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Apprentice Social Worker - Second Year

WHEN DID YOU START AS AN APPRENTICE SOCIAL WORKER?

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WHAT WERE YOU DOING BEFORE YOU STARTED YOUR APPRENTICESHIP?

I worked in a social care neighbourhood team as a senior Independence and Wellbeing Practitioner (IWP) since 2018. Before that, I worked as a driving instructor – many of the skills were transferable, and it set me up well for social work.

WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO PURSUE A CAREER IN SOCIAL WORK?

Since watching a film called 'No Child of Mine' in the 1990s, I have wanted to work with children in a children's home. My life took me in a different direction for many years. However, when I saw an advert for the job of IWP, I applied and have been so grateful that I did; social work is what I am meant to be doing.

DID YOUR PREVIOUS EXPERIENCES INFLUENCE YOUR DECISION TO PURSUE SOCIAL WORK? IF SO - HOW?

Yes, I have a feeling of empathy and responsibility towards people who have been adversely affected by experiences in their lives. I also have excellent experiences of care and support within other relationships and jobs that have left me wishing to support others in the way that I have been. I feel that I have a lot of skills to offer, and I enjoy using them in this type of work.

HOW HAVE YOU FOUND THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING AN APPRENTICE SOCIAL WORKER?

I love it! Having the opportunity to study my passion and work to keep wages coming in has been amazing – frankly, I would not be doing the degree if I could not have earned wages simultaneously. I appreciate the study leave to read and write essays and the support from the workforce development team, whom we meet regularly in student hubs and wellbeing meetings. Workforce Development also seems to be expanding on their offer regarding experiences within the apprenticeship.

I could do without the essays – I could really do without them - but even they are worth it for the other experiences. I get to work with three teams covering children and adults, and I shadow many others, giving me a 'world' view that you would not get in any other form of degree program or by having a 'normal' job in the council.

I spend a year in each team, a new team each year, and while it can feel sometimes like I am never the expert, it is because I am not. That will come after qualification. For now, I am so lucky to have the time to explore everything and anything I want. The support from team managers and other team members has been exceptional – more than I expected.

Of course, this is a job, and I have a caseload, which can be stressful, but that is the deal: we are not paid to do nothing. Suffolk also supports learning with its CPD program, which you can book on to with the support of your manager.

CPD supplies short programs to increase skills, and I have been on many, finding them extremely helpful in the job – this is not available on other degree programs as far as I know.

My cohort of apprentices are very close, and we always look forward to meeting up at university once a week to see each other – and to study. My cohort is my rock and my happiness. The University grown and strengthened; likewise, so has my confidence in them. My personal tutor this year is helpful and available. The course tutors have provided a comprehensive program and have listened to student feedback. The library people at the university can help you with essay skills if it is not your forte!

WOULD YOU RECOMMEND AN APPRENTICESHIP IN SOCIAL WORK TO SOMEONE CONSIDERING IT?

Without hesitation. This is a job, and you need to be prepared to work, but there is nothing to lose and everything to gain and no better way to get a huge amount of experience while qualifying.