

Changing lives: Keeley goes from finance to forests

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Keeley Hampton worked in finance for 20 years, but after experiencing redundancy, divorce and depression, she decided to ditch city life and pursue her dream job of working in the Wiltshire countryside.

A National Lottery-funded traineeship with the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust gave her the skills she needed to swap consulting for conservation.

Low point

Despite always having had a love for nature and animals, when she left school at 18, Keeley took on a role in the financial sector in Bristol. She spent the next 18 years working as a consultant support in pensions and investments.

“[Being made redundant] was really the kick up the backside that I needed! I decided to take some time off and sort myself out.”

- Keeley

“It was working at a desk all day. It didn’t excite me when I got up in the morning.”

It was being made redundant that really forced Keeley, then 36, to consider what she wanted her life to look like. The breakdown of her marriage at the same time triggered mental health problems and a bout of depression.

Next steps

A period of travelling reignited Keeley’s passion in wildlife. During her time away, she volunteered at animal sanctuaries in Australia and Bolivia and returned to the UK determined to pursue her passion, enrolling in a Foundation Degree in Animal Science and Management at Wiltshire College.

However, once she finished her degree and was looking for work, she discovered the age-old cliché of needing experience to get a job, and needing a job to get experience.

A Community Engagement Trainee role at the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, made possible by the National Lottery-funded Wildlife Skills scheme, caught her eye whilst browsing for jobs online.

“I didn’t think I had a chance because of my age, but I thought: ‘What have I got to lose in applying?’.”

Taking on the traineeship

Despite her initial concerns, Keeley was delighted when her application was successful and in June 2015 she began the year-long traineeship.

Keeley’s role was to help design and deliver events and activities to get people in contact with nature, working with groups like Help4Heroes, Alzheimers Support, local community groups and families. She also had the opportunity to gain practical qualifications, achieving her Level 3 qualification in Forest School – and a full chainsaw licence!

Her excellent communication and organisational skills quickly saw her taking on responsibility for managing and delivering her own events.

“It has given me much greater confidence in myself that I can do the job and also given me better knowledge, not only about conservation, but also about the importance of getting other people involved. It’s taught me the benefits of being outside in nature and what it can do for your wellbeing.”

Look where I am now

“I wake up every morning wanting to come to work, knowing that I am making a difference. I think that is priceless.”

In November 2016, months after finishing the traineeship, Keeley was offered a role as Wellbeing Project Officer with Wiltshire Wildlife Trust.

Now 42, she says: "If you had asked me five years ago, 'Where do you see yourself in five years' time?', I would never have dreamed of saying what I am doing now. I never thought I would have the confidence or the know-how, but look where I am now and that is all thanks to the traineeship.

"I wake up every morning wanting to come to work, knowing that I am making a difference to other people's lives. I think that is priceless."

Keeley feels grateful to The National Lottery players who helped her to get there:

"Without the funding, I do not believe there would be an opportunity for a person like me to gain access into conservation without having any sort of experience or qualifications in the field.

"I feel blessed to be able to do what I do and am so happy doing it."

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