

Adolescent - Aftercare Service

Speaker key

GM Gerri Maguire

[caption] Describe your specialist area and your day-to-day role.

GM My name's Gerri Maguire. I'm a personal advisor with the Adolescent and Aftercare Service in Southwark. I've worked here for getting on for three years now, and I work with 18- to 21-year olds within the service, a little bit older, depending on their circumstances and their educational needs or their disabilities and their support needs there. But my daily role varies from day to day; it's very hard to pin what I'll be doing on a daily basis; but it covers everything from benefit advice, educational advice, housing, housing support, maintaining tenancies, getting people to go to their doctors, to go to the sexual health advisors, or signposting them to professionals that specialise in the field.

[caption] What training and development have you received since arriving at Southwark and how has this impacted upon your job?

GM Training is actively encouraged by the management team, but we're left to organise the training according to our commitments in our diary at the time. But I've done loads of training. It starts off with a three-day induction to introduce you to Southwark and the whole of children's services, to tell you what each, individual department do, and how they can link in with your particular role in the organisation. And then every month we're sent a training schedule and we can hook up for whatever training we want to on that, and that's covered child protection, child development, drugs, alcohol, sexual health, benefits, housing, even some semi-legal courses so that you're not totally in the dark when you're faced with something like an eviction notice. And it's really useful because it's not only about the training; it's about the people you meet on the training and the networking you can do, and the other organisations that also join in with the Southwark training. So it's good networking.

[caption] What level of understanding do you feel Southwark has of the demands social workers are placed under?

GM I can honestly say they do. The management work on an open-door basis, that it's very rarely you'll find that you can't get to see a particular manager. Our first port of call are our team managers. If they're not available there's always another practice manager or team manager available, and if not, even senior management; and I have had to go to senior management on a couple of occasions with a case where I'm not sure how to progress. Management encourage you to use your flexible working-hours, so if you do feel you're in need of time off, there's never really a problem getting a flexi-day off.

[caption] What is your view on the level of support provided at Southwark?
Give an example of when Southwark was there when you needed it the most.

GM There was one particular case, and one that stands out because it wasn't that long after I started here, it was a client of mine, I'd only met her a couple of times, who came in and was refusing to go back to her placement. I didn't have a clue what to do, to be fair, so my team manager talked me through the whole process, and it was getting towards five o'clock, I had to go out then on an unaccompanied visit to her accommodation, but both the team manager and the service manager stayed with me until I left the building, and stayed with in contact with me throughout the evening until I was safely back at my home address. I think that was quite important for me: knowing that I had that support from very early on when I joined the organisation. But that would always stick out.

[caption] Can you describe the resources available to you and your team, and how important this is to you in successfully carrying out your role?

GM Within the Adolescent and Aftercare Service we've got a number of resources that we can tap into. We have Connections [?], and a specialised employment advisor for young people. We've also got nurses who will cover everything from basic health queries to sexual health, pregnancy advice, that kind of thing. We've got a Drugs and Alcohol worker who's quite happy to come down and formally meet people, and then make appointments on a more formal basis to help people out. We've got a group worker who works with our young people on a weekly basis, and she has a really good reputation for chatting to the young people and possibly drawing more information out about some of their concerns than they would necessarily speak to their allocated worker about.

[caption] What do you think the perception is of Southwark (as a place and employer) in the market place?

GM I think the area of Southwark often gets a bad Press and a bad reputation. When you talk to other professionals about your working conditions and your management team, and the way the organisation is structured, Southwark actually comes out as one of the best. I don't know how it compares pay-wise, but you do get an awful lot of support, an awful lot of backup, and it's not just from management; the whole team work well together as a team. We get regular supervision, and I'm not sure that other boroughs get as much support as we do. I definitely recommend it.