

'No two days are the same and you can make a real difference': social workers reflect on their careers

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

1. What particular skills and abilities do you think a social worker needs to have?
2. Would you consider becoming a social worker? Why or why not?

2 Key words

a. Write a word or a phrase in bold from the article next to the correct definition.

1. to limit or stop a negative increase in something, such as crime or unemployment

2. training programs where people learn a trade or profession while earning a salary

3. non-profit organisations or groups that rely on volunteers or donations to provide services

4. a professional who helps families and gives emotional, practical and social support

5. perfect in a way that others should try to copy _____
6. a young person between childhood and adulthood, typically between the ages of 13 and 19

7. quicker progression than usual, often used in career development or education

8. happening at the same time _____
9. social workers employed through private or public agencies rather than by a specific organisation

10. a student doing their first degree at a university or college _____
11. a feature of a product or service that makes it particularly desirable _____
12. working together with another person or group towards a shared goal _____

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Level 3: Advanced

13. financially supported through money provided by an organisation _____
14. research and education, especially in universities and higher education

15. relating to studies or students involved in education beyond undergraduate level, such as master's or doctorate programmes _____
16. individuals, typically under the age of 18, who have committed a crime or broken the law

17. creates opportunities or makes something possible, especially something new

18. the quality of behaving in the same way _____

b. Complete the sentences with words and phrases from the previous activity in the correct form.

1. Clare wants to work in _____ after completing her PhD.
2. Life can be difficult for _____ trying to find their own identity while at school.
3. _____ often move between different councils to cover staff shortages.
4. Children need _____ in their routines to feel safe and secure.
5. Kieran's dedication to his job was _____ and inspired the whole team.
6. A(n) _____ helped the parents manage school and health appointments.
7. The council offers a(n) _____ training course to qualify as a nurse in just 14 months.
8. The apprenticeship scheme was _____ the local government.
9. We work _____ with a youth charity to deliver our mental health services.
10. _____ are available for those who want to earn while they learn.

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11. After her degree, Amara started a(n) _____ diploma in mental health.
12. The ability to earn while studying is a big _____ for many students.
13. Chen studies and works _____, which is very demanding.
14. Sam's IT qualifications helped _____ new career opportunities.
15. New government policies aim _____ illegal border crossings.
16. Bethany is a(n) _____ studying for a first degree in music.
17. I've worked in both the public and _____ and definitely prefer the latter.
18. A(n) _____ support program is offered to teens who find themselves in custody.

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From paid apprenticeships to degrees, there are many routes to becoming a social worker – here's a look at some of the main ones, and how four people who switched careers found them

Debbie Andalo

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- 1 From **paid apprenticeships** to degrees, there are many routes to becoming a social worker – here's a look at some of the main ones, and how four people who switched careers found them.
- 2 Clare Guiry remembers clearly the first time she realised she had made the right decision to give up her job running a children's entertainment business to become a social worker.
- 3 She was working in adult social care, and the 96-year-old woman she was supporting wanted to move out of the care home where she was living, craving a more independent life. "Everybody thought it wasn't a good idea but I helped her move into a flat where she had carers on site," says Guiry, who works for Oxfordshire county council. "Now she's so happy. It's not that she was unhappy with care at the care home – she told me she just wanted to live somewhere where she could make herself a cup of tea without having to ask somebody else to do it."
- 4 Guiry, 44, who qualified two years ago after completing a professional postgraduate diploma, says helping people to get what they need to have a better life, or continue the good life they already have, is at the heart of being a social worker.
- 5 That's a view shared by Emily Bell, a social worker in a child protection and court team for Cornwall council. "I think a lot of people who go into social work would describe themselves as 'fixers' – which was definitely the case for me," says 46-year old Bell. "But what's become clear to me when working with families is not to come in and fix things, but rather work **in partnership** to achieve sustainable changes that work for them."
- 6 Bell, who initially joined Cornwall as a **family support worker**, qualified as a social worker last July after completing an Open University professional postgraduate diploma, **funded by** the council. "I knew Cornwall had this scheme where I could work for them and train as a social worker **simultaneously**," she says.
- 7 Being able to earn while learning was key for career-changer Sarah Ritchie, who is just months into her three-year level 6 apprenticeship with Oxfordshire county council working in adult care.
- 8 "The apprenticeship has allowed me to earn while learning, which is its obvious **selling point**," says Ritchie, 44, who gave up a career as a police community support worker. "I've been able to do what I want to do without coming out of employment or spending time at university. If I wasn't doing the apprenticeship, the change in career would not have been an option."
- 9 Today, a degree-level apprenticeship is becoming an established route to professional qualification. According to latest figures from the professional regulator Social Work England, there are now 36 level 6 (**undergraduate**) and five level 7 (**postgraduate**) approved apprenticeship courses in England.
- 10 An apprenticeship offers an alternative to the undergraduate or postgraduate degree, which has been the traditional option. Postgraduate **fast track** courses are also available. Step up to social work – a 14-month programme run in partnership with local authorities – is one option, as well as the children's services three-year leadership development programme Approach Social Work, which used to be called Frontline. For those interested in a career as a mental health social worker Think Ahead offers a two-year scheme.
- 11 A professional social work qualification **opens the door to** career options across the public and **voluntary sectors**, including working with **young offenders** and supporting people with drug and alcohol problems. It's also a way into policy work or **academia**. Rasheed Pendry, who qualified more than 20 years ago, says: "There are so many more career paths now compared to when I qualified."
- 12 Pendry is director of children's social care at Wandsworth council, which last year was recognised for the **exemplary** support it offers its social workers when it was named supportive social work employer of the year in the Social Worker of the Year awards. Pendry says a factor in its success is its permanent workforce.

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- 13 Unlike some authorities, which rely heavily on **agency social workers** to help fill vacancies, Wandsworth has few agency workers – and those it does have been with the authority long-term. Pendry is confident that new government guidelines, which aim **to stem the tide of** agency staff and provide a more stable workforce, will have a national impact. "Children and families need **consistency** and don't want to have to retell their story," he says. "We should treat families with the respect they deserve and give them a consistent workforce."
- 14 Pendry's decades-long career includes working in the voluntary sector supporting ex-offenders, time as a family therapist in children's services and as a specialist in NHS child and **adolescent** mental health services. Does he have any regrets about the decision he took in the 1990s to become a social worker? "No," he says. "I wouldn't hesitate for a second to make the same career choice today. It's the best job in the world, where no two days are the same and you can make a real difference."

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions with information from the article.

1. Why did Clare Guiry feel she had made the right decision to become a social worker?

2. How does Emily Bell describe the role of a social worker in relation to families?

3. What made the Open University diploma an attractive option for Emily Bell?

4. Why was the apprenticeship route important for Sarah Ritchie?

5. According to the article, what are alternative routes to becoming a social worker?

6. What does Rasheed Pendry say about the current variety of career paths in social work?

4 Key language

a. Rewrite these direct quotes from the article in indirect speech. Choose a suitable reporting verb from the box.

admitted

argued

emphasised

explained

observed

1. 'Everybody thought it wasn't a good idea but I helped her move into a flat where she had carers on site. Now she's so happy.' – Clare Guiry

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2. 'I think a lot of people who go into social work would describe themselves as 'fixers' – which was definitely the case for me.' – Emily Bell

3. 'I've been able to do what I want to do without coming out of employment or spending time at university.' – Sarah Ritchie

4. 'We should treat families with the respect they deserve and give them a consistent workforce.' – Rasheed Pendry

5. 'I wouldn't hesitate for a second to make the same career choice today. It's the best job in the world, where no two days are the same and you can make a real difference.' – Rasheed Pendry

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- How does the article contrast traditional university routes with apprenticeships?
- What factors do you think can motivate people to change careers?
- The article presents social work very positively. Pendry calls it 'the best job in the world'. What challenges or drawbacks do you think there might be to being a social worker?

6 In your own words

- a. Write a personal statement outlining the reasons why you would or wouldn't want to work as a social worker. Include reasons and examples to support your opinion.**
- b. Share your statements with your classmates.**