

Real-life story - Ranjit Bhandal

Ranjit started his working life as a drugs worker in the Police Force before turning his knowledge and skills into a career in public health.

Ranjit Bhandal

Workforce development lead

Employer or university

Birmingham Public Health Department

Salary range

£30k-£40k

It's about personal responsibility, managing risk and being a concerned friend.

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How I got into the role

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Originally, I started as a drug worker for West Midlands Police for four-and-a-half years. Then, in 2009, I joined the Birmingham Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) as a training officer. In 2013, when the local authority took responsibility for public health, the DAAT joined the Public Health Department.

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What I do

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Every morning I start work by finding out if any public health issues have hit the headlines and then I make sure that we respond on our Twitter account and other social media sites. I check that all of the information is consistent and that information about local services is posted onto the various sites. Often the director of public health will make a statement on the issue, and that is incorporated. The rest of my day is made up of attending meetings, coordinating events, supervising new staff, project development and so on. All of this is aimed at making sure our current projects and initiatives keep moving forward.

There are four clear aspects to my role, which are:

- developing and updating the Birmingham public health marketing and communication hub, which focuses on using social media
- working as part of a team to produce a TV programme that is broadcast weekly to local audiences. The TV programme focuses on current public health “hot topics” and priorities
- delivering training on Drug and Substance Misuse and Making Every Contact Count (MECC) to new staff in the department, for instance apprentices and registrars
- helping to redesign our current services so that they: (a) move into line with local authority priorities, vision, policies and systems; and (b) provide value for money

All Birmingham citizens benefit from our work. We work with a range of organisations and communities, so that we communicate health messages widely, including to all age groups and all ethnic backgrounds. We do not tell people what to do; rather, we give them information so that they can make informed choices. It's about personal responsibility, managing risk and being a concerned friend.

The reason I started this kind of work was because I wanted to help people to make the right decisions for them. If someone makes the right decision for them, then it has a ripple effect through the rest of their family and everyone's health improves. I work mainly with people from statutory services (such as police, probation and fire service), but also with people from other departments within the local authority (eg trading standards and the policy department) and with clinical staff from the NHS and people from the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs). Most of my work is office based but I travel across Birmingham City to attend meetings and deliver training, and I travel further afield to attend conferences and Public Health England meetings.

My initial training was an NVQ qualification in Health and Social Care (which covered functions and activities involved with working with substance misusers as set out in the Drugs and Alcohol National Occupational Standards (DANOS)) and then I gained my experience on the job with the police. When I was with them I started to do some teaching and that helped me to get the initial job with the DAAT as a trainer. I have done some teaching qualifications: Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS); Certificate in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (CTLLS); and more recently a diploma in social media and business marketing.

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The best bits and challenges

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The best bit of my role is that every day is different. We have an excellent director of public health who allows us to explore different ideas. He is very keen to be involved and ensure that we include the whole of the community.

I have a number of things that I am very proud of, including helping with the redesign of the biggest drug and alcohol service in Europe and developing one of the leading public health Twitter accounts (@healthybrum). I'm also proud of my own personal development, and that I can use my knowledge and skills in drug and substance misuse to train and help others who work in public health.

The biggest challenge of the job is addressing everything all at the same time, keeping everything moving forward and ensuring that services give value for money and are future proof. The service-contracts are usually for five years so services have to be relevant today and also in five years' time. Coordination is another big challenge. For

instance, we have to make sure that all services, initiatives and projects that are involved in a specific campaign give out the same messages and information. That can be difficult.

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**Life outside
work**

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The hours that I work are varied and include evening work, but that fits in well with my family life. Outside work I like football and gaming and I am also involved in a project with the Punjabi Sikh community that is about using social media to get messages across about lifestyles and substance misuse.

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**Career plans
and top tips for
others**

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I want to continue to enhance my learning around social media and public health. I'd advise others to never stop learning. If you have a passion, keep building on it, keep learning and keep yourself interested and interesting.

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