

## Case Study

Name

Michelle Young

Job Title

Peripatetic Probation Officer

Employer

West Yorkshire Probation Board

Please can you briefly describe what is involved in your work?

I am part of a small team of probation officers in the West Yorkshire district who fire fight problems as they occur within teams. Essentially we are drafted in where there is a deficit of staff or deluge of work and sort it! We generally take on larger pieces of work that can easily be taken from other offender managers to ease their workload pressures which are phenomenal. Our overarching aim within probation is to reduce offending and reduce the risk to the public that offenders pose.

Did you need any specific work experience or qualifications to get this job?

I had to undertake a degree in criminal justice to be able to do the job I do. This degree consisted of a level 4 NVQ as well as a degree at the University. Prior experience helped me to gain a place on this degree course and this included volunteer work and working in the prison sector.

What qualifications do you have?

I have various qualifications including those of a nursery nurse which is what I did many years ago! Regarding my current role on top of the degree qualification and I have attended a variety of mandatory training as well as voluntary training to update my skills on an ongoing basis. These courses include everything from systems, procedures, information technology, managing risk, report writing skills and so on and so forth.

What has been your career path so far?

I started life as a nursery nurse then moved into IT recruitment consultancy before leaving to have children. I then went into training which is where I began to do voluntary work within the prison sector and then got a job for a charity within the prison before being encouraged to join probation. I joined probation in January 2001 as a probation services officer and then embarked on my probation officer qualification in October 2002. I have worked in the prison sector, hostels and field teams which I have thoroughly enjoyed.

What do you enjoy most about your work?

I enjoy the variety and the challenges that my work poses. I really love the camaraderie from colleagues at the coal front as we have a very difficult task which is becoming increasingly more so due to cutbacks in staff and budgets.



What do you enjoy least about your work?

The pressure and stress that we are constantly under to achieve targets is not great. The threat of being made redundant makes the job harder and can be quite de-motivating.

What skills and personal qualities are important in your work?

The ability to listen carefully and not judge people is a very important skill needed in this job. You need a very strong organisational ability to plan your own workload around the very chaotic lives of offenders and the strict regime of the court system. You need to be empathetic yet assertive. You need to be good at lots of things to succeed in this difficult role.

What career development or training can you benefit from in your work?

At the moment there is no career development as we had a round of redundancies last year and there may be more dependent on the budget that the government give us. Training is therefore really limited at the moment again due to budgetary constraints however if there are any new changes or developments within the company we have to attend training for these.

What progress opportunities are there with your job?

None at the moment as described above.

What advice would you give someone thinking about getting into this type of work?

There is not currently a training programme set up for trainee probation officers however it is being looked at and developed. If you are interested in moving into probation then I would suggest that you undertake some kind of voluntary work with offenders whether that is youth offenders or adults as this will help you ascertain if this is something you really want to do as a full-time career. If it is then keep your eyes open in the press for the advert when we next recruiting trainees and apply!

Is there anything else you would like to say about your work?

Probation is a very different world to that which it was 10 years ago! The challenges are the same regarding working with offenders to change their attitudes, beliefs and behaviours and thus reduce offending and protect the public. There are different expectations placed upon probation officers with regards to the information technology systems and targets we are expected to achieve with very limited resources which is difficult.

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