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Real-life story - Charlotte Knighton

Through combining her recruitment skills and passion for mental health, Charlotte found the perfect career for her, working as an employment specialist.

Charlotte Knighton

Employment specialist

Salary range

£25k-£35k

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**How I got into
the role**

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collapse**

I was working as a head hunter in recruitment after university, which was fine, but I knew it wasn't what I wanted to do long term.

I took a break to go travelling for a couple of months and when I came back, I started to apply for jobs. In this time, I had also been volunteering with Shout! Crisis Helpline this is when I knew I wanted to work for a mental health charity.

When I came across the employment specialist job at the Working Well Trust, it was the first job I really wanted to get because I'd use some of the skills I had learnt in my previous role but in a different way.

The idea of helping people who are in need to find a job appealed to me and, even though I was concerned about being underqualified, I thought there was no harm in applying and I ended up getting the job!

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What I do

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My overall role is to support people with mental health conditions to find meaningful paid employment. In a first appointment with a client, we discuss their job goals and preferences and come up with an individual plan to achieve this.

Typically, I will support a client through the whole job search and application process, by helping them edit their CV, find jobs, and write cover letters. I also support them with interview preparation and conduct mock interviews for clients.

Each day varies a lot, but I normally have client meetings booked in, with space in between to write up my case notes and do administration. A part of my role also involves engaging with local employers on behalf of my clients.

Employment specialists are often embedded within an NHS clinical team - often a community mental health trust (CMHT) - and we work alongside the clinicians and multidisciplinary team. The clinicians can refer any patients/clients they have who want to start looking for work, and we take it from there. We update the NHS teams regularly and record our notes on the clinical systems.

I am currently based within a CMHT that is very pro employment, so we regularly discuss clients who would benefit from the service I can provide.

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The best bits and challenges

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The best bit, without a doubt, is the meetings with clients. They're so varied, you can never get bored and they make the day go so quickly! It's also rewarding when a client gives you positive feedback on a meeting or something you have done with them. The team is amazing here which makes a difficult day so much easier to deal with and everyone works in a really open way. If you're unsure about something you can ask anyone, and they will try to give you a new way of looking at things or a new idea that you hadn't thought of.

One of the challenges is when clients disengage with the service without an obvious reason. It is difficult because even when you know you did your best to support them, you always wonder if you could have done something more to prevent them from disengaging from the programme.

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**Life outside
work**

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It's really important to have hobbies and interests that are completely different to my work life because otherwise my entire life could become work related; that's something that just doesn't work for me and my mental wellbeing. I enjoy getting out of London at the weekends to enjoy a walk in the countryside.

For me it's just making sure that at the end of the working day I can leave and not dwell too much on what happened or what will happen tomorrow at work.

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**Career plans
and top tips for
others**

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collapse**

In terms of career progression, opportunities vary within different organisations, but you can always move from an employment specialist role into a management role. I am currently moving into a hybrid management role where I will keep my caseload but have line management of a couple of people which is a great stepping stone.

If you are looking to get into this type of role, especially if your background/education isn't related to psychology or mental health services, I would encourage you to do some volunteering within mental health. Anything you can do to show that you have a genuine interest and commitment to this type of work is important.

I think the three qualities needed for this role are people skills, patience, and resilience. People skills in particular are essential when you're meeting clients every day.

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