

# **Southwark Council - Service Teams -Fostering Service**

## **Speaker key**

CA Caption

PW Pauline Wedderburn

CA Describe your specialist area and your day to day role.

PW My name is Pauline Wedderburn and I'm a practice manager in the fostering section. The Fostering Service; we provide placements for Southwark looked after children, be it temporary teenage placements and respite placements. The main part of the role of the fostering social workers is to recruit, assess, train, monitor and supervise the foster carers, just to ensure they're providing a quality service in line with the national standards, and they also take part in our duty system, also they may also have responsibilities for doing specific pieces of work, such as running our support groups for the foster carers - they happen once a month and there are three groups. They may have to organise our annual foster carers' outings or the Christmas lunch and pantomimes, as well as run the pre-approval training for prospective applicants.

CA What training and development have you received since arriving at Southwark, and how has this impacted upon your job?

PW I joined Southwark three and a half years ago as a practice manager, and within that time I've attended numerous training courses, too many really to mention. But the most significant one, which I'll highlight, is I applied, was accepted and successfully completed the Certificate of Management in Health and Social Care, and that was beneficial because I think it enhanced my knowledge and skill base in terms of helping me to be a more effective supervisor and manager, and it challenged me on a very personal level because I learnt about financial management in the public sector, which I wasn't very knowledgeable about before. Also I had to do a finance presentation, so I had to learn how to use PowerPoint and do PowerPoint presentations.

CA What are the career progression opportunities like at Southwark, and has this had a positive impact on your career?

PW Part of the reason why I came to Southwark was because a friend of mine, who had recently been appointed as a practice manager, rang me; I worked for another local authority and she said, Pauline if you can come to Southwark, come. What I have found is that there is a career progression scheme, and at six monthly appraisals social workers and their managers jointly agree a learning and development plan, and compile an action plan in terms of what you think they need in order to progress. The training is actually excellent in Southwark. The other thing to mention about career progression is that there is a scheme in place where you can have an internal transfer, as opposed to if there's a job vacancy going through the external mechanism of applying, this is speedier and quicker process of internal transfers.

There's also a formal scheme where basic grade social workers, if they want to progress to become a senior practitioner, that's also in place, too.

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

EW I see it in two ways; I speak as a manager, and I think that particularly the service that I work in we are very understanding of the pressures that our social workers are under, I think we are very supportive. There is a culture, certainly in the fostering team, where if workers need to do a report and there's a deadline that they can work from home. To give you a personal example of maybe where I've felt quite supported; I hadn't been here very long and, due to my own pressure of work, one of the things that I discussed with my manager in supervision was that I was finding it difficult with all my other commitments to supervise the social workers on their Form F assessments - those are the assessments that are done on prospective foster carers - and I think she heard what I said and she got agreement that we could actually employ a consultant to do that piece of work, which meant it was taken away from me - and that made my workload more manageable.

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

PW I'll put it in context, again just in terms of the fostering service; on our register we have about 205 approved foster carers and that is providing placements for approximately about 290 of Southwark's - I think it's 553 placements, so I was told, for children that are looked after. Within the fostering team there is a team manager, two practice managers - of which I'm one - and we have 11 social workers in post. There is one social work vacancy at the moment, but on the whole - and certainly since I've been in post - we've actually had quite a stable workforce within the fostering team. Obviously, we have a certain budget and working within the constraints of the budget we are able to do quite a lot of things, and some of the things that have to be accounted for - or that we're able to use - are things like; we have a monthly adoption panel, the running of the pre-approval training courses, the support groups; the foster carers all get a fostering allowance for each child that they look after. Also in some cases we do provide the carers with enhancements if it's necessary - if we need to provide a support package to the foster carer we can do that - and that might include things like respite, additional help in escorting children to school; it might be additional leisure grants to help with leisure activities. We're always in need of recruiting more foster carers, and certainly there's an ongoing campaign in terms of recruiting more carers, as well as staff.

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

PW We were comparing it to the borough that we left, and one of the things I would say is that it's hard to give you something tangible, but you do get a sense of feeling valued as a worker. And in terms of my own perception, I was a social worker for many years and I'd got bored with my job, there wasn't scope for me where I was to progress to a more senior level, and the opportunities were here. Equally, although you're a practice manager - when I applied the name of the job was practice supervisor, but there was some acknowledgment, I think over the years, that practice supervisors actually take on a management role, and that was one of the positives if you wanted to progress. Actually within the scope of a practice manager, yes, the bulk of what I do is supervise the staff, but I'm encouraged to take on - and

you do have to take on - management responsibilities. Certainly senior management, I think, allow you scope if you want to be creative; if you've got an idea and you want to try and see that through there are opportunities to be allowed to do that and try; if you fail you fail - but there's scope to allow you to develop yourself.