



GWEN ROBERTS

Role: Specialist Prosthetist

Institution: NHS Cardiff and Vale

RESEARCH STORY

I grew up around research. My father in particular is very academic and spends all his spare time researching, writing and sharing information on a vast range of topics. I always assumed I would follow in his footsteps, but to my surprise I found my dissertation at University really stressful. I would draw a blank for days on end and cry, questioning everything I knew about myself. I found it really difficult to work on such a large project with so many components without guidance or support. I had originally hoped to stay on at University for a Masters, but this experience stifled my interest in following this more academic path. I kept saying to myself I would look into it “in the future”, when I had settled into my new career, when x, y, and z aligned.. and eventually settling on the arbitrary “when I buy a house”.

In the intern I completed smaller projects. I wrote articles for BAPO Connect, I was part of the Conference Committee, joined the Dementia Framework working group, supervising students, and so-forth. I retained the interest in research, but lacked the confidence. I found I would take on too many of these small projects and subsequently burn-out, affecting my home life and my pride. Around this time I came to the realisation that my struggles differed from others, which eventually led to a diagnosis of AuDHD (ADHD and Autism). This has been pivotal for me, in that I’ve started to understand my struggles and accessed software and coaching to help me utilise my strengths and work in a healthier way.

Then the inevitable happened and I bought a house, and like magic the

application for the second BAPO and Staffordshire University Research Hub arrived in my inbox. I found out I was successful in my application the same week I discovered I was pregnant! Clearly the perfect time to start my research journey!

Being part of the Research Hub involved regular meetings, with smaller, manageable goals between and research veterans to guide you through all the potholes. The meetings generally happened within work time, and I was lucky to be fully supported by my workplace in these activities, however inevitably a lot of the work had to be completed at home. It was a wholly different experience than my dissertation and although feelings of self-doubt and confusion would creep in, there was a team to encourage and redirect me as necessary. We worked together to complete the paper which is now published in the British Medical Journal Leader, and I've presented our results jointly with Nina for Staffordshire University, and more recently at the Wales Regional BAPO Conference.

The momentum has slowed a bit due to giving birth to a wonderful baby boy, but as he reaches 2 I find I have reached a place where I can once again look into opportunities to join research, whether this be joining a research team in writing a paper, or more formally applying for a masters. Thanks the Research Hub experience, I have connections in the field who can help and guide me on this journey until I hope I can become a mentor of my own.

RESEARCH TIPS

- Have a cheerleader. This is someone who can help keep you on track, encourage and support you, and remind you when to take a break. It doesn't necessarily have to be another researcher, it can be a colleague, friend or partner.
- Engage with other researchers. Whether these are "veterans" or others who are starting out, it's great to share ideas, and insecurities too.

- Be kind to yourself and remember: everyone starts somewhere! There is a lot of time and effort between the first draft of a research paper versus the last. You aren't expected to get it perfect first right away.
- Take the time you need to do it, and remember to leave time for yourself as well. There is software available that can help with mindmapping, writing documents and timekeeping and voice-to-text, to name a few. I was supplied with specialist software through the Access to Work scheme which was invaluable during the project.

