

# Volunteering for Daniel's Den – Joanne's story

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From the age of seventeen, I had worked full time. This all changed after I had my second child and due to circumstances I was a full time mum to two, then three children under five. This was a very dark time for me, in an area where I didn't know anyone and not able to go far with three small children. When my elder two children were in school a parent and toddler group called Daniel's Den started. It was based in the school hall, just one afternoon a week. I was a bit nervous, due to previous bad experience. I asked another parent to go along to see what it was like, she returned telling me her daughter enjoyed it and so did she. I decided to attend on the second week. This was the start of building back up my self-esteem and confidence.

After a number of weeks, I found that I was volunteering to help out, small thing at first, setting up, tea and coffee, sign in sheet, meeting and greeting. Then one session Joanna, Daniel's Den's Director, asked me if I could run a session as she was unable to. I was a bit unsure, however she gave me great encouragement and support, after completing all the necessary paper work I took my first session. The feeling of achievement, the buzz was amazing, it lifted me from the dark place I was once in, to on top of the clouds.

I continued to volunteer for Daniels Den for a number of years, building up my skills, running my own group, encouraging others to start their own group, helping at events and working in the office. It was working in the office that I enjoyed the most. Organising, developing processes and promoting the great work of parent and toddler groups.

All my children were now in school and I felt I needed to look at a future for me and my family. Volunteering had given me a lot of confidence and a great support network. It was this that encouraged me to follow my dream of going to university. Over the next four years, with continued support from Daniels Den, I obtained a first class honours degree in Forensic Science, while still volunteering, raising my family and dealing with the illness and death of my mother.

Daniel's Den was more than volunteering, it was mentoring, support, gaining skills, learning critical thinking, building confidence, giving to others and much more. It was finally time for me to apply for work, the first job I applied for I got. As well as having someone to put as a reference, I was also able to talk about relevant, and recent work experience. If had not had my experiences of Daniel's Den the only things I would to have talk about would have been from ten years earlier and my confidence would have been non-existence.

I am now working in a school in Brent, managing a number of support staff, still using the skills I developed whilst volunteering and still help the children of Brent to reach their potential. I am just one ripple in the pond that is Daniel's Den, I still help out when I can and I know the support is always there. There are many people that have something to offer, and for what every reason are no longer working. Volunteering can provide skills and a continued sense of self-worth. This leads to remaining as part of society and many other things.

It is a privilege to be a part of an amazing volunteering programme, which has allowed me to follow my dreams and passion. I am now very happy doing a job I love, providing for my family and being able to support my children in becoming the best that they can be.