

My Link Worker Story

I joined the WYCCP team in January 2015 starting as a student on placement. The six weeks entailed shadowing resettlement workers in the prison and the community as well as admin-based work in the office. The placement provided me with a general overview of the work WYCCP does and a direct understanding of how important the support is to many of the service users. I took up the opportunity to continue working with WYCCP as a link worker.

My link worker experience has been extremely varied and my roles have included working within the prison and the community. One of my main roles as a link worker has been focusing on the support of the two service users I had been linked with. Prior to their release I established a rapport with them in order to increase the likelihood of them engaging and to also enable them to feel comfortable and confident with me as their go-to support worker. My first service user failed to engage and unfortunately found himself back in HMP Leeds within a few weeks of his release. However, my second service user appeared to value the support on offer. I would meet him every week in an easily accessible public place to ensure both of our safety and he was able to attend. During the meetings, we would discuss how he had been and what progress he had made since our last encounter. Together it would also be discussed any concerns that had arisen and any new support needs he felt WYCCP could help with. This would often include money management and family issues. As a link worker I would try to put things in place to ease his troubles. This included creating budgeting plans, making necessary calls to reduce debts and creating payment plans. Once finished I would go back to the office and write all the notes from the meeting and highlight any actions that needed to be taken to help improve the service user's situation. The notes would be very informative and documented on the database to ensure an up to date record was kept allowing key workers to follow what had been done. In addition to the general community meetings, I have also been to many doctor and psychiatric appointments with service users acting as their support worker. This may be due to the service user feeling uncomfortable and worried about going alone or because they need support in understanding what is happening. Working in the community is always different and can also include attending probation meetings, court hearings and house viewings.

A second role of mine which I really enjoy and do more of because of this is legal visits. I will usually arrive at the office in the morning and be booked into see three new referrals each for forty-five minutes. Once set up in the professional's visitation area, I will complete an initial screening and first spider assessment with each service user. Once finished I will go back to the office to complete the necessary follow up work. This includes inputting the data from the meeting onto the database and creating a paper file for each service user. I will then set to work on their support needs. For example, if a man presented as NFA during the assessment I would complete as many relevant housing referrals as possible to improve the

chances of the service user gaining accommodation upon release. One this has been completed document this on the database and I would write a letter to each of the men to update them on their support explaining what I had done and what is intended to be done.

I have learnt a lot during my time as a link worker. On a personal level my confidence had increased dramatically. This is due to stepping out of my comfort zone through leading assessments and getting involved with training. Additionally, I have learnt not to be disheartened if a service user fails to engage. When working with this particular group it is expected that they may be unreliable and unpredictable due to their lifestyle therefore, it is important not to take things personally. I have also learnt skills that will aid me in my future career. I would say I am now much more resilient which is essential when working with offenders. And lastly, I feel I have developed an understanding of how to approach and perceive the service users. I think it is vital to appreciate what mood an individual is in, sometimes the men are willing to share personal information with you and have a very open attitude and sometimes they can appear very unsociable. As a link worker during these situations in order to do your very best job you have to respect them, adapt and make do with what you have in order to elicit the any information that will have you gauge their support needs.

I could not pick one specific experience that has been a highlight for me as having the opportunity to work with WYCCP has been all round amazing. One aspect of being a link worker that I have really enjoyed has been being able to make a difference to the lives of many ex-offenders. I have met some truly inspiring service users and had the honour to listen to some incredible stories. These men have experienced some terrible tragedies, yet despite the setbacks have remained focused on improving their lives. It has been an absolute pleasure to be a part of facilitating their move away from crime, watching them as they transition back into society and increasing their motivation to do so. The experience I have gained and the support I have received from working within the WYCCP team has been invaluable and it has honestly been an incredible learning experience for me.