Real-life story - Sarah Trute

Sarah worked as a project manager for 11 years before training as a nurse. She wanted a job that offered the human touch and loves her fascinating new career in learning disability nursing.

Sarah Trute Community behaviour specialist
Employer or university Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
Salary range Unknown

How I got into the role?

On leaving school with GCSEs I got a job as a PA, then as a project manager, working in the health and social care sectors. I worked for global drug companies, social services, and the World Health Organisation. My career was strategic and interesting, but I never saw how my work directly affected people.

Nursing offered me that ‘human touch’ – so after 11 years, I switched careers. Going from senior project manager to newly qualified nurse involved a drop in pay, but it has definitely been worth it. Given my interest in autism and special needs, I chose to study for a learning disability nursing diploma at Kingston University, supported by a bursary and holiday temping jobs.

What I do?

Community behaviour specialists spend time assessing the whole person, and the behaviours...
that challenge. The clinical skills you learn help you to interpret what a client is communicating through their behaviour. Your interventions can be quite creative, like designing picture sequences to support skill learning, or making personalised reward charts. For example, I’ve helped one client who self-harms to learn a safer way to express her feelings, which has been very effective. She has not bruised herself for three months now and it’s made a big difference.

My role is very people-oriented: I train and support residential staff teams, clients and parents, and work jointly with lots of health and social care practitioners. I’ve also set up a trust-wide Challenging Behaviour Forum to share best practice.

Learning disability nursing is quite different to other branches of nursing. It’s about enabling each person to reach their full potential.

Going further - next steps

Community work was definitely for me, so I took further training to became a Community Behaviour Specialist. The role lets you manage your own caseload and really get to know your clients. Even after five years, my job is still fascinating as every case is unique.

Learning disability nursing is quite different to other branches of nursing. The people you work with are differently abled – and may have social, mental, physical or sensory impairments – so the focus is not on ‘making people better’. It’s about enabling each person to reach their full potential, increase their independence and enjoy an improved quality of life.

The best bits and challenges

Working with staff teams and managing risk can be challenging at times but it’s very rewarding to see a client benefit from their Positive Behaviour Support plan. And it’s not all about reducing challenging behaviours. The plans you develop also focus on developing positive behaviours, building upon whatever motivates each individual.

What I love most is helping a client achieve something that’s really important to them. Whether that’s teaching a new skill, preventing self-harm, or enabling a client to access their local community, this job is amazing.

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