

Reflections on a return to practice -



stepping back into a Social Worker's shoes

This year saw my return to Social Work practice following a 2-year break. (2 years where I worked in a young person's supported accommodation project and more recently ventured into college lecturing in Health and Social Care). However, the pull to Social Work practice grew stronger as the months rolled by and on the 16th of June, I returned to the Family Assessment and Support Team (FAST) sector of Social Work.

As the old saying goes, you never forget how to ride a bike, words I heard on my first day from a new practice supervisor, in a new team, in a new area. Well, I hoped this was true...

The presence of Covid19 is perhaps the most significant change upon my return to Social Work, its impact clearly visible on my first day in what was an empty office. While this initially felt strange to not be greeted by the sound of social workers chatting to each other or the rapid tapping of keyboards, I am pleased to say it has not proved to be a barrier to me feeling part of the team as new faces have become more familiar over the last few weeks. While I feel very fortunate to be part of this new team, we all realise that an understanding management team is as equally important to the wellbeing of all staff. Therein lies the necessity of SWU union membership.

A few weeks into practice and once again I am reminded of the privileged position, we as social workers occupy, a position from where we can support families who may feel disconnected, left behind or powerless in society. For me, this

position's worthiness will always begin in that critical first contact and the empathy to that situation in laying the foundations for a better working relationship in the weeks and months



ahead. After all, we all at some point need support.

I did wonder what societal issues I would find out there when I first put my lanyard on and grabbed a notebook. From speaking to children and families, it is evident that Covid19 lockdown has led to many families being 'forced' together to where the things that usually remain 'unsaid' have now been 'said' -most notably with teenage young people who have represented most of my work to date. My challenge has been to separate some of the typical behaviours you might see in a parent -young person relationship from what is unsafe or unhealthy. Covid19 appears to have magnified this issue and while this has been the biggest test for me, it has also been the most rewarding as well.



It is clear that austerity is very much present for many families, whether that be the absence of or delay in access to further services, the impending reduction to Universal Credit, or the way in which many feel they have no voice in a society that left them behind long ago. While we were sold the line "austerity is over", my return to social work has confirmed for me that austerity has gone nowhere.

While Covid19 and austerity together have shaped some of the issues we face in our role, my return to social work practice has reminded me how critical an understanding of this social policy landscape is when working with families. This again raises the question, are we an agent of the state or an agent of change? Perhaps this is a debate for another time?

On a final note, and I am by no means biased on this, once again I can now wear my SWU union contact badge with pride....

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