



**Highly experienced professionals
– dedicated to protecting and supporting children**

Tracy Speight, Kirklees Duty and Advice Team Manager

Tracy is the Duty and Advice Team Manager at Kirklees Council. She leads a team that are the first port of call for members of the public and professionals who need advice or want to report safeguarding concerns about a child. Her team is multi-agency involving professionals from health, education, domestic violence coordinators, missing children's team and the safeguarding police working alongside 11 social workers and 3 early help practitioners to give support and early help to children and families.

Tracy's considerable experience of social work, which has led her to her current post, started when she was a looked after child. From the age of 9, she was placed in a children's home in Leeds. When she became a teenager she fell pregnant while still in care and was subject to a full care order. At this point in her life the social work team placed Tracy in a Parent and Child Unit and were seeking to remove her baby. Tracy was determined to keep her baby and showed the social workers she could do this and left within six months on a 12 month Supervision Order to live in her community. After only a 6 months this order was discharged and Tracy and her baby were no longer involved with social workers.

To support herself she had lots of different jobs, even selling double glazing. She then set up a dancing school for teenagers, in part to keep her own children occupied and 'off the streets'. It was this role that started her interest and desire to work with and help children, particularly those in most need of support like she had needed in her younger years. Tracy then went to college to complete her GNVQ Health and Social Care Training as part of her work experience she worked in a behavioural unit of a school in Leeds and later with Base 10, a project working to educate young people about drugs. Tracy also volunteered for Health for All working with teenage mums. This experience confirmed that was what she wanted to do and led to other roles as a part-time youth worker and part-time residential care worker at a care home in Leeds where boys and girls were placed on long term care orders. At this point Tracy had another two children and was still a single mum but she went on to meet her husband to be and they married in 2004.

After a further period in the residential job Tracy wanted more time with her own kids and took up an 'unqualified' social work assistant post in Leeds.

"This was a newly created post in the Children in Need team, which back then you didn't need to be a qualified social worker to do. In this job I was given the opportunity to undertake lots of direct work with children and their parents and saw first-hand what a difference social work can achieve and I really enjoyed it.

“Leeds then encouraged me to get qualified and I was seconded to do a social work degree at Leeds Metropolitan University. Out of 500 applicants I managed to get one of only 40 places on the course. It was a great personal achievement getting on the course but an even bigger one completing it. School, as you can imagine, was not a major part of my life growing up and unsurprisingly I didn’t do at all well, so much so that in my first year of my degree course I had to work very hard on my writing and maths as well the social work elements. Once I got into my placements I started to really enjoy it. These were in a Leeds crisis mental health team and in a hospital team. In at the deep end, I learnt about social work and why the welfare of children has to be the centre of things. I made it through and ended up with a 1st class degree and I am the only person in my family that had ever been university!”

After qualifying, Tracy got a social work job in the West of Leeds and then in the South, spending 4 years in child protection. She then got a job in the Duty and Assessment Team in Leeds. This was a new team that was developing and growing. Tracy played a key role in developing the team and what was meant to be a secondment lasted 3 years. After working on the frontline dealing with new or emergency cases Tracy moved back to the area team, to experience the relationship building and longer-term support of children and families through their time in the care system. After 18 months she decided that whilst the experience had been invaluable it wasn’t for her – the initial engagement and assessment was more her calling. By this point in Tracy’s life her children had grown up and left home, Tracy and her husband decided they had so much more to give children, that they wanted to become foster parents, enabling Tracy to give something back to children and young people who needed a loving home.

As foster parents Tracy and her husband began to look after children along with the children’s mother and sometimes father. They supported and encouraged parents to learn how to care for their child, feeding back to the social work team as required. Tracy’s approach throughout, then and now, has always been to be open and honest, even when difficult decisions and conversations need to be had. Eventually, Tracy and her husband decided that they needed a break from fostering and Tracy decided to move back into social work. To make this step she joined a social work agency and began work in the Kirklees Duty and Advice team as an agency social worker. Shortly after starting, the position of Team Manager came up and her application was successful.

“I’m glad I’m back working in social work – I missed it. In my role I am a strong advocate for children and keeping their welfare at the heart of everything we do – always making sure they come first. With my life experience and personality, I can relate to and empathise with all those involved and I encourage everyone to follow my lead in being approachable, open, honest and respectful, but also respectfully challenging when appropriate. These are key aspects of being a good social worker along with the obvious need to be resilient. In my view, social workers are facilitators of good outcomes for children and their families – it’s not about setting people up to fail. That’s why I’m a big supporter of an holistic approach through multi-agency team working and restorative practice at the heart of what we do, where everyone works together to find the answers.

“Whilst briefly working for an agency it gave me a way to get back into mainstream social work - there’s no substitute for being a permanent member of an established team. It’s good to work in a team. In a good team there’s often a great camaraderie and support for each other. Also, with a permanent job you have stability and good career progression and development opportunities. In contrast, in the agency world it’s harder to fit into an

established team, you have to learn new systems and processes and you lack an established relationship with the children and families. I also like to challenge the way things are done if I think they can be improved – you can only really do this if you're on the team permanently building those important relationships.

“A lot of people – the families we work with and colleagues – think that social workers get involved in and do everything for families. Whilst we do many things, our central focus is on doing what's right for the protection and welfare of children, which includes keeping families together when this is the right thing for the children. As a care leaver and now a grandmother with 6 grandchildren, keeping children safe and making a positive difference is what I'm passionate about.”

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