

Taking an individualised approach to DBS checks

Inspirative Arts

Skills for Care funded a project run by Inspirative Arts Derby CIC and Derbyshire YMCA to support homeless people through a pre-employment work programme.

They piloted an experiential therapeutic training programme which enabled people who have experienced homelessness to gain qualifications and experience with a view to future employment in social care.

During the project they came across challenges with DBS checks for a number of their participants due to past convictions. These potentially posed a significant barrier to their employment.

However throughout the project they explored people's values and did a risk assessment on a case by case basis to try and remove this barrier. From their experience they know that homelessness is often a symptom of other challenges that people face in life.

Wendy was one of the participants they supported onto the programme.

Wendy's story

"I had a difficult up-bringing, suffering abuse which resulted in me being taken in to care in my teens. When I left care, I fell into a relationship with an abusive partner, who bullied, controlled and physically assaulted me.

I didn't have anyone to turn to and I felt too frightened and broken to seek help elsewhere. Eventually I snapped. He hit me, and I hit him back. I know it wasn't the right thing to do, and I really regret it, but by that point my mental health was suffering, and I just needed to protect myself.

Unfortunately, this gave him another way to control me, because when I finally escaped he went to the police and reported me for assault -I was arrested and convicted. I wish I had been able to explain what happened and report him for what he'd done to me but I was young, alone and terrified, and I couldn't find the strength to speak out.

This was all years ago. Since then I've been rebuilding my life. I got help from YMCA to find a safe place to live and I haven't ever been in any other trouble. I've had counselling to recover my mental health and completed training because I really want to work in health and social care.

My experience means I have lots of empathy and compassion for people who need care and support.

I feel I'd be a really good care worker because I know how it feels to be vulnerable and rely on services, and I understand how care can be improved. I volunteered to get some experience— but the minute they saw my DBS check with that conviction, they told me I couldn't work there.

It is awful that my past experiences could now stop me fulfilling my aspirations of helping people in the future. I'm paying the price for that terrible relationship in my past, and I'm worried I won't ever be able to change that."

How did Inspirative Arts support Wendy through the DBS process?

Inspirative Arts saw that Wendy had the right values to work in social care, and took adequate steps to do a risk assessment before offering her a place on the programme.

They told us: "It would have perhaps been easier to operate a blanket ban and turn these people away as others had done; however, we had been able to really get to know Wendy and others on the programme and could see the wealth of compassion and care they had to offer.

Based on our experiences we would advocate a person-centred, individualised approach to risk management should a potential staff member's DBS present challenging information.

"The risk assessment was led by our safeguarding officer, in consultation with other staff including YMCA colleagues. We considered these points before making a decision.

■ **The historic nature of offending behaviour** – ensuring that none of the issues disclosed had happened recently.

■ **The openness of the participants** – everyone had been honest with us about what was likely to appear on their DBS reports and no one tried to hide problem behaviours.

■ **The context of the offending** - when we discussed this with participants, we found that Wendy's story was sadly not uncommon. Several participants had been victims of domestic abuse and this had contributed to the issues disclosed on their DBS reports. Having this background information helped us to understand what had led to these incidents so we could properly assess the likelihood of it happening again.

■ **Our own knowledge of the students** - during the initial phase of the programme we had not observed any behaviours which would suggest the individuals were not fit to work with vulnerable people. We also trusted the judgement of colleagues from YMCA who had known the students longer than us, and who were happy that they did not pose any risk to people who need care and support.

We decided that Wendy would be welcome to do work experience with us. We put these measures in place to protect everyone's safety.

■ **Supervised working, buddying or mentoring** - none of our placement students in support worker roles are left unattended with clients. New staff and students are always 'buddied' with an experienced mentor.

■ **Effective work-based support** - all participants have weekly support through reflective practice and clinical supervision to help them identify and develop best working practice. This also enables them to identify any issues which might come up.

■ **Ongoing training** - Wendy could continue learning after the work experience, so she can continue learning about and reflecting on good practice, develop her self-awareness and increase her understanding about how her behaviours impact on others.

■ **Safeguarding policies and practice** - all Inspirative and YMCA staff involved in the programme are supported to communicate and manage their cases effectively so they can quickly identify any safeguarding risks.

■ **Proactively supporting staff wellbeing** – all participants had already gone to a therapeutic group to help them process and deal with difficulties in their earlier lives. If we had any concerns about participants, we could signpost them to therapeutic support again in the future.”

This personalised approach to recruitment and DBS checks meant that Wendy was supported to overcome her barriers to employment, and she really excelled on the programme.



We are so glad we gave Wendy a chance. She has thrived on placement with us, demonstrating a kind and caring nature which has really benefitted our clients. We believe she and her colleagues emerging from our training programme are a real asset to the social care sector.



NB: Wendy’s name and some details have been changed to protect her identity.

For more information please visit:

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/seeingpotential

Skills for Care recommends

[Finding and keeping workers](#)

This online toolkit has practical tips and resources to help you find and keep workers with the right values.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/finderskeepers

[Values-based recruitment](#)

Taking this approach can help you get the right people to work in your organisation, and save time and resources in recruiting the wrong people.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/values

[I Care...Ambassadors](#)

Nominate your staff to be ambassadors and deliver careers activities to inspire more people to work in adult social care.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/ica



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