

"The best part of this job? Being able to work with people who might otherwise have difficulty accessing support."

Chris had a passion for mental health from an early age, having grown up with friends and family members who experienced mental health difficulties and distress.

Real-life story - Chris Millar

Clinical psychologist

Employer or university

Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust



How I got into the role

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My early experiences inspired me to volunteer in the mental health sector and pursue a psychology degree to learn more about the causes of mental health difficulties.

After I graduated I loved gaining a range of experience, ranging from working with young offenders in children's homes to personality disorder services, acute hospital wards and latterly in the prison service. Working with young offenders who had parents in prison, I was aware of the devastation prison can cause families and the impact on mental health.

From the prison service, I moved to work in research for a while and then trained as a clinical psychologist. I'm now a qualified clinical psychologist, working within high-secure

care.

What I do

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Some days I help facilitate talking therapy groups, carry out one-to-one interventions or attend Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) reviews, which aim to reduce the risk of prisoners' suicide or self-harm.

Other days are more admin- and office-based when I contact community teams, plan groups, research interventions, and write clinical notes, summary reports and letters.

My work is always changing but that means I'm always gaining skills in a number of areas.

The best bits and challenges

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The best part of this job is being able to work with service users with a range of psycho-social needs who might otherwise have difficulty accessing support. It gives me the opportunity for health promotion, education, signposting and working with individuals to develop coping skills to reduce distress and rates of reoffending.

Working for the NHS but in the prison service was a challenge. The prison regime can be quite complex; trying to organise numerous women to be in different activities and to do everything safely. Security has to come first and this means healthcare staff have to think in a slightly different way, so it's important to remain flexible and diplomatic.

Life outside work

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I'm a firm believer in the benefits of maintaining a healthy work-life balance and I find playing sport and exercising with other people really beneficial. It enables me to

socialise, keep fit and manage my own mental health so I'm able to help those in my care.

Career plans and top tips for others

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I've qualified as a clinical psychologist now. The training was split between clinical placements and allocated time for teaching and research.

If you work in a prison or high-secure care, you have to leave any preconceptions at home, keep an open mind and be prepared to provide care rather than judgement. If you do that, you'll give compassionate and quality care to help meet the needs of the most vulnerable in our society.

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