



## **From foster carer to a newly qualified children's social worker**

Sukhander Hussain, Child and Family Social Worker, Leeds City Council

Sukhander is a Child and Family Social Worker with Leeds City Council. He has been a qualified social worker for 20 months now.

Sukhander's work background is in charity sector management. His previous roles with a range of charities involved helping people in need at both local and national levels, but he had never considered social work as a career choice. This changed when he became a foster carer, and his experiences challenged some of his misconceptions about the profession.

"To be honest, my perception of social workers changed when my wife and I became approved foster carers. You could say I got into the social work arena through trying to understand from the other side of the fence. I came to understand what social workers did, the pressures they were under but also the value of their support."

"My wife and I have been foster carers since 2012. We had been thinking about adoption for a long time. My wife was working at a children's home at the time and wasn't ready to give up her job. I was doing contractual work with a national charity but that was coming to an end. I agreed with her that I'd become the main carer, thinking I'd maybe do it for about three months. It ended up being two years.

"Because I had time on my hands once the kids were at school, I thought, I need to go back to school myself. I wanted to study something relevant to my life at the time and that led me to apply to the Master's in Social Work at Leeds University.

"I live in Leeds so studying at Leeds Uni was really convenient in terms of accessibility. When I told my friends and family I was studying social work it didn't go down too well because people have a lot of misconceptions about social work. You get that with the public as well. When I get a referral and go to an initial home visit parents sometimes have the perception that I've come to take their kids away - which is obviously the last thing you want to do. It's about trying to break down those barriers, not just with service users but with family and friends as well."

As a relatively new social worker, Sukhander is able to offer insight into the guidance and support Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) can expect, and he has some tips for anyone studying to become a social worker:

“I would say learn as much as you can from your course, and learn from your placements because that will leave you in good stead when you move into full employment as a social worker. It’s easy to think that it’s only a placement, but that’s where you’re going to learn about the job, that’s where you’re going to find your own way of overcoming difficulties to deliver positive outcomes.

“I’ve been a social worker for 20 months now, and I’ve found Leeds City Council to be a progressive local authority and one that’s firmly focused on a child-centred approach. In my experience there is a solid infrastructure in place to support NQSWs, which includes close supervision to support you through your first year and beyond.

“Within the vocation of social work, teamwork and cooperation is essential because you need to come back to your team and learn from them, and hopefully share good practice. It’s not a vocation that’s easy and it’s not suitable for everybody, but having that level of support from your team makes a real difference.

“Within your team you’ll have a good balance of people with more experience and people with less experience. You learn from each other. While I’ve only had 20 months social work experience I do have quite a lot of life experience, and I can bring that to the team so there’s a good balance of one person learning from the others.

“My reward is the reaction I get from the parents and how receptive they are once I initiate any engagement with them. It’s about building and sustaining new relationships over a long period. When I get good feedback and my manager gets good feedback that also motivates me to take on the next piece of work.

“I’ve learned a lot more about social work now I’m involved in practice. Looking at things from the other side of the fence, the difficult decisions become more understandable and the value of our work is more apparent. The more we can do to show the public and the children and families what we do the better.

“If you want a challenging, rewarding career then social work is something you should seriously consider.”

This case study has been captured as part of Children’s Social Work Matters campaign [‘Improving Lives’](#).