

## Real-life story - Wendy Reynolds

Wendy had led a settled life until circumstances conspired against her and she found herself in trouble with the law. Whilst on probation she was given the opportunity to attend a health improvement course. This opened the door to paid work and a career working with women offenders who are on probation.

Wendy Reynolds Health Trainer

**Employer or university** Lincolnshire Action Trust, Lincolnshire Probation Service

**Salary range** ?10k-?20k

### How I got into the role

My initial employment was in retail and customer care but this wasn't as fulfilling as I would have hoped, and I felt I had more to offer than the job allowed for.

Whilst on probation, my probation officer offered me the chance to take part in a health improvement course and, although my confidence was low, I went along. I loved it and passed the exam, but was very surprised when I was called into the office and asked if I'd like the chance to become a paid Health Trainer (HT). It seems that the facilitators saw something in me that I didn't have the confidence to see for myself - my interest and compassion for people. They knew, from how I engaged in the course, that I'd make a good HT. It would mean more training, but their faith in me gave me strength. I had a chance to turn my life around and I knew I had to take it.

### What I do

I work with offenders who are on probation and offer them support to change and improve their own health. Clients are usually referred to me by their probation officer and, depending on the help they need, I might have little or significant contact with them. Some of these individuals are in temporary housing, might have drug or alcohol-related health problems or difficulties finding and accessing services, such as registering with dentists or doctors.

I work full time and this is split between group work, one-to-one work and planning and preparation. I work closely on case management with the probation officers and need to keep accurate records of what I do. The needs of the clients will determine whether I see them in a group setting, one-to-one or simply contact them for a telephone conversation.

In the groups, we cover various health topics and I offer some basic health checks. Work with individual clients will focus on something they'd like help with, for example losing weight, although sometimes people just need some moral support to access services or attend appointments. My job has changed recently in that I'm now working just with women.

?Believe in yourself and take the chances and opportunities that are offered to you!?

## **The best bits and challenges**

I love my job with a real passion.? So many of the people I work with have no self-belief and are nervous and scared, so if I help just one of them to take positive steps forward I feel such pride. I work with a great team and feel very well managed and supported and always have someone I can talk to if I need to discuss anything.

A key challenge in my role is that I need to win the trust and respect of the service users before they let me support them.? This is especially true of women.? For example, I spent some time supporting a lady who was bi-polar and really struggling with her mental health.? Eventually, she disclosed to me that she had been raped but had never told anyone before.? With my support, she felt able to go to the police and eventually see her rapist prosecuted.

## **Life outside work**

I work full time and have a family and grandchildren so I am usually pretty busy.? I love gardening and garden design and meals out with friends.

## **Career plans and top tips for others**

At the moment, I can?t ever see myself wanting to move on from my job.? I intend to keep building my skills so I can be the very best I can at supporting probation service users with their health and wellbeing needs.

My top tip would be to believe in yourself and take the chances and opportunities that are offered to you!

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