

Seeing potential

Greater Manchester's Transforming Lives and Communities scheme



This series of case studies profiles how locally-based programmes can support people from non-traditional backgrounds into the care profession, from the perspectives of the programme operators, local care employers, and the candidates themselves.

These two case studies profile Upturn Enterprise and Outreach Community & Residential's Transforming Lives and Communities programme, which helped Dawn not only find a job but a fulfilling vocation in caring for others.

The dawn of a new vocation in social care

Before she met Maria Williams at Upturn Enterprise, a local organisation helping people and businesses in Greater Manchester unlock and fulfil their potential, Dawn had not been in employment for over 10 years due to a range of external factors. She describes feeling desperate for work during her search and the value that Maria's support added to an otherwise difficult experience: "I needed that support from Maria – just simple things like interview techniques or ringing me up every couple of days to make sure I was still on-board and that I was okay."

Dawn first came into contact with the Transforming Lives and Communities (TLC) scheme, which helps people in the local community find a vocation in social care, after seeing an advert. "It was on life skills," Dawn highlights. This surprised her at the time because the advert called for people with the right values to take up a career in social care as opposed to those with years of experience or qualifications. Despite the fact that she had already enrolled in a care course, the lack of formal criteria and emphasis on values was appealing.

Dawn recalls her first conversation with Maria: "I felt like I could be honest about my problems." She describes feeling supported right from the beginning to not only find a career in social care but also overcome confidence issues she had been experiencing.



"Just go for it. You won't be disappointed. If you feel you have the right values or if you care at home, you can care in the community."

Firstly, Dawn attended an information day where she could ask any questions. She went on to sit through diagnostic tests with Maria, the results of which showed she would be well suited to being a support worker. Both of them met to work on the application form together and make sure it reflected Dawn's personal experience and values. Dawn recalls waking up at three o'clock in the morning to change her cover letter because it was that important to her.

Helping her prepare for the interview, Maria covered simple tips on what to expect or how to present herself. “I put on a shirt and trousers and everybody else was in jeans,” Dawn laughs. After receiving two interview offers – one in social care and one in retail – Dawn explains why she picked social care: “One’s a career and the other’s just a job.”

Maria highlights that she came across as an ideal candidate, not only to her but also to the service managers and service user who interviewed her, and at a ‘World of Work’ event at the community office of Outreach Community and Residential Services, a local organisation supporting people with long-term mental health needs or learning disabilities. She says: “Dawn has got a bright, cheery attitude. She makes someone’s day just by turning up at the door.” Maria checked in with Dawn well beyond the interview process and still extends that support to her client now. DBS checks and the referencing process followed as well as three days of training before Dawn’s first day on the job.



“I can’t believe I get paid to do this job.”

The impact of the experience has been significant. Maria recalls the moment, two years ago, when Dawn told her: “I can’t believe I get paid to do this job.” Dawn has gained confidence, applying her values and life experience in a line of work she loves and describes as fulfilling. She has worked as part of a team which won ‘Team of the Month’ during the pandemic for going 14 days without the virus spreading to the people they support, thanks to strict adherence to infection control procedures. Dawn has even won ‘Employee of the Month’ for her own performance. Working on her professional development, Dawn takes courses with Outreach and with her local college to take advantage of the opportunities for progression available in social care. When asked about the support she has received and what it looks like now, Dawn answers: “I’ve had it all the way through. Even now I still get the occasional text or phone call from Maria just to see how I’m going or what I need.”

What is the best part of her job? “Feeling wanted,” Dawn laughs. “This lady I work with loves going shopping with me. They all seem to appreciate me.” Work is not without its challenges. However, she takes pride in her work. Offering an example, she says, “I have to do medication, which is a serious role. Every day I get it right, I’m like, ‘Yes!’”

In addition to the day-to-day aspects she likes, Dawn credits the support she has received with helping her succeed: “Outreach has been absolutely fantastic. When my Mum passed away at the beginning of the year, they helped make me able to take time off.” Thinking about tips for others considering a career in social care, Dawn states: “Just go for it. You won’t be disappointed. If you feel you have the right values or if you care at home, you can care in the community.”

Top tips for someone thinking about working in social care



Be prepared to learn and work hard when starting out in social care. Dawn recalls her own experience of memorising new procedures for distributing medication or looking after the people she supports overnight.



Dawn would encourage anyone thinking of a career in social care to go for it. It isn’t work experience or qualifications which make the difference. Instead, a person’s values and life experience, perhaps even of caring for someone at home, count the most.