

Anita Davies

Anita has an hereditary visual impairment and is registered blind. She is a single mum of two young children with special needs and has worked full time since leaving college.

Anita was mentored by Joyce Chatterton, former Director of the Royal National Institute for the Blind and role shadowed Jenny Randerson, Welsh Liberal Democrat AM for Cardiff Central. Anita has now been selected as the Liberal Democrat candidate for her area in the 2012 County Council elections and is having training and support to run in a local by-election expected later this year.

“I was born in Llangeinor which is in the Garw valley but now I live in Bridgend. I commute to Cardiff four days a week as I work for the Cardiff Institute for the Blind. My mother and my sister also have visual impairments like me, I can see colour and shape but not faces. People have to come up to me and tell me they are there. I can't pick up on body language so well. I can feel reactions or sensations from people, rather than read body language or facial expressions.



I feel I have probably done more things in my life than some sighted people because the opportunity and challenge has been there. Having a visual impairment hasn't restricted my ambition. I see it as a challenge.

I've had to deal with more barriers due to my sight loss rather than my gender, although there were times when I was younger when assumptions were made about what I should and shouldn't do because I was a girl. The boys were allowed to go rock climbing and wind surfing but it was assumed that girls wouldn't do this. So I wanted to prove them wrong.

I remember my father wouldn't let me bring in the boat because I was a girl and because I was visually impaired, but my mum told him to let me do it, and so he did. I had a bike, I climbed trees, and I've learned to drive a car.

“This course has given me a different energy – more of an energy to fight for the change I want. The most satisfying thing is understanding myself better and learning how to be more comfortable with myself. I've had a lot of life experiences and I can contribute a lot of positive and realistic things to politics.”

Straight after leaving Hereford College I started work. I've always been the main bread-winner in the house. I run a blind society in my spare time, sit on a variety of committees and I'm training to be a crystal therapist.

I've always been involved in something. I used to teach judo and work in the bar in college. I was also a school governor at my son's school.

I got married and divorced, got remarried and divorced again. Had my second baby on my own and moved house on my own. This is when I started the Engendering Change course. I was able to do it because I was on maternity leave. Eight of us were on the course. At the end at the evaluation, I noticed that all the women who had gone on it had all got different things out of it at different levels. One of the women in our group was so shy at first that she couldn't speak, and by the end she had the confidence to do a presentation; that was her achievement. So many people lack self-esteem.

I'm quite a confident person anyway, but I learned a lot more about myself doing the course. I became more self-aware. In relation to politics my knowledge was limited, which I already knew. But I have had to fight for everything all my life. I've had to fight for the right education for my son; he has a disability. Sometimes I was so frustrated I became too aggressive in my approach. Engendering Change helped me deal with my anger or frustration. There are different ways of dealing with situations and being aware of the sort of person you are.

I've always had the aspiration to change policies for the better and the next level of training, Women into Public Life, gave me training in assertiveness, presentations and politics. Now I am more focussed to get things done in a more positive way.

My mentor used to be a schoolteacher of mine, but she also works high up in the field I work in. We have contact every couple of weeks. She asks me what I've done, and then picks up on issues that have come up. I read all the manifestos from the different parties and joined the Liberal Democrat party within two weeks of having a mentor.

In two years time I want to be a Councillor in Bridgend, as a stepping stone towards being an AM. During my Women Into Public Life training I role shadowed Jenny Randerson which enabled me to see that the way forward for me into public life is to start at the beginning, at local level. I have now been interviewed and accepted by the appointments committee as a candidate in the 2012 County Council elections and I am having training and support to run in an anticipated by-election later this year.

I enjoy making a positive difference to people's lives – developing a service or giving advice. I feel this is a very exciting time for me and I strongly believe that the training I have had through Women Making a Difference, the people I have met like Paula Manley who manages the project and all the other women and friends and family around me, have played a huge part in giving me that confidence to move forward with my aim to becoming someone who can and will make a difference to people's lives.

“To others, I'd say Women Making a Difference is a life changing experience. You can take all sorts of things out of it at all sorts of levels. Whether you're a single parent or haven't done much academically, it helps you to understand what you can achieve, it helps you to realise you are an individual and you have skills.”

With the challenges I face, being a working single mother, with two children with special needs and a visual impairment myself, I believe where there is a will there is a way. The course gives you the tools to find those way within yourself, your environment and the people around you.”