

A Typical morning in the life of an SJP Advisor

Start of the week.....

Return from the weekend rest and first task of the day, after making a cup of energy tea, is to catch up with all emails and text messages. Activity doesn't stop on the weekend and 2 customers have sent text messages on Sunday, including one asking for dates of the course being held this week, (even though I had already confirmed the same information on Friday). Typical characteristics of this client base is people have a number of medical appointments to work around and memory issues are common, patience and understanding are therefore prerequisite skills for the advisor. After replying to both, I scan to see if there are any communications regarding new job opportunities and spot that there is a role packing in a small local business being offered by the Employment Engagement Advisor. Immediately, an obvious candidate springs to mind. He is a customer who has packing experience and he is physically fit, which means he will be able to manage the heavy lifting involved. I send him the job details via email and then follow it up with a text, asking him to take a look and give me a call to discuss. I have a positive feeling about this one!



I look at the appointment schedule for the following day and smile as I realise Shaun is coming in to see me. He has aspergers, is in his late thirties and he has never had paid employment. He is very reserved and shy and feels that he has been 'parked' by a society that didn't know quite how to help him. He is pleased now to be on the programme and engages well, sitting in the waiting area, eager for the appointment to begin and reminding me *again* that he has arrived, if I am one minute late with the appointment start. Although Shaun finds it difficult to identify the help he requires himself, he enjoys listening to my suggestions for supporting him to move forward. I have learnt that when presenting these, he likes to know the full detail - the why, how, where and when, before mulling over and responding. A gentle nod of the head is a positive response and sudden shifting in his seat indicates that he is not keen - it's a communication system that works well for us!

Whilst I am certain that Shaun, who is a stickler for time, won't miss his appointment tomorrow, I know that the other scheduled customers all appreciate a reminder text and those with memory issues, often rely on them. 10 individual texts follow, each tailored with the specific appointment time and customer name included - the personal touch is important, along with the smiley face :)

Next, to check that the Training room is set up appropriately for the Confidence course that is running later in the morning. The attendees are all customers that need extra support with anxiety, resilience, coping mechanisms and confidence to manage their health, in the context of gaining employment. All of the attendees are nervous and two in particular are extremely anxious, and needed lots of encouragement from me to attend. It is important that the room is inviting and set up in an informal way, fire on early to warm the room, tea and coffee facilities laid out ready - maybe a biscuit or two as well. The worst case scenario for this group is that they arrive to a room that is set up as a 'school classroom' with a 'teacher' that selects individuals to stand up and speak. Some of them have shared with me traumatic and unpleasant memories of school days. I have briefed the trainer beforehand about the need to take small steps, be sympathetic and to interact at a group level rather than focussing on

individuals. I am reassured that she will do this, she is kind and caring whilst knowing her subject and adapting her style of delivery.

The volunteer customer, Anne, who is going to help with the course organisation arrives. Anne is also very nervous, it is only her second day of volunteering with us and she is a participant of the course as well as a volunteer, so doubly nervous! Despite this, she is soon meeting the clients at the door and welcoming them in, she records their arrival and takes them into the training room, making refreshments and reassuring them. It is obvious that the customers like her immediately and I hear her reassuring one of them that there is nothing to be nervous about and that everybody at Wheatsheaf is lovely and friendly. She is helping out with confidence, enthusiasm and purpose, you would never guess that it was only her second day of volunteering and it is great experience for her job goal of doing reception work.

The course underway and I settle down to see the first customer of the day for a face to face appointment. Billy has been unemployed for 15 years and he has several health conditions. However, in the last year, his health has stabilised and Billy is ready to move forward. He has a goal to go into work but is nervous about coming off benefits and also he is unsure of his capabilities and ability to sustain work. He has asked previously if I can help him understand what his financial position will look like if he goes into work and he has brought in the details that we identified for today's appointment. At this stage, he is fairly negative about the minimum wage and is certain that he will be worse off if he goes into work. Using the 'EntitledTo' system I showed him that he will be £89 per week better off and he is suddenly very animated. After explaining the breakdown of the results to Billy, he is clearly reassured about the security this provides for him and starts to talk enthusiastically about moving into work sooner rather than later. His worries about his health have suddenly become secondary and he states that he is sure he could 'manage' now. Billy and I agree that his next step should be to try some voluntary work to test his capabilities and build his stamina. Billy is not IT literate and looking at opportunities and applying will require my support, so we agree the next appointment date and time.

Lunchtime and the course is on a half hour break. I go into the training room and the customers are sitting together eating their sandwiches and chatting comfortably. I hear a conversation about gekkos and salamanders on one table and a sale that is on at 'The Works' on another. How's everything going I ask, they carry on talking between them and there is laughter - someone pipes up, 'it's great and I like the people'. I smile to myself and leave the room - I am not needed and nor is my reassurance! Onwards to my next appointment.....