

Task 2

Observation of Practice

Guidance:

*A learner must choose an observation of **direct social work practice** with people in need of care and support and/or their carers. The observation cannot be from giving evidence in court, contributing to strategy group meetings, case conferences or tribunals or any other indirect activity. The consent of the individual/s in need of care and support and/or their carers must be sought before the observation is undertaken. The observation must be undertaken by an observer who is social work qualified and has at least 3 years' experience (criteria set out in the Programme Handbook). The observation must be for a minimum of 30 minutes. The observer will gain feedback from the individual/s in need of care and support and/or their carers using either the pro forma below or one of the learner's own design at the end of the visit.*

The learner is responsible for providing a method of gathering feedback for the observer to use. This can be of their own design, and/or adapted to meet the needs of the individual. The provided pro forma can be used where appropriate. The method used will depend on age, ability and language/communication needs of the individuals in need of care and support and/or their carers.

This section will include examples of the ways in which effective communication impacts on practice in relation to language use, language needs and cultural sensitivity. You must demonstrate the principles of the "Active Offer" and make reference to "More than Just Words" (Welsh Government, 2012).

Please ensure you meet the Learning Outcomes for this task (See appendix 5 of the handbook).

Please answer the questions below.

Observation Summary

Please include name of the expert witness observing in learner's details section of the portfolio.

Date of observation: __ 23rd September 2022 _____

To be completed by learner.

Question:**Context**

Set out the social work objectives and give a brief description of the situation including geographical and legislative contexts and any relevant cultural, ethnicity and language issues, including how consent was gained and how you have considered the impact of the observation on the individual in need of care and support and/or their carers.

300 words (+/- 10%: include your actual word count at the end of each section).

A referral came into the department from a Housing provider to report concerns that a property had a lot of damage inside, and there were locks on the outside of the bedroom doors of the children. The family consisted of the mother, her three children (1, 2 and 3) and mother's partner. The family lived in rented Housing association accommodation in a town centre location. I felt that this would be a good opportunity for an observation as it may become a safeguarding situation and one I had not come across before. One of the parents was also reported to have acted aggressively during the visit by housing officers, and there were concerns for the welfare of the children. The family had been known previously to Children's services, and their ethnicity was noted as white, British, no religion was noted. Under the SSWBA (2014) it was agreed that an Assessment of Care and Support would be undertaken, and a home visit needed within 7 days of the referral.

I gained consent for the observation through a telephone call to the parents with responsibility for the children, prior to the home visit. Consideration was given to the Welsh language "Active Offer" (Welsh Government, 2012), although was not offered during the initial telephone call was offered in person on the visit. No other communication needs for any family members were identified at this point.

The key social work objectives to meet on this task related to assessing the needs and risks as per National Occupational Standards (Social Care Wales, 2017), as well as communicating effectively with the family, active listening and adopting a person-centred approach, whilst not making any assumptions. Lindsay (2013) states that equality is important in order to work collaboratively with people who need our support as well as showing empathy and understanding.

The impact of this observation on the children was considered, and that it may be strange for them to see two social workers in their home looking around, and that they may feel worried about that, so speaking to them alone to hear their voices and wishes was crucial.

Word count – 335

Question:

Critically reflect on your communication methods and skills during the observation; including how you identified whether you had the necessary communication skills to work with the individual in need of care and support and/or their carers.

You must use a person-centred approach to demonstrate the integration of social work ethics, values and the Code of Professional Practice. This must include culturally and linguistically sensitive practice and the principles of the “Active Offer” and make reference to “More than Just Words” (Welsh Government, 2012).

1300 (+/- 10%: include your actual word count at the end of each section).

On discussion with my manager regarding this case, it was agreed it was allocated as a SSWBA (2014) Assessment for Care and Support, and that another social worker would need to accompany me due to concerns shared in the referral about mother’s partner being aggressive. In preparation I checked the historical information on the system, where previous aggressive behaviour, concerns over substance misuse, and mental health was also noted. The social worker accompanying me then observed my practice.

The family consisted of mum, three children (child 1, 2 and 3) and mother’s partner living in a town centre home and had been known to children’s services in the past for neighbourly disputes, domestic abuse, substance misuse, concerns over mum’s partners aggressive nature, and mental health for both mother and her partner. During the initial telephone call to the mother who had parental responsibility, I was able to explain who I was, that a referral had come in and that I needed to make a home visit today, to see them and the children 1, 2 and 3. I felt I was adhering to the Code of professional Practice 5 (CoPP) (Social Care Wales, 2017), which states that social workers must act with integrity and uphold public trust. The mother agreed that my colleague and I could call to the home but that they were not home for another forty minutes or so, I said that I could wait until then for them to arrive home, mother agreed to this. I was apprehensive about how the family would react in the home visit and whether they would be hostile towards me given the background and referral information received, Koprowska (2008) describes “hostile” behaviour as shouting, swearing and making verbal threats.

On arrival to the home, mother invited us in, and her partner and the children were all present. Mum’s partner’s accent sounded like he was from the northern area of England, and when asked about language preference, he said he does not speak Welsh, and mum did not either, so they declined the active offer for the assessment to be undertaken in the Welsh language. The Welsh Government (WG), “More than words” five-year framework plan highlights that the number of Welsh speakers has increased, and that the aim is to increase that use of Welsh and create more favourable conditions in which to do this (WG, 2022). The framework states it is important to embed Welsh into the culture of

health and social care services, and how this can make a positive difference in people's lives (WG, 2022). I was aware that the family lived in a deprived area, and that they may feel oppressed by their environment.

I felt I was prepared for a hostile and defensive attitude from both the mother and her partner, however I explained from the start in an open and honest way, that we had a duty of care to visit the home to make checks due to concerns being shared with us. I felt I used a calm voice and engaged with all the family and the family dog on entry to the home to put them at ease. I considered my body language during the visit, and maintained eye contact, used an open and relaxed approach whilst using active listening skills by asking relevant questions after the family had spoken (Martin, 2010). It quickly became clear that the family were unhappy with the Housing department, due to the number of repairs needed in the home and were experiencing ongoing disputes with the neighbours. The Code of professional Practice (CoPP) highlights the need for social workers to promote the voice and control of people. I felt I used a person-centred approach as I listened to their worries about their situation. The mum became emotional at one point and said her anxiety was so bad due to the ongoing issues with neighbours and she was struggling to cope, I felt I was empathetic and patient towards her.

The mother and partner remained calm during the visit and allowed us to speak to all of the children alone during the visit, none of them disclosed that they had been locked in their rooms, but told me about the neighbours shouting abuse and that things needed to be fixed in the house. Despite there being evidence of locks on two, out of the three bedroom doors, one latch was not used and was broken, one was evident and used by the eldest child, (who was almost at adult age) and explained they locked their door when going out so the younger siblings would not go in to steal their things. When speaking to child 2 and 3, I sat at their level, and spoke generally about school, friends and home life and they engaged well. Child 2 spoke of how their mum and mums' partner both had mental health problems, I was concerned that child 2 was aware of too much of the worries of parents and being subjected to this every day.

The British Association of Social Workers have a Code of Ethics (2021) which states that social workers should have respect for people's rights to make their own choices, and that we should address barriers to equality and injustices. Martin (2010) describes how our own personal and professional values can overlap at times, and in this visit, I did not necessarily agree with the parent's negative approach and attitude towards housing and their neighbours, and that maybe they had not been pro-active in the process, I was also aware I had not heard from the neighbours perspective.

Mathias (2015, p.468) states that "... critical thinking in social work is generally treated as a form of practical reasoning". On reflection, I came out of the visit feeling that there was a lot more unanswered questions and felt maybe that I should have been more assertive in my approach and asked more questions. I felt that the family definitely needed support and I was concerned that there was a negative impact on the children's wellbeing due to the issues reported. I felt I had addressed the immediate safeguarding concerns, but that there were clearly a lot more issues going on. Interpersonal skills are crucial in social

work in order to relate and communicate with people, a high level of knowledge does not mean hold much value if interpersonal skills are lacking (Thompson and Stepney, 2018).

Paul and Elder (2005) promote critical reflection and describe how a practitioner needs to raise questions, be open about their assumptions and communicate effectively. I felt that I had made assumptions from the information in the referral that mother's partner was going to be aggressive and abusive towards me, but in fact, he was pleasant and calm throughout, although frustrated about the home situation and feeling let down by their housing provider. I feel that the family felt I took the time to listen and even though was not promising that we could ensure Housing made the repairs, but that we needed to work collaboratively them to improve their home life. The SSWBA (2014), promotes partnership working and it is well documented that safeguarding children where there may be neglect or abuse means the social worker must collate a "jigsaw" of information and then evaluate it (Davies and Duckett, 2010, p.111). This was an initial visit and further information would then need to be collated through visits and information gathered from other agencies likes school and health, which the family consented to me doing.

I felt that the main barriers to communication during this visit were that both mum and her partner were very much focussed on the housing providers lack of support and help with the repairs. I felt that it was difficult to talk about any other issues, and mum's partner acted in an over-powering way at times. Although both parents openly admitted they struggle with their mental health, but targeted the blame of this on the neighbours and housing. I feel that I need to adopt a level of "critical depth" in my practice to look further than what is seen on the surface and address the underlying problems (Thompson and Stepney, 2018). I felt that overall, I was able to communicate effectively with the children and family, and had positive feedback from the parents after the observation whilst also addressing the safeguarding concerns.

Word count - 1396

Feedback and comments from individual in need of care and support and/or their carers

Information for the observer

This section of the Observation should not be completed in the presence of the learner.

No formal written feedback is required from the observer on the learner's practice. However verbal feedback should be provided to the learner as soon as possible after the observation. If the observer is not the mentor, then feedback should also be provided to the mentor.

Some or all of the questions below may be used by the observer who can rephrase and add explanations and prompts as required. The observer should record responses from the individual in need of care and support and/or their carers below, or by using an alternative method if required/provided.

Before asking the questions, the observer must explain to the individual comments will be shared with the learner. It may be useful to explain that it is used as a learning tool for the learner to develop their own practice.

If the observer is unable to gain feedback, they should briefly say why.

Was the social worker on time? Or, if delayed, did he or she contact you?	We were grateful that Kate waited outside the home for us to return as this took quite some time, we were grateful that Kate had visited promptly to keep us informed on the worries and to clear things up.
Did the social worker get your permission in advance for the observer to be present? Did they explain why they were being observed?	Kate explained clearly that Nicole was present observing her which we accepted.
Were you clear why the social worker met with you today?	Kate explained the concerns that had led to today's visit, she gave us the opportunity to show her around the house and have our say on the issues raised. Kate explained what will happen next too.
How well prepared do you think the social worker was for his or her meeting with you?	Kate seemed prepared, she had the information she needed from housing and answered our questions.

How has the social worker listened to you and respected your views and wishes?	We thanked Kate for taking the time to listen to our side of the story, we have spoken to other social workers and police recently and not felt listened.
Did the social worker talk to you in a way that you understood? Did the social worker consider your language needs?	Yes, Kate explained everything to us and took the time to listen to us. Kate also spoke to the children and listened to them too.
How has the social worker's involvement met your expectations for this visit?	We were happy that Kate explained the worries to us and checked everything out in the house to make sure it was safe and suitable for the children.
Are there any other comments or suggestions that you would like to make?	We have had lots of issues with the police recently, it was nice to feel listened to when Kate visited us.