



Beth Major

Consultant Clinical Psychologist

Can you give us a brief outline of your work history?

After completing my undergraduate degree, I spent some time traveling and lived for a year in New York, working in the corporate world. Once I returned to England, I got a job as an Assistant Psychologist, working in a Behavioral Medicine service. I applied to do Clinical Training (a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology) and got a place on one of the London courses. Training in London was great because you got the opportunity to move around some really varied and specialist services. After I qualified, I began working in Adult Health Services and worked in two different hospitals in London. I worked with patients who were struggling with difficulties associated with physical health problems – pain, cancer, HIV/sexual health, and renal. I moved to Northern Ireland after meeting my now husband. At the time, there were not many jobs about, so I applied for the various roles that were available. I ended up being offered a post in Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS), which was a new area for me. I have been in CAMHS ever since – 12 years and counting.

What made you decide this career path?

When I finished my undergraduate degree, I remember having lunch with some course mates and talking about what we were going to do next. The only thing I was sure of was that I didn't want to be a psychologist! I suppose trying to imagine your future is difficult at 21. I felt differently by the time I got back from a couple of years away. I wanted a job in helping professions and was curious about clinical psychology. My associate post helped me to work out that I did want to pursue clinical training. My dad was horrified when I said I was going to apply for the Clinical Psychology doctorate. He thought it was high time I got on with working! In reality, we are very fortunate that training in Clinical Psychology is funded, which means you can join the workforce and earn money whilst completing the doctorate.

How did you train for this role/educational route?

I completed an undergraduate BSc degree in Psychology and then went on to complete a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology.

What qualities are required for your job – both personal and professional?

Personal: thoughtfulness, empathy, compassion, kindness, patience, determination, strength
Professional: hardworking, resilient, flexible, able to work with distress and in services under pressure.

What does a typical day involve?

Working in CAMHS involves working with children and young people who are experiencing mental health difficulties, and their families. CAMHS is a multidisciplinary team, which means there are lots of different professionals working together. Being from a psychology background, my core business is talking therapy. However, alongside seeing children and families for therapy, I would also be involved in assessments – new patients, specific cognitive assessments, autism assessments, etc. As well as being a clinician, I am a manager so also offer supervision and attend a lot of management meetings. I also get involved with service development, service evaluation, audit, teaching, offering placements to trainee psychologists, etc.

What do you like best about your job?

I love working within a team and working with the young people and families that we serve. Every day is different, every day is challenging, which means work is stimulating. I can never believe that it is the end of the day already – time just flies by. Being a clinical psychologist has allowed me to work in very different settings, and across the age range from young children to older adults at the end of life. There is a real emphasis on transferable skills during training, which offers a lot of options for jobs for the future. There is also a shortage of clinical psychologists in NI which means employment options are very good.

What advice would you give anyone thinking of doing your job?

Getting into training can be a process - it's a marathon, not a sprint. Collect as much experience as you can, but also enjoy living a little bit as you go. This is a brilliant job and a great career, but there is competition for training places which can make things a bit fraught when you are trying to get started. It's no bad thing to take a slightly more circuitous route – if you are enjoying your life, learning about yourself, developing insight and resilience, gathering clinical experience, this will help prepare you for the next step in your career when it arrives. Good luck!