



**Charlotte
Wilson**

Approved Social
Worker

Introduce yourself. Where do you work? What is your jobrole?

I am Charlotte Wilson and I am an Approved Social Worker with the Mental Capacity Act Service.

What does your job entail?

My substantive role is working under new legislation being implemented called the Mental Capacity Act (NI) 2016. I work with people aged 16+ across all directorates who are in hospital and may require the safeguard of the statutory framework if they lack the capacity to make a decision to remain in hospital (Deprivation of Liberty). My role is to ensure the legal criteria is met whilst supporting the person. I also work with the person's family and Multidisciplinary Team colleagues to ensure their human rights are being promoted whilst balancing best interest decisions. I also support my colleagues throughout the Trust by delivering training regarding my role. As well as my substantive post, I also work as an approved social worker under the Mental Health (NI) Order 1986. My role under this piece of legislation is to ensure the care and protection of people with a mental disorder by carrying out various functions and statutory duties, which may result in detaining/depriving someone of his or her liberty for an assessment in a psychiatric hospital. I am also a practice teacher for student social workers who are coming onto placement within the Belfast Trust.

How did you get into this line of work?

Social work found me... people often think I became a social worker because I have a brother with a disability who has had some good social workers over the years and maybe subliminally, they helped. However, from a very early age, I wanted to be a special needs teacher. I was then diagnosed with epilepsy and began researching the brain, which led me to psychology, which became my first degree. Additionally, both during school and university I volunteered for several organisations, some included youth groups for children with disabilities, ADHD support groups, addiction services and completing research to support service provision to policymakers in my local area. Combining psychology and volunteering gave me a broader perspective on biopsychosocial models and I realised that my original career choice was not the route I wanted to follow. This all led me to social work, and I realised there is a vast array of social work roles. I did become a practice teacher for social work students on placements within the Trust and I love delivering training so in some way this brought me back to my original plan and I can combine my passion for social work and education.

Outline your career to date

I began my social work career in the voluntary sector, working for five years in Women's Aid supporting women and children who had experienced domestic abuse. I then moved into the Belfast Trust and worked in the Children with Disabilities Team, Primary Mental Health Team and I have been in my current role since November 2019.

Tell us about your qualifications and training

I completed a psychology degree. I was then able to complete my Bachelor of Social Work degree via the two-year Relevant Graduate Route at Queens University. Since qualifying, I have completed my assessed year in employment followed by Professional in Practice awards. This has included a Postgraduate Certificate/PIP Consolidation award and two Postgraduate Diplomas/Specialist Awards in Practice teaching and Approved Social Worker. I also ensure that I continue to learn and develop by completing short courses, mandatory training and currently I am completing a coaching course to support colleagues within the Trust.

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

I believe the personal and professional qualities to become a social worker are the same. Social work is all about connecting with people and building relationships. All interactions with people require humility and you have to be open and honest. Some decisions may have to be made that people will not agree with but how you interact and convey the message is extremely important; it's all about communication. You need to be adaptable, think on your feet and be able to respond in a crisis. You need to listen to people; they have their unique life story and it's not always about jumping in with a quick fix solution. Compassion and respect go a long way.

What is the best advice you have ever received?

I have been given lots of great advice over the years but two that are important to me is to treat everyone as I wish to be treated and good manners cost nothing.

Tell us an interesting fact about yourself

When I was in primary school I was asked to leave the choir, I was not blessed with a singing voice! It hasn't stopped me though I still sing every day because it makes me happy.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

In my spare time I enjoy walking, reading, baking and I am a keen photographer.

Who has inspired you most in your life?

Definitely my family, they have always encouraged me to believe in myself. My brother has the most infectious smile and doesn't let anything hold him back and he always gives me hope for the future.

What advice would you give your 16-year-old self?

Everything works out, have faith in yourself. Continue to push yourself out of your comfort zone. Remember you can continue to dream but it's much better if you are out there chasing them. Don't judge yourself in comparison to others, keep judging yourself on what you know you are capable of. Trust your gut, it will steer you right. Not everything in life will go to plan, you're human but use it wisely as it will teach you something about how to succeed. Timing is everything, if it is meant to happen it will and usually when you are least expecting it to. When the opportunities appear make sure you grab them with both hands.