve great outcomes for our customers.”

Despite the challenges, Kate has also had many proud moments and achievements at work, including when Sanctuary Supported Living was awarded a large and complex £1.2 million contract to support clients with mental health needs across Cambridgeshire, in 2017. This was the first tender she had been involved with, and it took a lot of teamwork to support the new services and integrate them into Sanctuary Supported Living.

Kate said: “It was a huge achievement for me and my team, and we received lots of positive feedback from both the commissioners and our customers. We were also subsequently recognised at a local commissioning event for our hard work, and it was very rewarding to see our efforts being publicly valued and appreciated.”

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When asked what makes someone a good candidate for joining her team, Kate explained: “You don’t necessarily need a degree or industry qualification to work for us, as you can gain valuable experience on the job, and progress within your role and your team, thanks to the many opportunities and training offered. The most important thing is to be willing to learn, and be caring, compassionate and want to spend your working days helping people. If this sounds like you, then Sanctuary Supported Living could be the perfect place.”

When reflecting on her career, Kate added: “I always want to keep learning and progressing, and Sanctuary Supported Living offers a lot of opportunities for personal and professional development. Most recently, I’ve undertaken our “Be Your Best” leadership training programme, and I’ve spent a lot of time this year working on an exciting new project alongside a team of colleagues, rolling out our new electronic care planning tool, Nourish. It’s been great to be part of it and see how this new technology is making day-to-day work much easier for our teams - helping them to help our customers.

“I feel very honoured to be doing my job. I enjoy working with my team and knowing that we’re making such a positive difference to clients’ lives every day.”