



## **A Day in the Life of a Mental Health Social Worker....**

Vicki Pratt, Mental Health Social Worker at York City Council reflects on her role.

We are all working and living in unprecedented times with the C19 virus and in Mental Health Awareness week, I have found myself wondering and reflecting on:

- What I am doing to manage my own mental health as a mental health social worker?
- What strategies am I implementing to help myself in the challenge of working from home?
- What am I doing to help realise that the small successes achieved with customers are actually big gains in the field of mental health?
- What am I doing to help realise that I can do this and that I can help others make change?

At 3pm today, having not gone for my morning run as intended, definitely not taken a long enough lunch break and drank too much tea/not enough water, I concluded that I am not practicing what I am preaching to the customers I work with about self-care. I also recognised that I was forgetting the small successes that we might take for granted when working with complex cases - successes that make a big difference to those that we work with.

During the first week of my mental health secondment, I was allocated to a customer to look at their accommodation situation and determine a pathway so that they could have more secure and stable living arrangements. Three weeks in and the weekly 'phone catch ups' we scheduled were going well.... I thought to myself *'I can do this phone assessment stuff, it's okay'*.

However, week four took turn. The phone was slammed down on me mid conversation after I edged out of our usual 'chit chat' territory into plans, expectations and the housing application. It left me feeling anxious and uncertain. Two days later the customer sent me a text apologising for putting the phone down on me and explained why they became upset. At first, I was just happy to read the message, so I knew they were 'okay'. After speaking about this in supervision I was encouraged to reflect on this further and consider how this text is real positive progress. The customer had not just put the phone down and forgotten about our conversation or me. We can have a real impact on those we work with. We can still build relationships with customers over the phone. We can still help people move forward ...even whilst sat at our makeshift desks at home.

A further reflection, again from early in my secondment when I was working with a customer living in a very neglectful situation. Concerns were raised around safety and wellbeing and our first visit to the house consisted of being told to “go away”. With some perseverance, we were able to build a level of rapport with the customer and in the weeks that followed, we obtained consent to start undertaking some clearing. My colleague and I were elated with a sense of achievement, especially given the barriers other professionals have encountered around engagement. There were still concerns and risk but holding and working with risk is fundamental to this role.

A day in the life of a mental health social worker involves being aware of statutory action that can be taken but also, the need to develop and maintain trusting working relationships so that risk can be worked with and managed collaboratively with confidence.

Writing this piece helped me recognise that, a day in the life of a mental health social worker, has its anxieties and worries. However, one of the best ways we can look after ourselves in this difficult time is to take the time to reflect and recognise the small (and big!) successes that we achieve each day/week in our jobs.

And now, I am going for that run. As much as I complain, moan and my face goes as red as a tomato two minutes in, it does make me feel better for going!