



**GRADUATE CERTIFICATE in Consolidation
of Social Work Practice
LEVEL 6 - 60 Credits
BMPF6044**

**LEARNER PORTFOLIO
(PORTH AGORED and UNIVERSITY OF WALES
TRINITY SAINT DAVID)**

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Cohort: 21 onwards

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: 10/07/2024

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).

This observation involved a visit to parent 1. He has a partner (parent 2) who has been incarcerated for ten years. They have child (1) and parent 2 is pregnant. An unborn baby assessment was required to assess whether baby could reside on the Mother and Baby Unit. Concerns had been raised by other agencies about parent 1's ill health, home conditions and his parenting ability. It became clear during the assessment process that grandparents caring for child 1. As a result of the uncertainty around child 1's living arrangements, coupled with the uncertainty of UBB's placement on the unit, a Legal Planning meeting was held. It was decided that an application should be made to Court for an Interim Care Order, in order to ensure the ongoing safety of the child. The PLO (Public Law Outline) process is the legal framework for care and supervision proceedings in England and Wales, and this is the framework that I was following. (Ministry of Justice, 2014).

Child 1 is currently in the care of maternal grandparents, the purpose of the visit was to talk the plan through with parent 1 and get his consent for child 1 to remain with grandparents under a Section. 76 arrangement (Sec. 76, Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act (2014) until a court date has been confirmed. This visit also provided the opportunity to discuss the ongoing care and support needs, the expectations of the Local Authority and the support we would be providing.

I had discussed the observation with parent 1 beforehand. On arrival, I explained again to ensure he understood. The active offer had been offered during previous visits and a Welsh speaker not required. (Social Care Wales, 2017).

Prior to the visit, I ensured all paperwork was completed and written in a way that parent 1 could understand (without the use of acronyms and jargon). I printed out copies for parent 1 to keep, so that he could refer to them again if required.

Word count: 330

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).

Initially, I feel that parent 1 engaged well with me with the conversation. As I had already been working with this family for some time prior to this observation, using the ‘Active Offer’ (Welsh Government, 2016) I had previously discussed whether he wanted to be communicated with in the Welsh language, which he declined. I explained once more the reason for my mentor’s presence and reiterated that she was there solely to observe my practice. Again, I asked if this was ok, to which he agreed.

I considered my body language and sat down with him to ensure he felt as comfortable as possible. I used open body language such as leaning in slightly, ensuring my arms were not crossed and making consistent eye contact to evidence that I was listening actively to what he was saying. He said he had been making progress with improving the home conditions which was evident. Given the difficult subject matter, I felt it was important to recognise the positives that had been made in order to try and ensure parent 1 remained empowered to keep working with the Local Authority. I was mindful of ensuring that the conversation remain person centred and that child 1 remained the focus of the discussion as ultimately, child 1 is the reason for our prolonged involvement. The Code of Professional Practice (Social Care Wales, 2017) states that social workers should ‘communicate in an open, appropriate, accurate and straightforward way’. Given the complexity of the discussion, I was mindful of the language that I used, and was aiming to communicate as openly as possible, in a way in which parent 1 could understand. However, I also considered that this was not a difficult conversation for parent 1 to have and anticipated that it may be a tense discussion. Gorman (2009) states that one of the roles a social worker has is to explain and answer questions from service users. Parent 1 had some questions about the process that I attempted to answer as fully as possible. However, I was mindful that despite my attempts to explain, parent 1 struggled to fully comprehend and process what I was saying, which on reflection, led me to consider the power dynamic in more depth.

Smith (2008) discusses the concept of power in the role of the social worker, and suggests that social workers need to have an awareness not just of the authority that comes with the job role, but also the power dynamic that exists between the professional and service user, and the need to promote service user’s rights and interests in a non-judgemental manner. It is worth noting, that parent 1 himself has had his own experiences of social care dating back to when he was a child and by his own admission held preconceived ideas about my involvement and felt that from his perspective social worker’s do little to help families and tend to make matters worse by being involved. Whilst parent 1 may have considered that my actions were only evidencing this view further, I would argue that regardless of this, being

honest and trustworthy (Section 2.1, COPP, 2017) is one of the key skills needed as an effective practitioner, however difficult this may be to hear.

Dominelli (2002) discusses the power dynamics that exist, suggesting that working using a person-centred approach may at times place social workers in conflict with the structures they work within. In this case, I found it quite difficult to explain to parent 1 that I needed to balance the needs of the child within the structures and legal frameworks in which we operate, with his own rights as a parent. For example, Article 8 of the Human Rights Act (1998) states that individuals have the '*right to respect for private and family life*'. This is parent 1's right as the child's parent, however Section 1 of the Children Act (1989) discusses the welfare of the child and how this should be paramount in any decisions that are made. I considered this further and recognise that at times, the legal frameworks and structures in which we operate can be conflicting. In terms of communication, I did not consider that explaining these differences in legislation to parent 1 would have been beneficial, as this may have confused matters further. Whilst as social workers we endeavour to uphold the requirements of the COPP, it is important to remember that whilst we can attempt to share power with service users as much as possible, we cannot always remain equal in terms of co-production.

Reflecting critically on my communication methods and skills, I feel that this observation was mixed in terms of success. Whilst I feel I was able to explain clearly to parent 1 what the paperwork meant as well as what the next steps in the process would be, I felt that my explanation was not fully understood by parent 1. I reflected on the discussion later with my supervisor, and considered the emotional attachment to the discussion that parent 1 had, which I did not. (Reference) Further reflecting, I considered his understanding again as well as the communication methods I used. I recognise that there were times during the conversation where parent 1 would not listen and would interrupt and talk over me, which I found frustrating. I had to alter the communication approach I was using mid-way through the conversation in order to ensure that the discussion remained focused on the subject matter in hand. At the start of the interaction, I felt my active listening skills were evident whereas as the conversation progressed, I recognised that this was becoming increasingly difficult which impacted on my ability to communicate effectively.

Reflecting further, in future I would consider the timing of the visit. Parent 1 had already told me earlier in the day via text message that he was tired and wanted to go to sleep. However, because of the time frame I was working within it was not possible to change the time of the meeting. In addition, the reason for parent 1's tiredness was that he had not been to bed the night before. As this was one of the original concerns, I did find it difficult to empathise with him. At this point I recognised that my own personal values started creeping into my thought process.

On evaluation, I feel that the working relationship between parent 1 and myself is somewhat fractured and becoming increasingly difficult to navigate. I feel this is a direct result of the interactions and interventions that have been carried out thus far, and parent 1's lack of acceptance of the concerns that have been highlighted during the assessment process. Whilst the purpose of this visit was fulfilled, in that he signed the relevant paperwork, I feel this has negatively impacted the working relationship further. Ward, et al. (2018) emphasises how

important it is for social workers to develop positive relationships with the service users they support. I felt that in this case, the collaborative working relationship between parent 1 and I remained intact until the point where the PLO process was entered into.

Overall I do feel it the aims and objectives of the intervention were met. The paperwork element of the visit was discussed and Parent 1 signed the relevant documentation. I also discussed the support we would provide and I offered parent 1 several opportunities to discuss this further. On reflection, I will further consider my communication skills and how I can ensure any future conversations are dealt with calmly and effectively. In terms of the working relationship, although fractured it is important for me to ensure that I uphold the requirements of the COPP and continue to work with the family in an honest, open and transparent manner.

Word Count: 1297

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

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?	Yes, she was on time, although I forgot about it. She text me.
Did the social worker get your permission in advance for the observer to be present? Did they explain why they were being observed?	Yes, she text me and asked, I said it wasn't a problem but then I forgot about her coming today because I've been unwell.
Were you clear why the social worker met with you today?	Yes, to sign paperwork
How well prepared do you think the social worker was for his or her meeting with you?	She had everything with her we needed to go through.
How has the social worker listened to you and respected your views and wishes?	She has listened but feel that she sometimes doesn't understand my side of things.
Did the social worker talk to you in a way that you understood? Did the social worker consider your language needs?	Yes.
How has the social worker's involvement met your expectations for this visit?	I understand but want to go through paperwork with my partner before I sign anything.
Are there any other comments or suggestions that you would like to make?	No

