



We meet **Nicola Blake**, a Senior Dental Nurse, Mobile Fleet Coordinator and Employee Elected Director for Community Dental Services CIC (CDS).

Special and paediatric dental care

Community Dental Services CIC (CDS) is an employee-owned social enterprise and a referral only dental service, providing special and paediatric dental care and oral health improvement across much of the East of England and the East Midlands. CDS brings dental care to people who cannot easily be treated in general dental practice; its patients typically have learning disabilities, mental health issues or severe anxiety.

Approaching her 28th year with CDS, Nicola Blake began her career as a dental nurse and now has a diverse role which includes dental nursing on special care GA sessions; attending special school and youth offender sessions; and running CDS's five strong mobile unit fleet. She has also served on the CDS Board as an Employee Elected Director for 12 and a half years.

Nicola's career

We find out from Nicola how her career has progressed in line with her work passions:

'I fell into dentistry! I finished my GCSEs and as I didn't particularly enjoy studying or exams, I didn't want to sit my A-Levels. My dream was to work in an office and although I applied for jobs, I had many rejections as I was deemed not experienced enough. My parents wouldn't allow me to just sit around, so I went back to school to study BTEC

'We are taking dental care to the most vulnerable groups'

business management. But then when a job came up in a general dental practice for a trainee dental nurse, I was successful in my application, and this is where my long and varied career started.

‘I worked at the general dental practice for three years and gained my National Certificate. The dentists I worked with encouraged me to look beyond the small family run practice and that’s when I joined CDS as a dental nurse. My career evolved from dental nurse and support dental nurse to Senior Dental Nurse and Mobile Fleet Coordinator. In addition, outside of work, I visit and support a local Beavers group when they are learning about oral health.

‘I have always been focused on my professional development and have been awarded my NEBDN National; NEBDN Sedation for Dental Nursing; BTEC Oral Health; Radiography for Dental Nursing; NEBDN Special Care; Fluoride varnish application extended duties; Impression taking extended duties and a B-Skill Management Level 3, in which I gained a distinction in 2021. CDS is fantastic at supporting its employees to enhance skills and look at further opportunities, as well as ensuring employees are up to date with mandatory training, in line with our GDC requirements.

‘Throughout my varying roles with CDS, I have had the pleasure of supporting a fantastic patient group, ensuring we provide care to the most at risk vulnerable groups across communities, including those with special care additional needs; mental health needs; complex medical history; the elderly; those with physical disabilities; and children in secure units.

‘My main role now is Mobile Fleet Coordinator – responsible for CDS’s fleet of five mobile clinics. Our mobile dental clinics contain a fully equipped dental surgery with X-ray facilities, sterilisation equipment, and a hoist to enable the dental team to carry out a full range of dental treatments in an accessible manner. This service provides a positive dental experience for many people who have not been able to access this in the past and

being on wheels, enables us to get into the heart of those communities who experience barriers to care.

Typical day

‘A typical day for me can vary from week to week, as my role and the needs of the mobile clinics are always evolving and becoming busier through the acquisition of more mobile contracts. One day I can be clinical, the next day managerial, or the next, fixing a mobile dental unit. I like how unpredictable it is working on mobile services, for example, the other day I attended a secure unit and the

between CDS and the East Midlands Primary Care Team, working on behalf of five in the Midlands. People who are homeless can often feel ashamed and embarrassed to attend a dental practice full of people, fearing that they will be judged as well as facing difficulty finding and registering with a dentist without a fixed address. SMD groups have disproportionately high levels of pain, infections, untreated dental disease, and tooth loss. The Groundswell survey in 2017 of over 260 homeless individuals found that 28% used illegal drugs to help deal with their dental pain.

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next day I attended a SEND school, followed by a day to catch up on all the paperwork. I enjoy being busy and keeping the mind thinking of the next step and a better way forward. In our mobiles team, I have five drivers, three contractors, two nurses and two specialist nurses. Clinically, my duties are mainly for CDS’s mobile services in the secure unit settings, with my current focus being on mobilising and maintaining contracts with Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), to fulfil contract requirements and manage the employees for the contracts.

‘In 2022, I became involved in the CDS SMD mobile project, a one-year pilot programme treating people with Severe Multiple Disadvantage (SMD) and/or homelessness. The pilot is a partnership

‘Our commissioners connected me with local charities working with people who are homeless, to look at the best locations for the mobile units in each region. It was important that we attended sites that our patient group already felt comfortable in, and we work with organisations to refer our patients to smoking cessation, drug misuse and alcohol services. I then coordinated with the local groups to organise dates and areas for the mobile unit and team to be located. I helped recruit the clinicians and drivers and coordinated the nursing cover for the sessions. I personally oversee the project and support the full team as well as providing reports for commissioners about how the pilot is going.

‘I believe this project is worthwhile as we are taking dental care to the most vulnerable

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groups who struggle to access care and can often feel judged by their appearance when sitting in a main waiting room, so we take that barrier away. It would be incredibly beneficial to expand this project as there are so many people who require this care.

'I enjoy supporting our patient group and love the diversity of my role, as it is always evolving. I enjoy a new challenge to support other team members but most of all, it's supporting the patients that gives me the most job satisfaction. To date, we have treated over 175 patients as part of our SMD pilot and ensure we provide information around better oral health and prescribe high fluoride toothpaste at each visit.

'I'd say the most challenging element of my job is time management, as I aim to always give 100% to each task and when you have more than one role this can be difficult at times. I like a challenge and moving from different tasks is what I enjoy and what keeps me motivated, so working for CDS is perfect for me.

An employee elected director

'In September 2011, I became a CDS Employee Elected Director (EED). I stood as an EED as I was passionate about ensuring employees had a voice. Colleagues were aware that I'm confident and willing to pose difficult questions, and I have been delighted to represent the voice of our employees, putting forward ideas and suggestions of what we believe should change to benefit the patients we are here to treat.

'Throughout my years as a board member, I have helped to guide the future and consider strategic direction for the organisation. I've enjoyed the opportunity to openly speak out

and provide my point of view which looks from the ground level up to help guide the service.

'Being on the board has allowed me to grow in my abilities to look strategically, as well as looking at the whole service rather than just the small section of the service I work in. Because CDS is an employee-owned company, it means that you as an individual can own what you bring to the service and make a difference, and this is something that makes me proud to work for CDS.

'My aims for the future are to continue growing the mobile service and taking care out to more vulnerable groups who need it the most and to assist CDS in making sure our mobile service continues to run efficiently. I am flexible in terms of the locations I support and cover, so I can support team members across the service to break down barriers for this patient group.'

An early riser, Nicola maintains a regime of exercise and healthy eating. A family orientated person, she enjoys helping her parents with their house and gardening at the weekends. Nicola is a passionate swimmer, clocking in around 6-10 hours each week; loves a country walk with her husband and daughter and relaxes by completing cross stitch.

If you are interested in working for Community Dental Services CIC (CDS), view the latest vacancies at: <https://www.communitydentalservices.co.uk/work-for-us/>.

For more on careers, visit <https://www.bdjjobs.com/careers/>.

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