

Spotlight on Social Work Placements by Kirsty Young - Lead Social Work Practitioner (Safeguarding Lead)



So, the COVID-19 Pandemic has created challenges for everyone in our services. The initial focus back in March had to be on keeping services running, our staff and service users safe. Here was the likes of something we had never experienced before. Shops were closed, streets were deserted, grey fence paint commanded an all time high price on its new black market, awful fake news stories were circulating from around the world and no one knew how it was going to pan out.

Services had to react faster than ever before and measures were put in place at lightening speed to keep the wheels turning.

Amazingly, and in huge credit to our staff teams, it wasn't long before services were spinning all the plates again and we were able to focus on what to do with the student placement situation.

Back in March we had four Social Work students on placement from two universities, Hull and York. Incredibly after only a short interlude one of these was able to complete placement, something that really was essential as not to have done so would have meant her not graduating. The other three placements had been put on hold whilst services operated on minimum staff levels and rotas for office working.

Guidance was issued almost daily from Social Work England and the various universities and we worked with them to agree which adaptations to placements

would help this cohort of students from around the country (and in fact, the world) to be able to meet all the regulators requirements to go on to graduate and become tomorrows Social Workers.

One student was able to change placement location to a statutory setting whilst we still continued to support her in drawing out social work learning from the new site, the other students were able to have their placements shortened slightly allowing them to run it right up to the start of the second placement. Our staff worked extremely hard to provide placement learning in these new conditions. Some universities worked rapidly on shifting modules around for their incoming cohorts of new students which has meant changes to our usual intake schedules are ongoing.

Both university teaching and some placement learning moved online which has presented its own challenges, and I'm pleased to say some highlights. We used different platforms for each establishment, whether good old Skype, MST or Zoom, and being reminded by the host for all delegates to 'raise your hand' to speak in the meeting and actually raising my physical hand before realising there was a button for this was not a highlight...

However getting to coo over a students new born baby in a zoom call most certainly was one of the nicer parts! I have certainly come to appreciate our new found ability to enjoy work within our normal daily lives and accept the impact that can have and I hope that we can hold onto more of this way of working as the pandemic passes into history.

Personally I have been working from home since March and can now reflect on the excitement of a colleague popping to the door to drop off some work when I'd not seen anyone in person for so long. Nipping back to a deserted Spring Bank for the

first time in six months was certainly strange. And for me individually, I'm learning new ways to keep in touch with people I would normally see regularly just from bumping into them.

One more stressful moment early on in lockdown which I can now (almost) laugh about was being on a phone call with Tim and having my little boy come screaming into the office declaring war on his older brother who had just wee'd on him in the bath. Parents of boys, I hope you can relate or this will be TMI.

And that reminds me of my experience of what I would very loosely call 'home schooling'. On one occasion I recall being asked by my older son how to 'divide an imperfect fraction' whilst brushing up on my 'relational security' for a student I was working with. I am definitely much greyer and also more than a little plumper. I just hope you all recognise me when we do finally meet in person again, which I really do hope will be soon. 😊

Merry Christmas to you all!