Real-life story - Helen McPeake

Helen is based in a GP practice and works with the community to help patients and local people find the support they need to improve their own health and wellbeing.

Helen McPeake
Senior community wellbeing officer

**Employer or university** Wellbeing enterprises (a community interest company)

**Salary range** £15k-£25k

How I got into the role

After graduating from university, I spent a lot of time working and volunteering in a variety of roles in the voluntary and community sector across Northern Ireland and then Merseyside.

I volunteered for 12 months with Healthy Communities Cancer Collaborative Team, Liverpool Primary Care Trust, where I helped promote the early signs and symptoms of cancer to encourage people to access their GP as a preventative measure. This involved me engaging with a range of different communities and improving the awareness of different cancers.

I have also worked with young people who have struggled with drug and alcohol misuse. One-to-one work took place to help them understand the damage of substance misuse and get the correct support for their health and wellbeing. Furthermore I have volunteered in a young women’s refuge to empower individuals through the breakdown of relationships and help to restore their self-esteem and self-worth to enable them to live independently.

Through my various volunteering roles and academic studies I discovered my true passion is helping and empowering people and communities to improve their own health and wellbeing and this is exactly what the Community Wellbeing Office (CWO) role offers.

What I do

I am based in a GP practice and work with colleagues and other community agencies to support the health and wellbeing of patients and the local population. The practice has an action plan, informed by the local joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) and in turn this helps to guide the priorities for my role.
I help people to find their way through ‘the system’ and reach the services they need to make improvements to their own personal situation; this may relate to poor health or social problems such as debt or isolation.

Many of my clients face challenges that go hand in hand with living in deprivation, such as poor health and wellbeing levels, debt, poor housing or relationship problems. I work with individuals to design holistic interventions that help them to develop the skills and knowledge to improve their own wellbeing, and to become resilient in the face of difficulties. If I don't have the skills or knowledge to personally deal with an issue, or there is a specialist agency that could better help, then I will refer clients on to other services. If necessary, I can continue to support them whilst they build up their confidence levels and achieve their goals.

In addition to one-to-one work my role also involves delivery or design of various training courses. For example, we offer a long-term health conditions programme for people with ongoing health issues who may also have problems associated with their social health such as debt or isolation. There is often an overlap between health and social issues and we try to address this in the courses we offer.

As a CWO we support individuals to build up their confidence to a point where they want to become a volunteer or a wellbeing champion. This involves us working together to develop a personal development plan (PDP) where individuals can pass on the message of wellbeing to others in the wider community.

We support individuals to build up their confidence to make the positive changes they want to see.

The best bits and challenges

One of the best bits about my role is that I’m out and about in the local community working with people. I enjoy working with clients and local partner agencies to develop solutions to a recognised need or service gap. The practice I work with runs a ‘doctorpreneurs’ and a ‘patientpreneurs’ program. This is where staff or patients identify a gap or need and have a suggestion for improvement. We have a small budget and together we can often develop a solution. On a one-to-one level, working with clients with complex needs can be really challenging but it’s so rewarding when you see your support is making a difference.

Life outside work

Outside work and in my free time I enjoy being with my friends, going for long walks and spending time outdoors. I enjoy going to the cinema to see the latest films and trying the new restaurants in Liverpool.
I am originally from Ireland and go home to see my family and attend family parties, whenever I can. When I am in Ireland I make a point of travelling along the ‘Wild Atlantic Way’ coastline and revisit places I used to love from my childhood.

**Career plans and top tips for others**

At the moment I am very happy and have no plans to move. I have recently been promoted to senior CWO so I want to concentrate on doing the job well. We have really good access to further personal development so I will continue to benefit from that.

This role will suit you if you have experience of working in your community or on health and wellbeing initiatives and wish to develop your skills. A passion for helping people is vital.


**Links**

[1] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Primary_care
[3] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Personal_development_plan