

THE UNSUNG HEROES

OF THE CARE SECTOR

Making a Difference

*If you want to make an impact on society,
change someone's life for the better or if
you just want to help by caring for others
then consider a career in social care.*

Read our stories, be inspired and open the door to a world of new opportunities



Not just a job

WeCare Wales aims to raise awareness and understanding of social care, early years and childcare and attract more people with the right skills and values to work in caring roles with children and adults.

If you have a positive attitude and a commitment to care for others, then for most roles you can gain any training and qualifications you need on the job. There are lots of ways to work flexibly, so you can fit caring for people around you and your family.

For the right people, it's one of the most rewarding careers there is. Learn about the jobs available in working with children and adults in Wales by visiting:

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FOREWORD

BY SUZANNE CHESTERTON



New series looks at the unsung heroes of the care sector

The Covid-19 pandemic has thrown our caring sectors into new light. From care home staff to childminders, an army of people look after the dependent and vulnerable in our society, allowing others to carry out their own jobs and keep the wheels of industry turning, safe in the knowledge their loved ones are being looked after.

Economists describe these caring sectors as part of the human foundational economy – foundational, because they provide the basic supports on which other parts of the economy rest. Without them, many people would not be able to enter the workforce because of their caring responsibilities.

During the lockdown, the people who worked in care homes were thrust into prominence because of their role on the front line of the pandemic, caring for people who were often at high risk from the virus. It highlighted the lack of recognition that workers in the sector typically enjoy, all too often being wrongly dismissed as low skilled, low paid and low value.

In fact the care sector is a large and vital part of the Welsh economy. There are 70,000 people working in the sector, spread among 1,500 employers. These include private sector businesses, third sector organisations and public bodies.

The care home staff, childminders, nursery nurses, social workers and others who work in the sector see it as a vocation rather than just a job. Roles in the sector are demanding – staff often have to deal with difficult and challenging situations. But the rewards are also high. Workers may be involved in guiding children through important stages of their development, or helping elderly people cope with the onset of dementia. The human relationships that develop are valued by both parties.

The commonly held belief that work in the caring sector is unskilled is increasingly untrue. There is a

wide range of training and qualifications that people need to work in the sector, and there are ample opportunities for continued professional development throughout your career. People who start out at the ground level often progress to higher levels of management, or transfer sideways into other careers or professions.

The caring sector already employs more people in Wales than the NHS, but the need for care workers is only expected to grow in the years ahead, as the population gets older and demand for care services increases. It is estimated that an additional 2,000 people a year will be needed to work in the sector between now and 2030.

The **WeCare Wales campaign** exists to fight misconceptions about the sector and encourage more people to consider working in social care, childcare and early years' roles. Over the next few weeks we will run a series of articles looking at the work people in different parts of the sector do, from a nursery nurse manager to a local authority childcare manager and a team leader at a residential home for children. The people interviewed talk about their experiences working on the frontline of care, how they get to the positions they fill today, the rewards and challenges of their work, and why they wouldn't do anything else.

The series kicks off this week with Christine Jones, who is an independent social care worker responsible for placing vulnerable children with foster parents.

Suzanne Chesterton

Marketing & Communications Lead



WeCare about Social Care

with **Christine Jones**
Independent Social Care Worker

Leaving school over 40 years ago with, like so many of us, little idea what she really wanted to do other than an innate belief that whatever it was it would probably involve children, Christine Jones's early career saw her take the somewhat predictable, traditional route of entry into the world of teaching. A safe, dependable and infinitely respectable career by any standards, but fortunately now, perhaps more so than then, not by any means the only game in town if a career in "children's services" is your calling.

Fortunately for Christine, and for the countless families and children she has assisted over the decades, Christine knew that teaching was not for her - that rather she was destined for a different type of work that would see her trade the predictable world of teaching for the unpredictable world of social care. A world where no two days are the same, where the highs and lows and spectrum of emotions experienced on any given day are frequently off the scale, and where there are constantly new faces to meet and new problems to solve.

It's a challenging, demanding environment and not for the faint-hearted, but it's an environment Christine and many like her thrive within. She can't imagine any more worthwhile way to earn a living.

"From the moment I started, I knew it was for me," Christine said.

"I love the variety of workload, the deep sense of satisfaction you get from knowing you've made a real tangible difference to someone's life. The responsibility sometimes can feel daunting; we are dealing with real people and potentially life changing issues in the here and now, and that takes courage, grit and stamina, but the rewards for getting it right are immense. I wouldn't trade it for any other profession, even though there are many that are better paid."

Over the years social work and social care hasn't typically enjoyed the same sort of reputation for professionalism, integrity and value that some of the more traditional careers of working with children enjoy - teaching being a case in point. It has also earned a reputation of being a profession that is overly concerned with box ticking and bureaucracy and doing the right thing, as opposed to doing what's right. When combined with a reputation for not being particularly well-paid, it is not difficult to see why it has struggled to attract high calibre new entrants, and why the sector is constantly in a recruitment deficit.

However, all this is changing. Covid-19, for all the misery it has brought in abundance, has if nothing else served to elevate the role of our key workers and bring about a Damascene moment amongst our communities at large about the vitally important roles people who work in our "human foundational economies" play, and the extent to which we are all unequivocally dependent upon them for the provision of services we have all just come to take for granted.

At last we are seeing due recognition for the collective hard work and care that goes on across the whole spectrum of occupations within the health and social care sector; and with the sector employing 1 in every 17 adults in Wales, that is whole lot of recognition on the table and for the taking.

"It is heartening to see perceptions changing," said Christine,

"Social care is such a worthwhile profession, with such a varied spectrum of roles capable of challenging and fulfilling the best of us. Covid has brought with it new ways of working which will further modernise and streamline the industry but bring with them new challenges.

"For example, in my own line of work this is most notable in the online assessment processes for potential foster carers. It can be so easy to form an incorrect impression over a bad laptop camera angle or poor technology connections, so the burden of responsibility that places on us to get it right is even higher in a virtual world than a face to face world.

"If it's a challenging, highly skilled, stimulating career you're after then look no further. We have it in abundance."

For anyone out there considering a career change into social care - maybe you've been made redundant and are looking at what options are open to you, or if you work in a different industry sector in a service role and think you might have transferrable skills, or if you are just starting out in your career and looking at this sector as a potential future employer - then let the words of Christine inspire and motivate you.

"I would urge anyone, despite whatever perceptions you might have about the world of social care, not to prejudge but to just give it a go. It can offer you a rich, rewarding career where your sense of self-worth and personal value will transcend that typically experienced in more mainstream roles.

If you throw yourself into it, give it 100%, do whatever it takes, you'll more than reap the rewards in the doors it will open for you and the satisfaction you will gain."

Opportunities for all in the empowering world of childcare

with **Claire Bevan**

Childcare Opportunities Manager, Swansea Council

Childcare is one of the essential props on which our economy and society depend. Without childcare, how would working parents with pre-school children be able to go out and do their jobs? Even when parents are working from home, they still need childcare if they are to work at their maximum efficiency, as experience during the lockdown has shown.

It is also an empowering profession for those who work in it, whatever their age. It's not all about nursery nursing and childminding, though they are the bread and butter of the sector. Many people who start off as a nursery nurse progress into higher management, perhaps with a private sector childcare provider, a third sector charity or a local authority. One who did so was Claire Bevan, childcare opportunities manager at Swansea Council.

Helping families

Claire's team includes a mixture of people from different ages and backgrounds, not all of them in childcare. They are united by a passion for helping families access the childcare they need.

Most parents in this country have to pay for childcare, which is usually provided by self-employed childminders or third sector nurseries and daycare

centres. Some parents get help with the costs from their local authority, who can fund up to 30 hours childcare with their chosen provider, while those in the greatest need can access free services. Deciding who can receive help with costs or get free childcare is one of Claire's main responsibilities.

In a typical year Claire and her team deal with more than 800 applications for childcare funding. There are more than 200 childcare providers in Swansea, from full day care and sessional care centres to childminders. But the demand for childcare exceeds the supply of providers, so another of Claire's responsibilities is to recruit childminders.

Claire is acutely aware that the cost of childcare is a major issue for many families.

"It's great to hear a parent say that because of this funding, they can now go and get a job and have a better quality of life," she says.

Career progression

At 16, Claire had no idea what she wanted to do, but she was inspired by a cousin who had studied nursery nursing at college on a course that included a week-long placement every second week.

"That really appealed to me, the thought of being in a work setting and learning what went on was really interesting," she says.

"I really enjoyed the course, there were lots of hands-on activities. It wasn't just about assignments, it was about understanding how children would learn by doing practical things."

After qualifying Claire went on to work in a succession of day nurseries. When she had a daughter of her own she registered as a childminder, then became deputy manager of a new day nursery that was opening in Swansea. She trained in assessment and became an accredited childcare assessor, getting a job at Swansea Council assessing students and childminders.

"The common perception is that once you get into childcare it's very limited, but actually it opens the door to a whole world of opportunities in terms of careers," she says.

A career for life

Many childcare providers stayed open during the lockdown, one in Swansea remaining open 7 days a week and up to 10 in the evening. Claire is frustrated that they didn't get the recognition that others, such as schools, received. However, she feels that appreciation for the professionalism and importance of the sector is improving overall.

And she has words of encouragement for anyone considering a career in the field.

"Do it, as long as you are passionate, have empathy, and want to learn and understand," she says.



It's not just a profession for young women either, she insists. Whatever age you are and whatever you want to get out of your career, there's a place for you in it. As Claire's story shows, there are plenty of opportunities for career progression if that's what you're after. But if childcare for you is just about caring for children in your care, there's nothing wrong with that either. Older people with experience are important as well, across the sector.

"We do see older people wanting to become childminders too, but we also want them in day nurseries and sessional care, they come with a wealth of experience and have a lot to offer," Claire says.

Making a difference to parents and children, helping society, and opening up a world of opportunities for yourself – what better reasons could there be for considering a career in childcare?

Claire herself has no plans to leave childcare until she retires. "It's a job for life, but it can change in many ways during your career too," she adds.



Putting the care into social care

with **Claire Mather**

Operations Manager, S&S Care

Most jobs in social care tend to be focused on caring for people at one end or another of their lives. You're either looking after children and young people, or you're caring for elderly people. Both, in their different ways, are equally challenging and rewarding.

Elderly people can have physical or mental health problems, sometimes both. A common and vital role is looking after elderly people with dementia, which can arise from a number of causes, often Alzheimer's disease.

Caring for elderly people with dementia may seem a daunting task, but it can be immensely rewarding. People in an advanced stage of dementia often have to be cared for in residential homes, where they get round the clock support.

They are often highly dependent, and can require help with basic needs such as eating and toileting. But there's also joy and laughter to be had in care homes, as staff engage residents in activities designed to stimulate and entertain them. Care home workers describe the fulfilment that comes with seeing a resident, who may have arrived at the home being aggressive and uncooperative, soften, smile and show pleasure. There can be few more rewarding moments than that.

More care than in hospital

Claire Mather did not plan to go into social care. She wanted to be a midwife, and did her nursing training to get the qualification. In the meantime, she started working part time in a local care home to help support herself during her studies. The contrast between the care home and the hospital she was working in during her training proved an eye-opener.

“There's no care in the hospital, it's all about discharging the patients, and it's a very medical approach, whereas social care is about getting to know people, giving them comfort and making a difference day to day,” she said.

As she came to the end of her nursing training in 2006, a manager's position came up in the care home and, disillusioned with nursing, she went for it. Fourteen years later she is operations manager at S&S Care, in charge of 2 care homes and a domiciliary care agency.

One of the care homes is a general residential home, the other is for elderly and mentally infirm patients, generally suffering from dementia. The domiciliary care agency cares for people still living in their own homes. Claire is also in charge of the company's training department.

It's hard work, she says, but she loves the challenge, making a difference not just to service users but also to the staff, helping them with their training and career development.

A typical day

A typical day for the care home staff begins before 8am, with the handover from the night staff. Then follows a busy morning of hands-on personal care. Most of the residents have advanced dementia, which calls for a lot of skill in handling them. Carers have to build relationships with each service user, getting to know how to approach each of them individually in the manner that suits them. They can be subject to verbal or physical abuse at times so resilience is essential, but they also get the reward of smiles, laughter and thanks from grateful residents.

“You've got to be able to think on your feet and respond to what's going on in the environment,” says Claire.

“You've got residents who wouldn't choose to live together, so you have personality clashes in the lounge at times. Staff have to intervene and minimise any safeguarding issues.”

The night staff work just as hard, coming in at 8pm for a 12-hour shift, supporting residents to bed, then carrying out checks throughout the night. Some residents can be highly dependent and a round can easily take an hour and a half.

It can feel regimented at times, no care home can function without a routine in place. But Claire tries to keep everything as person-centred as possible, with the focus very much on the needs of both residents and staff.

Making a difference

Working with the families of service users is often the hardest part. People often try to look after their loved ones at homes as long as possible, so when they come to the homes they are in an advanced stage of dementia and it's harder for the staff to get to know them and build relationships.

“My staff are here because they're caring in nature, and it's what they were designed to do,” she says.

“I've told you about the difficult parts of the day, but between that you've got your activities, your laughter, residents that have come into the home perhaps a little bit aggressive initially, that start to soften and say thank you. The staff can see that they're making a difference day to day.”

Claire recently interviewed someone for a role who had never done caring before. She told them it was hard work, physically and mentally, but very rewarding.

“Some days you'll go home feeling like you've made a real difference, other days you'll go home wondering if someone will be there when you next go in,” she says.

“We spend more time with these residents than we probably do with our own families sometimes, so when someone's approaching the end, it does play on our mind. It's being sensitive to that and seeing it as a privilege.”

That, in a way, sums up social care. No-one is going to pretend it's an easy job, but for fulfilment, reward, and the privilege of being able to help and support someone in their moments of need, it's hard to beat.

Professional, dedicated and qualified: what it's like to be a nursery nurse

with Jacqui Kempa

Nursery Manager, Cardiff University Daycare Centre

Jacqui Kempa recently celebrated her 25th anniversary working at the Cardiff University Daycare centre on Cardiff's Park Place. Starting out as section leader in a team looking after 3-5 year olds, she is now nursery manager.

It's hard, demanding work at times, but she wouldn't have it any other way. Nursery nursing, she says, is not a job, it's a vocation, and you have to be really committed to it to make it work.

That said, you don't need to have always known you wanted to be a nursery nurse to be successful. That certainly wasn't the story with Jacqui.

"I grew up around children, but I didn't have the confidence when I was young to go further and leave home and study to become a teacher. I wasn't that way inclined," she admits.

Seeking a fresh start after the end of her marriage, she studied to become a nursery nurse, despite having two young children at the time.

"It was tough going but well worth it," she says. "I got to find out a little of what made children tick, how they develop, and it was fascinating, knowing that even from birth this tiny baby you see is so perfect, but so different from any other."

A surrogate extended family

It's that connection with the children that makes nursery nursing such a rewarding job, Jacqui says. You're a part of helping them develop, watching them learn something you taught them. Many of the parents who bring their children to Jacqui's nursery are employed by the university and may not have any extended family in Wales or even the UK. Consequently the staff at the nursery become part of a surrogate extended family, developing close relationships with both children and parents.

"I don't see it that I'm just here to make sure I've got the right staffing levels, and that I've got everything in place, I'm here to support the parents. If they're struggling with anything they will come to see me, and we are here to advise; and if we haven't got the answers, I find out where to get them and I know where to guide them," she says.

"But it's an absolute privilege to know that parents are trusting us to look after their children, even now with Covid-19 going on. I have their complete trust, and I cannot be put into words how much that means."

The impact of Covid

Covid necessarily has had an impact on the nursery and how it works. The daycare centre is allowed bubbles of up to 8 children, with babies having a maximum ratio of 3 infants to each 1 staff member, toddlers 4, and pre-school children 8. The number of children allowed in is governed by the need for staff to be able to socially distance, and for the time being the nursery cannot allow in as many children as it would like. The centre does a thorough deep clean every morning before opening, and continues to clean touch points, boards, kitchen and bathrooms every two hours throughout the day.

The precautions are thorough, but the children haven't noticed the difference, says Jacqui.

"They haven't got the freedom of movement they used to have, they have to stay in their bubbles, but we've made it fun, even though we've had to take some toys and soft furnishings away, and there's no sand and no water. But they are so happy to come back, we've had one or two with tears but nothing like I was expecting."

Giving more

It's the children that keep her going through all the challenges of managing 23 staff and up to 80 children.

"The moment you open the door to those little ones and they come running in with their arms up, nothing can replace that," she says.

Every child has an individual development plan, but Jacqui and her staff are always trying to give them



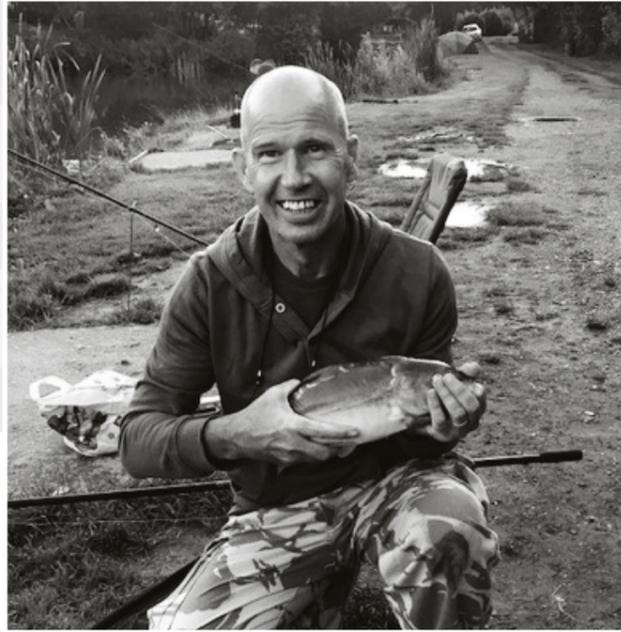
more, pushing them that little bit further while keeping their interest and making it fun. Pre-schoolers will learn to read at least three-letter words by the time they go to school. If you catch them when they're ready the learning is amazing, says Jacqui.

For all the satisfaction she gets from her work, she is frustrated by the lack of recognition for the nursery profession. Nursery nurses are professional and dedicated, and highly qualified within their field, she says.

“ People think we play all day, but we have to understand development stages, we have to help those children and plan them to their next stages of development,” she says.

We spend a very significant amount of time with the children and are role models for them. We are teaching them a lot. We are privileged to do that and watching those children develop and learn something you've taught them, nothing can ever surpass that.

It's the most rewarding job you will ever have, and whatever you put into it you will get twice as much back out,” she adds.



Making a real difference to young people's lives

with **Wynne Randles**

Team Leader in a Therapeutic Residential Home for Young People

Of all the jobs in social care, one of the most rewarding is working with young people in difficulties. It's a role in which you can really make a difference to somebody's life, helping to divert a young person from a path which could see them excluded from mainstream society and carried into the criminal justice system.

Bringing the right influence to bear at this critical, formative time in a young person's life can change their life forever, setting them on a positive course towards success and happiness in adult life. Few jobs, arguably, are as important or fulfilling.

There are many different jobs you can do where you can be the person who performs this vital role. A variety of different youth work, young person's social work and youth advocacy opportunities are available for people with the right qualities of empathy and compassion.

Some of the young people with the biggest problems end up in residential care homes. They are typically young people who have suffered severe abuse of one kind or another, and have often had breakdowns in foster homes due to their difficulties.

It's often hard for foster parents to deal with the most difficult cases, and these children need the extra support and care a therapeutic residential care home can provide. Their time in the home, with its 24-hour supportive care, gives them the foundation they need to rebuild their lives.

A typical day

Wynne Randles works as a team leader in just such a home, which caters for 4 young people, 3 boys and 1 girl, with ages ranging from 11 to 15.

"Unfortunately there's a real need for our role. Residential care isn't the first option but it does meet the needs of many young people," Wynne says.

"For some young people residential care is the best setting because within a team you've got different skills. For many foster families some of our young people are a bit full-on, if it was just a couple it would be a lot harder sharing that responsibility compared to a team of 10 people."

Three staff are at work each day, and 2 of them will stay overnight, finishing their 24-hour duty when they hand over to the next day's staff the following morning. It's a long day, but the idea is to give the young people as close as possible to a normal family home as they can.

In normal times, most of the young people will be at school Monday to Friday, so one of the big jobs is the twice daily school run. With the children at school the staff get on with cleaning, health and safety and vehicle checks. Once they're back home it's preparing the evening meal, helping with homework, and taking people out to evening activities such as dancing or Sea Cadets.

"Weekends and holidays they get to lie in a bit longer, but we try to get them up fairly early. Different kids have different activities like camping, horse riding, fishing, bike rides. Saturdays they've got independence, where they go into the town for a couple of hours like normal teenagers," says Wynne.

Many paths into the profession

Wynne's route to his current role was a roundabout one. After 9 years in the British Army he left, hoping to become a social worker. But lacking the necessary qualifications he went to community college, volunteering at a youth club in the meantime.

He was offered a paid job in youth service and went on a youth work course. A tutor at the college asked if he'd ever thought of becoming a tutor himself, so he went on a teacher training course and became a key skills tutor, helping young people learn English, maths and other key skills.

From there came 5 years as a youth inclusion officer with the Youth Justice Board, working with at risk young people and trying to steer them off the criminal justice path. Then a stint at a local youth group, before finally starting in his current role at young person's charity Action for Children.

Making a lasting impact

He explains why he finds his present job so rewarding.

"In my other roles as a tutor I had a positive impact on these young people's lives for at most a few hours a day, on the Youth Justice Board a few hours a week, then they go back to issues that are beyond my control," he says.

"Within a residential home you're there full time, you can give them that support and role modelling they need. It's such a rewarding job and it's through that care you can supply that you can make life changing differences."

Speaking about the qualities you need to work in this field, Wynne says empathy, compassion and a caring nature are key. It's not a profession that often gets the credit for the vital work it does, nor is it necessarily as respected as others. But the people who work in these homes know the young people in their care better than any other professionals they will come into contact with, and arguably have a bigger impact on turning their lives around.

"If you've played a role in any team where you've wanted to empower and help others, if you believe all children are a work in progress, if you could contribute to help them do what they want to do in life, come and have a chat to someone who works in the sector," says Wynne.

Your skillset and qualities as a person could have ripples of effect for generations to come." If that's not reason enough, what is?



Why a career in the care sector could be for you

Working in the care sector could be the most rewarding and fulfilling job you will ever do. You will be working with people who need all your care and attention, whether they be young children, vulnerable teenagers, or the elderly and infirm.

Jobs in the care sector are not the highest paid or most prestigious. But they are as vitally important as any job you will find, and the fulfilment you will get from making a real difference to someone's life, someone who is fully dependent on your help, is in itself a very special sort of reward.

Over the last few weeks we have looked at some of the jobs that people who work in the care sector do, from nursery nurses to managers of residential care homes for troubled teenagers or the elderly and infirm. The people who fill those jobs have all told us the same thing: that while the work is hard and often challenging, the satisfaction they feel at the end of the day is immense.

Jacqui Kempa, nursery manager at the Cardiff University Daycare Centre, said she and her colleagues feel like part of an extended surrogate family for the children in their care. She said:

"...it's an absolute privilege to know that parents are trusting us to look after their children, even now with Covid-19 going on. I have their complete trust, and I cannot be put into words how much that means."

She added: "We spend a very significant amount of time with the children and are role models for them. We are teaching them a lot. We are privileged to do that and watching those children develop and learn something you've taught them, nothing can ever surpass that."

"It's the most rewarding job you will ever have, and whatever you put into it you will get twice as much back out."

Claire Bevan, childcare opportunities manager at Swansea Council, said she would encourage anyone to go into childcare, and that there are plenty of opportunities for personal development and career progression so long as you have the right qualities.

"Do it, as long as you are passionate, have empathy, and want to learn and understand," she said, adding: "The common perception is that once you get into childcare it's very limited, but actually it opens the door to a whole world of opportunities in terms of careers."

Wynne Randles, team leader in a therapeutic residential home for young people, said his present role gives him more time to engage with and help the

young people in his care, compared to other youth work jobs he had done.

"Within a residential home you're there full time, you can give them that support and role modelling they need. It's such a rewarding job and it's through that care you can supply that you can make life changing differences," he said.

While many people in the care sector work with young children and teenagers, others work with the elderly and infirm. The challenges may be different, but the reward from having made a positive difference to someone's life is the same.

Claire Mather is operations manager at S&S Care, in charge of 2 residential care homes and a domiciliary care agency. Most of her service users are elderly and infirm, some suffering from advanced stages of dementia.

Claire originally planned to be a midwife, and she compares social care with working in a hospital where she did her nursing training. "There's no care in the hospital, it's all about discharging the patients, and it's a very medical approach, whereas social care is about getting to know people, giving them comfort and making a difference day to day," she said.

The care sector is critical to the Welsh economy; without the support that care workers provide to families by looking after children, the elderly and other vulnerable people, many adults would not be able to go out to work. The need for care workers is only going to increase in years to come, as the population grows and becomes more elderly.

The care sector has also received more high profile recognition as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. There have been steps underway in recent years to improve skills in the sector and raise the standards of professional development.

"If you've played a role in any team where you've wanted to empower and help others, if you believe all children are a work in progress, if you could contribute to help them do what they want to do in life, come and have a chat to someone who works in the sector," added Wynne.

Your skillset and qualities as a person could have ripples of effect for generations to come."

So for a rewarding career with opportunities for professional development, perhaps it's time to give social care a look.

Interested?

For more info take a look at: www.wecare.wales

You will see that many people working in this arena have made the jump from jobs such as hospitality or retail. The sector urgently needs more social care workers so if you think you have transferrable skills then do think about using them and do take a look at possible roles in your area at: www.wecare.wales/jobs

Finally still undecided? Then more general information is available at: www.socialcare.wales or maybe if you just want to see what it is like work in care then perhaps take our interactive quiz "A Question of Care" which you can find at: www.aquestionofcare.org.uk



