

"I have always had an interest in the job market, employment and supporting people into work."

Paul is able to combine his interest in supporting people into employment and mental health in this role, and he finds it extremely fulfilling.

Paul Wilkinson

Employment specialist

Employer or university

Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust

Salary range

£20k-£30k

Paul Wilkinson

How I got into the role

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After 15 years working at the Department for Work and Pensions, I was looking for a new challenge and the role of employment specialist at Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust came up. The main attraction for me was that it supports people with severe and enduring mental health needs and offers one-to-one guidance to find employment to help with their recovery. The idea of offering tailored support suited to each service user was also enticing and I could see it would be an extremely challenging but rewarding role.

What I do

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There is no typical day as the role is so varied. One day I could be meeting service users in the community, discussing their job aspirations and the support I could provide to help them achieve this. Or I could be meeting service users to create CVs, help with their job applications or discuss interview techniques.

I follow the very successful Individual Placement Support (IPS) model, creating realistic employment plans and addressing any barriers that service users have in finding employment.

There are also days where I am out visiting local employers, building relationships by promoting the service, advising them on the benefits of the employment service and discussing their recruitment processes.

The best bits and challenges

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I have always had an interest in the job market, employment and supporting people into work. This gives me a lot of job satisfaction. I also have a keen interest in mental health and spend a lot of time researching and reading about the subject. I have found that combining the two has been extremely fulfilling.

I am extremely proud of the work I do in my community mental health team and the employment service was awarded the Centre of Excellence after our first successful year. It was incredibly rewarding and reflects how well the IPS model works.

Supporting service users into employment after they feel they have no hope and seeing them flourish is something I feel very honoured to do. I really enjoy my role and am hoping to further establish myself and my reputation within the trust.

One of the main challenges has been addressing the stigma attached with mental health in the workplace, but, in my time doing this job and speaking to employers, I have seen massive improvements in this area.

Career plans and top tips for others

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To give me a better understanding of the role before I started, I completed IPS training, employer engagement training, benefits training and a mental health awareness course. I am also due to complete the Mental Health First Aid course.

This role, though demanding, is extremely rewarding and I would encourage anyone to look into it.

For anyone considering the role, I would recommend that they gain a basic understanding of mental ill health and I think the main skill you need to succeed in this role is excellent people skills and you need to be non-judgemental and tenacious.

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