

Reflection essay

During my first year at university, while going through the various advocate positions the independent domestic violence advocate became a focus of mine. I found myself becoming really interested in this role and felt that I had a lot I could give to this sector. Since then, much of my work has pointed me in that direction, so naturally that was the area I chose to go to for my placement. I am fortunate enough to have a friend who is in this sector and after some enquiries she was able to point me in the right direction. Here is a series of accounts I have decided are the most beneficial for reflection, from my time at a refuge supporting victims of domestic violence. This was unfortunately cut short due to the Covid-19 lockdown. When doing this reflection, I have decided to use the Gibbs (1998) model of reflection. This model will help me to explore my feelings and thoughts, while providing a balanced account of my time at the refuge. I was also advised that this is the model that the support workers at the refuge are advised to use, as they find it very beneficial due to it offering you the chance to reflect on your feelings.

Description

The morning of my interview I busily organised myself by arranging my day accordingly, as it was later on in the day, I needed to arrange things for the children. I wanted the day to go well and have as little stress as possible. I printed some off some information about the refuge and put a copy of some of my previous work ready to take as an example of my current knowledge, keyed the postcode into my satnav and I was good to go. Making my way to the refuge for my initial interview I considered how unfamiliar I was with its location, so as planned, I arrived slightly early. Unfortunately, I had not accounted for it being a hidden location and there was nowhere to park, I decided to go around the block again, in the hope a car may have moved, however, there was still nowhere to park. I decided by best option was to make a quick telephone call, they told me there was a large car park around the corner and gave me the directions. Finally parked, I could make my way to the location. I introduced myself to the manager and apologised for my lateness, I was reassured this was not a problem. I was shown to a small room for what was described as an informal chat, expressing my enthusiasm for the placement I showed her an example of my work, she was very enthusiastic and asked me how my degree was progressing. We talked comfortably for some time, discussing the role and what I could expect from my time at the refuge. There was much emphasis on the need for confidentiality which is understandable and something I would have no problem respecting. We exchanged the paperwork and my placement was agreed.

Feelings

Whilst preparing for my interview, my nerves about travelling to the area were making me feel more and more anxious, but this kept me focussed on all of the tasks that I needed to complete in order to get to my interview on time. I went through a roller coaster of emotions during the day, my initial nerves

from going to an area I was un-familiar with, which changed to panic as once I arrived, I found myself struggling to park, according to Heshmat (2016) experiencing a range of emotions at the same time enables people to find the positive in stressful situations. However, I was conscious that as a nervous driver I often have a tendency to get lost, Seligman's attribution theory (1991) on helplessness, suggests that this occurs when someone finds themselves in an uncontrollable situation. Thankfully on arrival I was immediately put at my ease, my phone call to the manager expressing my predicament had prepared her for my lateness. Thottam (nd) agrees as a consultant for Monster.com, a career advice company, it is advisable when you find yourself being late, to call ahead and explain your predicament. Thankfully, when I arrived the manager was very understanding, assuring me that this was not a problem, however, I felt cross with myself for being in my opinion un-professional, this only heightened my anxiety. The interview went much better than I expected, we chatted about the role and what I could expect and the opportunities that would be available. I believe they were impressed with my enthusiasm for the role. As I showed her my portfolio of work I had done during my degree, I felt apprehensive, showing someone who had experienced within the role I had passion for, which made me question if I had the skills needed, however, her compliments about my work made me feel elated and reassured that I was making the right decision going to the refuge for my placement.

Evaluation

During this experience, my nerves had been building all day making it very long and tiring. When I eventually arrived and then had trouble parking, my natural anxiety left me feeling panic, although I had planned my route, parking was not something I had anticipated. Lazarus (1966) suggests that this is due to us making a series of choices emotionally when dealing with our own stresses. I was aware that it was going to be unfamiliar and had prepared my satnav in preparation, Gov.uk (no date) advise it is safe to use a satnav, however, you must always be in full control and not have your view obstructed. The actual interview went really well, this was reassuring and made the stress worthwhile. Taking an example of my work supported my knowledge and the positive feedback was encouraging and made me very happy. I felt much more positive leaving, reassuring my decision to attend that refuge.

Analysis

Going for any interview is a stressful experience, Maltby *et al* (2013) explains this is because we feel confident in some situations and less in others. Being prepared is advisable however, sometimes things do not go as planned. Thottam (nd) explains that missing an interview raises a 'red flag', suggesting you should offer a sincere apology while being as honest as possible. Steps can often be taken to try and ensure things run smoothly but nothing is perfect. According to Cowley, Heikurra and Ravaja (2013) this is an example of a double learning loop, my action going somewhere unfamiliar, resulted in my assuming I would be able to park, resulted in my becoming late and heightening my anxiety, however, phoning ahead showed some initiative, this is then an example of a triple learning loop by thinking

logically and putting my situation into context helped me avoid further stress (Cowley *et al* 2013). I got the directions and no damage was done. The professionalism of the staff at the refuge put me at ease and shows the support that the refuge provides unconditionally, also reminding me that a refuge is supposed to be inconspicuous. A refuge is a safe house for women, a place where no men are aloud, and the address is confidential (Refuge no date). Woman's Aid (no date) confidentiality policy also highlights the importance of its confidentiality which is written in conjunction with the Data Protection Act (find date). This would explain a lack of signage and suggests it is normal for people to have some difficulties.

Conclusion

It is important to remember that no matter how prepared you are sometimes, things happen that are out of your control, this is supported by Clark and Beck (2012) who suggest that feelings of anxiety can on occasions motivate a person to take precautions and be better prepared when traveling to new places. Having read Nicholson (2015) I understand that nerves are natural, and sometimes you can use nerves as an advantage, by turning them into strength, giving you the power to 'see the bigger picture' and having the ability to reflect on your actions and dealing with problems. I have also learnt trust myself, as the reaction I recieved to an example of my work left me very positive and keen to prove myself, putting yourself out there is not an easy thing to do. Wilkins (2010) suggests this need for positive self-regard is developed in early childhood and is a basic need during infancy, which creates the ability to interact and communicate with others.

Action plan

For the future I think I could learn from investigating the road and where appointments are to avoid this happening again. if possible, take a trip to the location beforehand in preparation to asses the area and familiarise myself with the location, or enquire when appointments are made what parking arrangements are needed. As Nicholson (2015) suggests I will try to turn the experience into a positive and reflect on this in a bid to gain in confidence Also, from the reaction I had to my work I should trust myself more.

Experience no 2

Description

One of the support workers thought it would be good for me to have a read through the freedom program book written by Pat Craven (2006). This program is rolled out over a 6-week period where local women who are victims of domestic abuse are invited to attend the hub that is situated in the local town. The aim of the program is to help women to understand that there are differences between partners, and to reassure them not all are the same. By encouraging them to make better choices, it identifies negative traits in partners and then offers the positive signs to look for. Whilst reading, I recognised many of the

traits in my former husband and identified with many similarities in the various characteristics. This came as quite a shock to me; my first marriage was difficult, but I was very young and had never really addressed what I had gone through. The revelation that I could have been a victim had a profound effect on me. I found myself seeing so many similarities and could identify with much of the advice in comparing the positives within my current marriage. I decided to share my thoughts with the ladies about my feelings the book had stirred, they explained that the aim of it was to help women to identify characteristics and it was not unusual for us to identify with the various characteristics, suggesting I should reflect on my experiences.

Feelings

I was shocked at the effect it had on me, emotions can often be so integrated into your behaviour, making it difficult to recognise its influence until the situation has passed (Hughes, Thompson, Bradford Terrell, 2009). I was young when we married and I considered his behaviour to be normal, I had quite a turbulent marriage and seeing many of his traits written down and identifiable left me feeling alarmed. Philippson (2009) suggests this is because I had 'put it in a pocket' a way of ignoring ourselves by colouring over experiences. I realised that I had never addressed the controlling behaviour I had been subjected too. Much of my experience was buried within, according to Philippson (2009), this is an act of 'selfhood' or a separation which is a response that could not have been predicted. Having to address my fears, and the hurt and pain I had experienced and suddenly seeing it laid bare was difficult to digest. This was a situation I had not anticipated; it is important to remember as Philippson (2009) suggests when we are just ourselves and we make choices with no guarantees and not knowing what will come next. My conversation with the ladies helped me see that what I was experiencing was normal. I feel very fortunate to be lucky enough to have married again and my husband and I have a great relationship, I felt relived and remembered how fortunate I was, I found myself going through a similar process as many of the women. These emotional feelings can according to Fredrickson (2001) broaden and build theory, open our mind as we go up through different stages of intellectual, physical and social resources that help us to develop positive emotions, enabling a feeling of huge gratitude that I got through it and was able to make better relationship choices.

Evaluation

Reading the book did really have quite an effect on me emotionally, this helped me understand what a vital resource it was and why the refuge were keen promoters of the program. Engel (2000) suggests the reason women continuously follow the same path is down their childhood, explaining that they would have experienced what is now referred to as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) Felitti, Vincent J; Anda, Robert F; et al. (May 1998) and become 'disappearing women', who lose who they are when in a relationship. I found this an interesting experience and felt it was vital to my understanding of the role I was undertaking. I had not anticipated the effect this experience would have on me or to

re-live so many emotions, however, to be given the opportunity to evaluate the situation helped me confront things and appreciate what I have now. I am fortunate to be in the position I am, and this experience helped me.

Analysis

Having to deal with difficult emotions can show a soft side, according to Davidson, Irwin (1999) our brain is split into a positive and a negative side. Hefferon and Boniwell (2011) however suggests that emotions are linked as how we behave and the feelings that we experience create a positive effect, whereas threat or anxiety bring negative effect. This goes some way to explain the difficulty I had dealing with my reaction on how I felt, how we manage our stress helps us to deal with life's challenges and encourages self-acceptance (Hughes, Thompson, Bradford Terrell, 2009). The book and the 6-week program is a great aid, according to the website, the 'Freedom program' has a good success rate, many of the women who addended in London praised the support workers who delivered the program and fed back explaining how they found it very beneficial (Freedom program 2019). When we consider this, and my reaction, we can see what a positive effect it has on women, my experience, and having the ability to empathise with the women in the refuge is, I feel of great advantage. I feel safe in the knowledge that I have made good choices and I am fortunate to be in a happy relationship.

Conclusion

I struggled to know as to whether I should reflect in this experience, but after some soul searching, I decided that this was probably one of the most important reflective pieces I could use. I feel I should have been better prepared to deal with my feelings having experienced my own struggles during my first marriage, this was not something I was expecting, however, I now understand that this is a normal process, as was explained I am not alone in this. I appreciate that this was something I needed to deal with to feel happy, these positive emotions widen through success along with our well-being, over time this creates a 'positivity reservoir' that you can draw from during stressful or distressing experiences (Heffron, Boniwell, 2011). I feel thankful that this experience will also help me to become a better advocate, in future, I can identify with victims who have also attended the program. I believe that if I was to be faced with a similar situation again, I would probably have the same reaction, there are some experiences we have to go through to learn and grow, and I have learnt that these experiences make us who we are.

Action plan

I intend on using this experience to help me in future roles, having the ability to empathise with people will help them to feel safe and happy to accept help. I would like to draw on this experience to help me in my quest to become a successful advocate. I also feel that maybe I should find a way to come to terms with my abuse, Woman's aid (no date) advise that you take time to heal, ways to do this include

eating healthily, regular exercise and finding new interests. My time in the refuge has taught me that there is help available if I should decide it is necessary. If I could advise my younger self, I would want her to get help. Interestingly, the Woman's aid (no date) website recommends attending the 'freedom program' for support, bringing us full circle, and attending counselling through contacting your local abuse service, or your local GP.

Experience 3

Description

I was fortunate to be offered to attend a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference or MARAC as this is more commonly known, under strict confidentiality. This was a great honour for me as none of the other ladies working at the refuge had attended one. I had to meet a refuge consultant at the hub in the town, and we then walked to the location. The meeting was held in a small room in the police station, it had limited seating and was very warm. We were joined by different agencies and like me all of whom are relevant in domestic violence cases, there was an air of familiarity, but I sensed only in a professional context. I was also happy to see I was not the only student present; I was however interested to see that they were all women. The only man in the meeting was the police officer who was chair of the meeting. He was a largely built man who had an air of dominance over him, he was certainly in charge. During the course of the meeting, it was interesting to note that some members were not sufficiently informed, as each case went around the table, I noticed that one of the support workers was particularly unorganised and ill-informed as to the situation relating to many cases, having to be re-evaluated at a later date.

Feelings

I got the impression that the police officer who chaired the conference was obviously highly ranked, he was quite imposing and authoritative, I imagine he was well respected as he had a definite air of importance about him Knott and Scragg (2009) support my assumption by arguing that men are often better suited to roles of protection as this reaffirms their power and dominance through their masculinity. I felt that he was certainly in charge, and I was definitely intimidated by him and would not want to have wanted to have to challenge him. I noticed he spoke very eloquently, but his tone was sharp, I decided he was certainly an experienced speaker. I noticed how when he spoke there was an air of formality that was apparent the instant that he entered the room. From a feminist's perspective Knott and Scragg (2009) suggest he could make women feel uncomfortable as the majority of women are at a disadvantage and have experienced abuse or violence from men, however, he soon managed to change my prospective. As the meeting progressed, during a particularly difficult case I could see his disgust for how the victim had suffered, as I continued to observe him, his dislike for the incidents was obvious, his tone changed and he was speaking more empathetically he was visibly disturbed by many of the incidents. From this I could see that he was a passionate man who was committed to his job and position,

according to Villiers (2009) this encapsulates leadership and will often lead the officer being admired. I felt disappointed for the clients who were being under supported by their support worker, I found myself seeing the frustration that goes down the chain when one of the elements are missing, when other agencies are seen to be doing nothing, there can be a knock on affect.

Evaluation

The whole experience was fantastic, getting to see all the various agencies work together gave me a real insight into the role. Having the ability to see first-hand how a MARAC meeting works was a real insight. I find myself feeling frustrated that one of the members was unorganised, Banks (2012) however suggests that service providers do care as they often treat clients familiarly as they would a friend as they view their role is a vocation. I should always consider that there could be different reasons for this. As the meeting progressed, she did explain how part of the reason she was ill equipped was down to other agencies not giving her the information. Thompson (2016) explains that although people work in partnership with agencies, they should appreciate the complexities involved, and how the other agency could be in need of the information they hold without dealing with these discrepancies, priorities then become confused and can create conflict.

Analysis

The aim of a MARAC is to identify those who are at risk of crimes relating and those of domestic abuse, the decisions to send cases to MARAC are made by the various agencies involved in order to decide on the necessary risks and the next cause of action (Safelives2015). Referrals are made to the MARAC through a checklist which is filled in by a support worker, police officer or someone who feels the alleged perpetrator poses a significant risk (Ricmond .Gov .uk 2019). Having the ability to combine warmth and unity while in charge of a group can be a challenge, however, is an example of good leadership (Villiers 2009). It was interesting to see that the room was full of women, especially when Knott And Scragg (2009) suggest even though there are more women present, women are still at a disadvantage to men.

Conclusion

It is important not to judge a book by its cover, often we make assumptions on people in the first few seconds, according to Lickerman (2012) who suggests we instantly judge a person's clothes, accent or behaviour through our own emotional bias during an initial meeting. I judged the officer by appearance, and I now believe that this was probably unprofessional as he was not the person that I perceived him to be. This is something I should reflect on Thompson (2016) suggests we do this by reflecting on our values enabling us to be clear on our position and not focusing on oppressive practice. I have concluded how it is important to remain open minded and not to judge, men are on occasion intimidating but it is

best to remember that everyone is different. Thompson (2016) contradicts this suggesting although women are perceived to be more emotional than men, men are judged to be 'hard-wired' as they show emotion differently. At the end of the meeting, I decided he was not as intimidating as I originally assumed. This also applies to the support worker, although at the time I found it concerning that nobody questioned why the support worker lacked the information, I should remember that I know nothing about her situation. As the conference continued, I could see she was uncomfortable having to keep apologising for not having the information to hand. This made me feel much more sympathetic. Reflecting on this I can appreciate that due to the complexity of the cases, funding and workloads along with the various services she would need to liaise with, there could be numerous reasons that have caused information to be slow in getting to her.

Action Plan

If I was to experience this again, I now realise that I should be less judgemental, the police are often perceived in a certain way that is not always positive. If I was to meet him again, I would feel less intimidated and more confident in a professional aspect. Being quick to jump to conclusions is obviously a trait of mine and one that I need to remember when meeting new people. I believe this experience has taught me a lot, maybe for the future I should consider reserving my opinion.

Experience 4

One of the members of the MARAC was the IDVA, I was fascinated to see what the role involved, as this was the role that sparked my original interest in advocacy and set me on the path to the refuge. I was interested to discover she was an ex police officer and was positioned within the police station. She spoke with confidence, while giving many informative accounts regarding the cases that she was involved with, while showing a huge level of empathy with her clients. She spoke with authority but also with empathy, ensuring that her clients wishes were heard, detailing how she had actively been involved in the cases and what plans needed to be put in place. After the initial meeting, myself and the consultant had to stay behind for a further confidential meeting with the chairman and the IDVA. Here she really came into her own, explaining the situation, explaining the affects on her client stressing that it was a very delicate case, however, I was impressed how she certainly had it all in hand. The situation was discussed in great detail with all the details being prepared in order to put a successful safety plan in place.

Feelings

It felt amazing to be in her presence and I felt myself enthralled on her every word, as she explained the situation. It was evident as she spoke that she was a strong, confident woman but it was also evident she had a softer side and that her client was her priority. Knott, Scragg (2009) suggest this is because

empathy and emotion are qualities that are more typically attributed to women and would explain why I felt she would be easy to talk too. I found myself wanting to talk to her for hours, wanting to ask her about the role, however, there was no time and she had no idea that I was studying advocacy or that I aspired to be just like her. During the confidential conversation, her passion for her role was evident. Having the ability be passionate in your role seems simple but as Heffron, and Boniwell (2011) suggest, it is not easy, as with each new experience there comes challenges, but without challenges there will be no growth. She was adamant that her client would get the support that she needed, also, as I was a representative of the refuge within this meeting, my input was appropriate. I felt this was valued although I did not feel I had the experience to make much of a comment, I found myself wondering if I could ever take on the role and do it as well.

Evaluation

The whole experience was one I will never forget, at the time I was a little nervous, which was draining. Knott and Scragg (2009) suggest that this example of self-awareness is essential when using emotion effectively when interacting with others. The energy and passion she displayed helped me to feel included, I was treated the same as everyone else which was reassuring. I found myself picking up some tips on how an IDVA would have, the role of an advocate is one of empowerment. A good advocate should be equipped with a degree of social intelligence and the ability to show emotion to both sides, this involves recognising your own emotions and how to deal with them Thompson (2016). I felt comfortable in the small group, there was a feeling of unity as we were all there with a common goal, and that was to get the best outcome for the victim.

Analysis

It came as a surprise to me to learn that the IDVA was located within the police station, I had assumed they would have been located in the hub. This would make sense as many of the victims are identified through the criminal justice system and are in vulnerable hard to reach groups. As suggested by the Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA) policy (2012), It's the advocates role to represent the victim, within a MARAC highlighting how they need to have a good relationship, supporting my feeling that she was approachable. I was able to interact within the meeting, which gave me the confidence that I fitted in. This was a complicated case and all parties were aware of the sensitivity of it. The confidentiality of the case has made it difficult to reflect, knowing the repercussions if this had become public was difficult for me to digest. However, Moss (2015) expresses that confidentiality effects all aspects of this profession and is at the core of the various codes of practice, for example the Advocacy QPM (2014) explains the advocacy provider will comply with the Data Protection Act (1988).

Conclusion

I feel inspired that this is the right direction for me, being in a position where I can help women escape the abuse that they have endured is my absolute goal. I find myself quite a nervous person and I am not that comfortable when speaking in a crowd, however, this whole experience has helped me realise that I do have a voice and my opinion is valid. To build confidence or achieve 'self-efficacy' is to reach your goal, according to Hefferon and Boniwell (2011) I can do this through taking control of my situation and thinking positively in the belief that I can do it. After evaluating the event I can also conclude that I can reflect on my experience through the effective domain of Blooms Taxonomy (1994), through firstly attending the meeting and being aware of my surroundings, to actively being part of the meeting. While valuing the situation, I found myself justifying my position through having the ability to reflect over the whole experience, however, having to reflect on such a confidential case has proved difficult as I am unable to discuss the content.

Action Plan

To work as hard as I can to achieve my goal of becoming an IDVA, I will endeavour to do as much training as is available. I have already asked at the refuge if they have space for me to become a volunteer, which will allow me the experience to run alongside my qualifications. To follow my interest in becoming an IDVA SafeLives (no date) offer a specific qualification, Here in Wales the course is fully funded through the Government's framework. This offers me something to think about for my future, possibly when I finish my degree. CAADA suggest this is an area where services need to improve, and through the introduction of the domestic abuse framework policy and new legislation being introduced in (2020) hopefully I will be best placed to support this service.

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