

Sheila Q&A

Interview with Sheila Gibson

Q: Start by telling us what you're passionate about in life.

A: I have four children, two of whom were born with an illness. One with liver disease and one with mental illness, so my passion comes from 30 years of taking care of and advocating for their illnesses while also trying to get the other two children the attention that they need. I think that that's why I'm doing what I do.

Q: What are some of your fondest memories of working with people with disabilities?

A: There are so many memories that I hold close to my heart. But I think ones that you remember the most are the ones where you make a difference immediately or you can see a difference in the people that you support.

Q: Has a negative experience ever impacted how you view your work now or in the past?

A: Not so much a negative experience in my job, but as I said, I had a son with mental illness and back then there wasn't the support you needed for proper support and proper diagnoses. We hit dead ends with everything back then, so I think now being able to make a difference and advocate for those services and get proper diagnoses. Quite frankly, I think that's why I do what I do.

Q: What would make you leave the human services field?

A: I don't think anything would make me leave the human services field. I think that's what I was born to do.

Q: Did you turn the negatives around? Why or not?

A: Those experiences I had with negative support and not getting proper diagnoses, that made me push harder and harder. I went to school to figure things out and now I'm doing what I'm doing. That's how I turned it into a positive for me.

Q: What in your current position has impacted you the most?

A: In my current position I'm learning something every single day. I'm getting greater knowledge and that's going to help me keep going further.

Q: How about in previous positions?

A: In previous positions, I just worked through. I feel like I wasn't able to excel in those positions and keep moving forward. I'm hoping that I learn more and more every day.

Q: Is there anything in life that's impacted you tremendously? You mentioned your kids, is there anything else? I know your dad was very important.

A: My job is very important to me. My kids are what push me through it. I was taught by a very wise man, my father, about work ethic and I feel great passion for my work.

Q: If you could tell the public or anyone who doesn't know why our work is so important, what would you tell them?

A: I would say that the need for services in the home, out of the home and crisis beds is huge in every state around us. For mental illness and developmental disabilities, the need for inclusion with all of them is what we're striving for. We need to educate our people and educate legislators and educate donors. We need to educate because it's the unknown that people are afraid of.

Q: If you could tell people what they could do to support our efforts at Frasier, what would you tell them?

A: I would say to offer support in areas such as being a donor, volunteering, giving a gift or helping support to educate people. Maybe scholarships, maybe put a grant in their names. Anything to just help support these individuals.

Q: If you could give a 30-minute lecture to people regarding our industry, what would you focus on and why?

A: I would focus on the need for support with developmental disabilities and mental illness. I would focus on educating the public. Again, I go back to education, I feel like people are uneducated when it comes to that. That's not saying something bad, it's just saying people are afraid of the unknown and until we educate them, it'll always be unknown.

Q: What is your advice for people just starting out in this industry?

A: I would tell them to be patient, to keep their minds wide open and to pay attention. Pay attention to the people we support, because not only are we supporting them and teaching them, we also learn from them.

Q: If there were any red flags that a new employee should watch out for, what would they be?

A: I think that the red flag is people not knowing what we do. We need to teach them, we need to tell them, we need to show them what we do. We need to introduce them to our individuals. The red flag is the unknown and the lack of education.

Q: Are there things that a new employee should look for in their employer or organization that serves this industry?

A: I believe that they should look for a place that focuses on their employees as a whole. The employees' training is the biggest piece. If you're not training your employees or your staff properly then you can't succeed. And if you're not training them, you're setting them up to fail. I believe that if you're looking for an agency, you should look into what training they provide.

Q: As a supervisor, what is your greatest asset?

A: My greatest asset is my employees. You want to attract and retain the best employees. You need to advocate for them and you need to train them. They are why we're here today.

Q: What are the key things in life that you treasure most?

A: I treasure my family, honesty, and hard work.

Q: What are the key things in your career that you rely on daily?

A: Developing positive relationships. Being accountable. I value relationships.

Q: What do you offer that sets you or Fraser apart from other businesses in the community?

A: Fraser is always looking to support every individual. Whether they're high medical or high behavioral, if we don't have the ability to do that, we will find a way to do that. We're always looking to find ways to support the people that are in need.

Q: What do you do or say when potential employees comment on low wages?

A: I explain to them that low wages are a huge problem. As far as Fraser goes, we're a nonprofit and rely on state funding and we rely on donors. I encourage them to educate also. They need to call their legislators and make sure that they know how important their work is and what needs there are for the state budget.

Q: What do you say when they comment on tough working conditions related to behaviors or mental health concerns that may cause some anguish? I'm focusing here on some recent things you've had to go through with your staff, and some very difficult moments. What do you say to them about these tough working conditions?

A: I try to explain to them that it takes a very special person to work in this industry. I will tell them that over and over. I also try to explain to them that when you have behavior problems with our people, it's *their* situation, it's *their* issue. It's not the staff's issue. I try to explain to them that they need to not take things personally, but still support them. I also remind them that whether they were there or not, the behavior was going to happen. I always explain to them that it's not personal.

Q: Why do you work in this industry? Why are you here?

A: I think I've done this indirectly and directly for 25 years. The main reason why I started in this industry was my son who was born with mental illness. It taught me so many things. It taught me that there are so many people in need. I just need to keep pushing forward and making it better.

Q: What about Fraser makes you want to recommend it to others?

A: Fraser provides a wide variety of services. From childcare, all the way to counseling services, adult services, and transitional youth services. They all work as a team, they complement themselves and I think all of those different services that we provide is what separates us from another agency. We can complement and work together.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to add or anything you'd like to say at the end here?

A: The human services field is the most rewarding field that you could ever work in and that's why I'm here.

Q: Is there anything you want to say that you didn't say in the questions?

A: I'm happy to be a part of the Fraser team!