

Starting Social Work

Reflections of a Newly Qualified
Social Worker

Sample

Other books you may be interested in:

Anti-racism in Social Work Practice

Edited by Angie Bartoli ISBN 978-1-909330-13-9

Modern Mental Health: Critical Perspectives on Psychiatric Practice

Edited by Steven Walker ISBN 978-1-909330-53-5

Positive Social Work: The Essential Toolkit for NQSWs

By Julie Adams and Angie Sheard ISBN 978-1-909330-05-4

Evidencing CPD – A Guide to Building Your Social Work Portfolio

By Daisy Bogg and Maggie Challis ISBN 978-1-909330-25-2

Personal Safety for Social Workers and Health Professionals

By Brian Atkins ISBN 978-1-909330-33-7

What's Your Problem? Making Sense of Social Problems and the Policy Process

By Stuart Connor ISBN 978-1-909330-49-8

Titles are also available in a range of electronic formats. To order please go to our website www.criticalpublishing.com or contact our distributor NBN International, 10 Thornbury Road, Plymouth PL6 7PP, telephone 01752 202301 or email orders@nbninternational.com

Starting Social Work

Reflections of a Newly Qualified
Social Worker



Rebecca Joy Novell

Sample

First published in 2014 by Critical Publishing Ltd.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

The author has made every effort to ensure the accuracy of information contained in this publication, but assumes no responsibility for any errors, inaccuracies, inconsistencies and omissions. Likewise every effort has been made to contact copyright holders. If any copyright material has been reproduced unwittingly and without permission the Publisher will gladly receive information enabling them to rectify any error or omission in subsequent editions.

Copyright © Rebecca Joy Novell

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-909682-09-2

This book is also available in the following e-book formats:

Kindle ISBN: 978-1-909682-10-8

EPUB ISBN: 978-1-909682-11-5

Adobe e-book ISBN: 978-1-909682-12-2

The rights of Rebecca Joy Novell to be identified as the Author of this work have been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Design and Patents Act 1988.

Please note, the names and details of people mentioned in this book have been changed to protect their privacy.

Cover design by Greensplash Limited

Project Management by Out of House Publishing

Typeset by Newgen Imaging Systems

Printed and bound in Great Britain by TJ International

Critical Publishing
152 Chester Road
Northwich
CW8 4AL
www.criticalpublishing.com



Dedication

Reid Finlay

The first few months of my Masters course in social work were somewhat overshadowed by how much I was struggling financially. I was several thousand pounds in debt, couldn't afford to pay rent and could only afford one meal a day. I was working every evening and weekend to try and earn enough to continue my course but I soon realised that I would not be able to sustain my lifestyle for two years. Anyone who has struggled with money will know the pervasive impact it has on your life. It is a source of constant worry, stress and sadness. I was very low for many weeks. Knowing how much I wanted to do social work, and knowing that I couldn't afford to, was heartbreaking.

One evening in late October, I remember clearly, I was sitting at a bus stop in the outer suburbs of Sheffield after another evening shift as a social carer. It was dark and cold and pouring down with rain. My bus was typically late. After 40 minutes of waiting I burst into tears. I remember literally sobbing in the street. Luckily there was no one around to see me as the pathetic mess I was. As I started to pull myself together, my Mum rang me. To this day I still believe that phone call was a miracle.

Mum knew I had been struggling with money and had rung to tell me that her Uncle Reid, who had met me twice as a young child, was willing to pay off all my debts, pay my rent for two years and provide me with a weekly income. Reid was willing to do all that because he knew from my Mum just how much I wanted to be a social worker. Unsurprisingly, I reverted to uncontrollable sobbing.

Because of Reid, I was able to continue the course; and without the constant worry of lack of money. Reid gave me the two greatest academic years of my life. I spent every day learning how to help people to the best of my ability. He enabled me to spend my time concentrating on the thing I love most in the world.

I completed the course in July 2012 and graduated in January 2013. I was waiting until my Graduation Day to tell Reid exactly how much he had done for me; to tell him that completing this Masters and qualifying as a social worker is my proudest achievement to date; to tell him thank you.

I found out in October 2012, almost two years exactly since the miracle, that Reid passed away in the night. It was sudden but it was peaceful.

I am filled with incredible guilt and sadness that I did not tell Reid what he meant to me sooner. Reid barely knew me but was willing to give his money to see me fulfil my dream. My admiration for him is indescribable.

My Mum has told me that before he died, Reid put aside enough money for me to start a PhD. Something I desperately want to do but never in my wildest dreams thought I could afford.

I want you to know Reid, that because of you I spend every day trying to help some of the most vulnerable children in our society. With social work I have found my purpose in life. The work I do and the people I work with complete me.

I am devastated that the world no longer has you in it. My memories of you are as a kind and gentle man and I promise to work tirelessly to ensure that your generosity continues through me.

All I can really say (and what I should have said a long time ago) is *Thank you*.

Rest in peace, Reid.

CONTENTS

Meet the author

Acknowledgements

viii	Meet the author
ix	Acknowledgements
1	1. Introduction
5	2. Discovering you can get paid to help people
11	3. Starting the course and meeting Spider-Man
19	4. Single-handedly saving the world
31	5. The riots
37	6. The key to being a good social worker is good rum and a great friend
47	7. Red tape
61	8. The fear
73	9. So are you a social worker or not?
81	10. The Assessed and Supported Year in Employment
89	11. Conclusion
93	Index

Meet the author

Rebecca Joy Novell

Rebecca Joy Novell is a Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) working for a charity in Sheffield which works with homeless young people. She graduated from The University of Sheffield in 2012 with a Masters in social work. Rebecca has been involved with youth justice for five years in a variety of voluntary and paid roles, and is currently undertaking a PhD in Criminal Justice. She was recently elected to the Professional Assembly for The College of Social Work and regularly blogs for *The Guardian's Social Care Network*.

Sample

Acknowledgements

The process of writing this book has made me realise just how lucky I am; I owe a lot of thanks to a lot of people. I would like to thank my parents, Emma Mulliner and everyone who took the time to proofread my ramblings. Thanks to Di for taking a chance on me. But I would also like to thank all those people who have carried me through the lowest moments in my life and have led me to this happy moment; Mum, Dad, Nanna, Reid, Miss Allen, the nine LGGS girls, G2, G1, Louise and Mr Leitch.

Thanks to my Godfather Brian who taught me to see the good in everyone. To Andy for being the best 'cornerman' I could ever ask for. To the women who continue to challenge and inspire me as a social worker: Nora and Nell. And to my partner, Rob, who has spent numerous evenings dealing with all my worries. While I've not known you for very long, you've helped me through a life-time of problems. Wherever we find ourselves in ten years, know that you saved me.

To Lizzy for sitting by me in the hospital when we thought I would never see my Mum again. There are no words for what that meant to me. And finally, to God, whilst I'm still not sure what or where you are, you helped my Mum beat cancer this year and without you there would certainly be no book. Thank you.

Sample

1

Introduction

Do you want a hot pot? asked Betty.

Ooh, that'd be lovely, Betty. Thank you, replied Deirdre. I wonder if Peter will want some.

Ooh, I wonder? responded Betty.

How Coronation Street is prime-time television, I will never know. It was another evening spent staring at the screen with my Nanna, watching the drudgery that is life in the Rovers Return, when my Nanna asked me: *What do you want to do when you're older?*

In a desperate attempt to cling on to the little life that I could feel ebbing away to the dulcet tones of Deirdre Barlow, I responded with enthusiasm:

Well, Nanna. I just want to help people. Fight for good, you know? Make this world a fairer and happier place. There is so much injustice in this world and I want to make a difference. I believe that all men and women are born equal and should be treated as such. I believe in equality of opportunity. I believe that under no circumstances should money take precedence over human rights. We should value others not because we can gain from them, but because they too are human. Our value comes not in doing, achieving or creating, but simply in being. As Ruskin states, 'There is no wealth but life', and I want to help people lead the best life they possibly can.

Without a hint of sarcasm my Nanna replied, *And how much does that pay?*

I suppose that'll teach me to be less pretentious.

THE CURRENT STATE OF SOCIAL WORK

There is a dark cloud hanging over social work at the moment. I worry for those who have just started their journey into the field, or those who are considering it as a career, because much of the conversation around this profession is very off-putting. If you relied solely on mainstream media for information you would believe that social workers spend most of their time failing to protect children at risk while simultaneously putting happy and healthy children into care. Mind you, if you relied on mainstream media for all your information, I suspect negligent social workers may be the least of your problems, what with the imminent threat of world annihilation from swine flu, SARS and terrorism. The social work I see on the front pages is not the social work I know.

Social work is about so much more than Child Protection. Social workers specialise in mental health, disabilities, older people's care, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, fostering, adoption, homelessness, gangs and youth offending, to name but a few areas. We are a wide and varied bunch. And contrary to popular belief, social work *is* a good thing. Some people may find that statement uncomfortable, or even debatable but, at its core, social work is about making things better for people. And I believe that is a good thing. Of course, the process of helping people can become convoluted, warped and occasionally broken, but it is our job to ensure that doesn't happen.

We live in a time where being optimistic about change is made almost impossible. The economic situation is having a dramatic effect not only on the public sector but on the majority of British people. Increasing levels of poverty are creating more and more social problems. Again, if you relied on mainstream media, you'd be sure that it was people on benefits who caused the recession. We are living in desperate times. And while the Government points the finger of blame at everyone who has ever used the Welfare State, social workers are left to fix the ever-increasing number of problems. But of course social problems have been re-branded as individual problems, and social work is being forced to focus more on working with individuals than on looking at communities and the wider picture, thus making the task of creating social change an even harder one. We are literally expected to solve problems such as homelessness and youth crime one person at a time.

Have I sold social work to you yet?

Social work is complex and the more I know, the more I realise the depths of those complexities. I knew when I chose to be a social worker that there were things that would need improving. I liked the idea of being part of those changes. And while there has been, of late, a dark cloud hanging over us, I can see the sun beginning to break through. I believe it is a very exciting time to be a social worker as the discourse is always around change and improvement. There is a clear sense of always needing to better ourselves and put our arrogance aside in the name of good practice. There is definitely an air of hope around.

THE AIM OF THIS BOOK

This book has a very simple aim. I want to show you my journey into the profession and what social work has been like for me. I'm not trying to sell the profession to anyone. In fact, I think it takes a unique sort of person to want to do (and be good at) social work. Nor am I trying to put anyone off the profession. This book is simply my honest reflections of my experience (although the names and ages of people I work with have been changed for confidentiality reasons). So, if you are thinking about becoming a social worker; if you have just started the course; if you are newly qualified; or even if you have been in the profession for 20 years and are losing your passion for it, I hope that this book will help you have a clearer picture (or a reminder) of what social work is really like for those just starting out, and why some people still choose to do it.

What this book won't be is a guide to the best theory or practice examples. There are hundreds of people out there who can do that a lot better than me. Nor will it show you how I have integrated the Professional Capabilities Framework into my practice. If you are a student social worker you can figure it out for yourself, and if you're not a social worker at all, you won't thank me for introducing you to our assessment system. I wanted to strip away the jargon and focus on the emotional and human impact of the profession. I have included excerpts from my online blog, which was written at the time I was studying, to give you a sense of how I was really feeling at the time. On reviewing my blog, I realised that I relate most of my life experiences to some aspect of *The Lord of The Rings*. I'm not sure what that says about me but I have tried to keep my Frodo and Gollum references to a minimum in this book. Also, a few lovely and inspiring social workers I have met along the way have added their contributions about how the journey has been for them.

THE STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

This most sensible way to structure this book was chronologically. It begins with me choosing which course to take, progresses through two years of university, and ends with me qualifying. As a result, the reader will get a clear sense of what a roller-coaster of a journey I have been on and the rainbow of emotions I have experienced. I apologise in advance to you, the reader, if I give you a false sense of security that everything is positive, and then on the next page drag you into a pit of despair. I originally thought about warning you in advance if a depressing bit was coming up; but then I thought, sod it, life doesn't work like that. You don't get warned about the crisis phone calls you receive telling you one of your service users has been arrested, so if I have to go on the roller-coaster, you do too.

I'm sure you will have heard social work being described as a 'thankless task'; a description which could not be further from the truth. Yes, it is exhausting and repetitive and frustrating, and sometimes you feel like you are making no progress. But, once you sit back and reflect on what would happen if you were not there to offer the support you did, you begin to realise just how fantastic this job is. Even allowing someone to off-load their anger or hurt for an hour is a great reward, knowing that they felt able to tell you about their problems. Simply having people know that you're there if they need you to be is a great feeling and an honour. And, very occasionally, you may end up saving someone's life.

INDEX

- abuse, *see also* sexual exploitation
 witchcraft and spirit based, 71
- anti-social behaviour
 riots summer 2011, 33–34
- Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE), 73, 81
- asylum seekers
 experiences of, 21–23
- Bamu, Kristy, 71
- BASW, 71
- blogging, 37–38
 extracts, 42–44, 48–49, 56, 65, 74, 77–78
- bureaucracy
 public criticism of Youth Justice Service, 55–59
- care home for elderly with dementia
 shadowing a social worker, 13–14
- career choice
 leaving school and applying to university, 5–6
- career in social work, *see also* Masters in Social Work
 advice for new students, 79–80
 current state of the profession, 1–2
 decision, 90–91
 doubts, 61, 62–65
 internet search, 37–39
 networking, 79
 personal account by Keith Malcolm, 70–71
 reading matter, 79
 starting out, 2
 university degree, 8
- case studies
 distinction between translation and interpreting, 51–52
- sexually exploited service user, 25–29, 41, 84–87
- young offender in need of housing, 83–84
- Youth Justice Service case, 50–52
- chavs
 demonisation of the working classes, 35
- child development
 practical assignment shadowing a pre-school child, 15–18
- child prostitution
 terminology, 41
- Climbié, Victoria, 71
- council housing, 32–33
- crime
 sociological reasons for, 7
- Criminal Justice System, 47
- culture
 sensitivity to, 71–72
- dementia
 shadowing a social worker on visits to sufferers, 13–15
 terminology, 15
- demonisation
 working classes, 35
- dissertation, 41
- emotions
 social worker relationship with service user, 25–29, 31–32
- endings theory
 case study, 25–29
- evidence-based practice
 public criticism of Youth Justice Service, 55–59
- Facebook, 38–39
- faith, *see* religion
- Ferguson, Harry, 90
- friendships, 39–40
- Guardian Social Care Network*, 38
- Holman, Bob, 71
- homeless persons
 giving money to, 77–78
- housing
 young offenders and teenagers, 19–29, 32–33, 83–87

- idealism of social worker, 66–67
inequality
 dem著isation of the working classes, 35
 housing, 32–33
 riots summer 2011, 33–34
internet
 social media, 37–39
interpreting
 distinct from translation, 51–52
Islam, 71–72
- job-hunting, 61
Jones, Owen, 35–36
- language
 distinction between translation and interpreting, 51–52
- legislation
 social work, 18, 47
- Malcolm, Keith
 personal account of a social worker, 70–71
- Masters in Social Work
 applying to universities, 9–10
 course agenda, 11
 dissertation, 41
 law exams, 18
 placement at Housing Trust working with young offenders and teenagers, 19–29
 practical assignments, 12–18
 shadowing a social worker, 12–15
- media coverage
 riots summer 2011, 33, 36
 social work profession, 1, 28–29
- Mental Health Services
 shadowing a social worker, 12–13, 15
- Miller, Sue, 89
- Muslims, 71–72
- networking, 79
- office politics, 23
- paperwork
 public criticism of Youth Justice Service, 56–59
- peer-supervision, 39–40, 79–80
- personalisation, 15
- Pickett, Kate, 33–34
- placements, 79
 Housing Trust working with young offenders and teenagers, 19–29
- police statements, 24
- poverty
 housing, 32–33
 social problems caused by recession, 2
- power
 struggle for social worker, 47–49
- Practice Learning Consortium (PLC), 76
- professionalisation of social work, 63
- psychiatric ward
 shadowing a social worker, 12–13
- recession
 social problems caused by, 2
- refugees
 experiences of, 21–23
- relationship-based practice
 case study, 25–29, 41
- relationships
 social worker and service user, 25–29, 31–32
- religion
 and spirituality, 70–71, 72
 Islam, 71–72
- rescuer instinct, 29–31, 41, 64, 66, 87
- resource scarcity
 public criticism of Youth Justice Service, 55–59
- riots
 summer 2011, 33–34
- risk-based management
 public criticism of Youth Justice Service, 55–59
- sentencing, 47
- service users
 emotional relationship with, 25–29, 31–32
 terminology, 24
- sexual exploitation
 case study of a service user, 25–29, 41, 84–87
- social housing, 32–33
- social media
 blogging, 37–38
 Facebook, 38–39
 Twitter, 80
- social problems
 effect of recession, 2
- Social Work Christian Fellowship, 71
- social work practice
 asking for help, 54–55

-
- experience and confidence, 84
inspiration, 19
lessons learnt, 53–55
office politics, 23
power struggle, 47–49
relationship-based and endings theory, 25–29
stress, 66–71, 90–91
work–life balance, 31–32, 80, 81–83
- social work profession**
current state, 1–2
future of, 89–90
media coverage, 1, 28–29
professionalisation, 63
- social workers**
common traits, 76–78
description, 90
spirituality, 67–72
religious faith, 70–71, 72
witchcraft, 71
- statutory sector**
legal aspect, 47
placement with the Youth Justice Service, 47–54
- stress management**, 66–71, 90–91
coping mechanisms, 67
depressive illness, 67
spirituality, 67–72
- suicide attempt by service user**, 24–25
- teenagers**
housing, 19–29, 32–33, 83–87
working with, 7
- translation**
distinct from interpreting, 51–52
- trauma-based social work**
case study, 84–87
- Twitter**, 80
- voluntary sector**
placement at Housing Trust working with
young offenders and teenagers, 19–29
working as social worker for, 73,
75, 76
- volunteer work**
Youth Justice Service, 6–7
- Wilkinson, Richard**, 33–34
- Witchcraft and Human Rights Information
Network (WHRIN)**, 71
- working classes**
demonisation, 35
- work–life balance**, 31–32, 80, 81–83
- young offenders**
housing, 19–29, 32–33, 83–87
label, 41
volunteer work with, 6–7
- Youth Justice Service**
case study of young offender, 50–52
Intensive Programme, 57
placement, 47–55
public criticism of, 55–59
volunteer work, 6–7