

The slippery pole for women working in sports centre By Vivienne Monahan...my centre operations experience

I came from the background of a being physical training instructor (PTI) in the Royal Air Force to a council run leisure facility.

My time in the air force involved programming sports activities, coaching and teaching RAF personnel, maintaining sports sites, developing leisure activities for RAF families as well as the usual NCO responsibilities. In addition to this I travelled to several RAF stations to set up sports programmes and teach the teachers.

In my time in the RAF I was lucky enough to be able to train with some of GB's top athletes of the time and I got to know the ins and outs of air sea rescue and mountain rescue work.(left RAF 1970)

Having had a break from work whilst marrying and having 3 children, I applied for a job at the brand-new local swimming and sports centre. I wanted to get right back into teaching, coaching, and organising etc. and sadly the only way was to start at the bottom of the ladder, for I could only work part time to start off with.

My interview for the grand post of Centre Assistant was in front of a panel of 5 council employees, one of whom was the personnel officer who asked me how I could undertake the job (which was part time only) when I had 3 children to look after! My reply was that if I hadn't got that organised then I would not be sitting in front of them. I think that back in (Feb) 1983 discrimination against females, especially mothers was rife.

I did however get the job and bit my tongue and bided my time carrying out poolside shifts for hours on end (even though I had more qualifications than most) before the step up the ladder. In the meantime I was one of the main swim teachers in the exciting innovative swim teaching programme that eventually became one of the best programmes in the country.

I think the Centre Manager had faith in me and when a gap in the centre family tree came up, I was promoted to assistant manager (1990) with specific responsibilities for the teaching/coaching programmes and poolside staff training; and indeed undertaking much of the teaching etc. myself. This of course was full time.

I was in my element but it had taken 6 or 7 years to get there...patience is definitely a virtue. It was great however to be part of a very successful leisure centre right from the beginning.

I was duly promoted to Deputy Manager (1995) with responsibility for the whole centre in the managers absence and taking a wider role in the centres operations.

I spent many years in this role. Council bureaucracy was frustrating at times with strange meetings that had to be attended and interesting rules and regulations that had to be adhered to, we just wanted to get on with the job in hand, It was a bit like big brother watching and waiting for mistakes to made, but we were so successful.

Eventually the centre, along with the other council leisure facilities became a trust and things had to change.

Due to changes in staff, people leaving etc. I was successfully interviewed for the role of centre manager (2006). I had nearly 3 years in that role which only finished when I retired (2008) at the age of 60.

So how did those 25 years go? I embraced it right from the beginning because it was a brand-new facility with everything going for it. I loved it and I hated it. I loved it because I eventually achieved my goal and along the way I met some of the most interesting people from all walks of life, and I hated it because firstly my experience wasn't recognised at the beginning hence the starting at the bottom and it was a long hard struggle. Would I change anything...probably not...but maybe I should have stayed in the RAF longer.