

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF...

a community project worker



■ Becky Hirst is hoping to raise the profile of Matson Neighbourhood Project.

I really like my link role

SOMETIMES I get woken up by Steve at 5am as he works shifts as an engineer, but usually I get up at 7.30am and get to the Trinity Centre in Norbury Avenue for 9am.

The first thing I do is find out what's going on around the place and check the mail.

Every Monday we have a team meeting with other members of staff (there are 24 of us in total over three sites) and Andy Jarrett, the project co-ordinator. This morning, we discussed plans for a community garden next to the Trinity Centre and the launch of a Befriender scheme for the old, disabled and housebound.

Then I get on with my own work. I produce the Matson News – I get all the articles together, plan it out on the computer, take it to the printers and distribute about 2,000 copies each month.

Another thing I am spending time on at the moment is Fair Shares. This is a new scheme we have just started where, for every hour someone spends being a good neighbour, they earn one fair share.

They can then spend that on another service that someone offers – anything from washing cars to looking after pets. There is no money involved, so people don't feel pressured if they get into debt.

Basically, it is like a bartering scheme and people are loving it. We have only just launched it and we have already got 10 people involved and are looking for another 10.

We don't really have a lunch break; sometimes I eat my lunch in reception so I can chat to people coming in, as my office is a bit out of the way.

Something else I'm working on at the moment is the Community Resource Fund, which is £5,000 we have to give to local groups in Matson.

Job facts

QUALIFICATIONS: Although Becky has a degree, there are no specific qualifications for the post, although you need to be numerate, literate and have computer skills.

ATTRIBUTES: The ability to get on with people and to encourage and motivate them. Enthusiasm and the ability to sell ideas. You also need to cope with having lots of things on the go at the same time.

SALARY: Becky earns £12,500 a year, plus a pension. Most community work is on fixed term contracts.

BECKY Hirst, 21, is a community involvement worker for the Matson Neighbourhood Project and is a passionate advocate for the district and its people. She was appointed last September after graduating from Leeds University with a degree in dance. Her post is funded by the National Lottery and her role is to raise the profile of the project. She lives at Hardwicke with her fiancé.

We have had a few successful applications – for example, St Katherine's Church got £500 for a new amplification system. We have still got money available and I am spending time going through applications, preparing publicity and so on.

Late afternoon, we often get called into the community shop to give a hand, as lots of kids come in.

It's No Smoking Day today so I am giving out stickers and bookmarks. This is the best time to meet people. I usually go home about 4.30pm, although occasionally I have evening meetings.

I'm a member of the Gloucester Operatic and Dramatic Society and at the moment I'm very busy with rehearsals for *Me and My Girl*. I get home from that about 10pm, watch my soaps on video and go to bed. My biggest interest at the moment is getting my garden into shape, although things keep dying on me!

On a Saturday, I teach contemporary dance at the Gloucester Academy of Music and Performing Arts (GAMPA). Although my degree is in dance, I specialised in community dance and when I graduated I wanted to get involved in community work.

I grew up in Gloucester and I used to work on the Matson summer playschemes in my holidays, so it was ideal when this job came up. I'm the link between the people in the community and the project.

The project has been here 10 years now and it offers advice and representation to the people of Matson on issues such as housing, council tax and debt. There are also employment generation workers and we run the Phoenix Club for people with mental health problems and a Carers' Group.

It annoys me that Matson gets such a bad press. There's an awful lot of positive stuff going on here and the people are really friendly.

There are eight community involvement workers in eight neighbourhood projects in Gloucestershire and we meet together every so often.

I really enjoy my job, getting out there and talking to people. My post is funded by the National Lottery until December 2000, so I have got my fingers crossed for more funding. Everyone's got to keep putting their pound on, as that's my wages!

Interview by Alison Fawcett