

A Day in the Life of a WiSER Specialist Advocate

solace

My role:

As a Specialist Advocate for the WiSER Project, I provide trauma-informed support to women affected by multiple disadvantage who are often excluded from mainstream support. The WiSER project is unique in its ability to provide long-term flexible support with the understanding that disadvantage does not impact individuals in the same manner, and that this type of support service must be woman-led. We work with women over the age of 16 who are experiencing violence or abuse and are affected by severe and multiple disadvantage.

Disadvantages include housing/homelessness, substance misuse, poor mental health, poor physical health, insecure or uncertain immigration status, those affected by or at risk of prostitution, interaction with the Criminal Justice System, and history of children being removed from care/ at risk of further removals.

A typical day

Working for the WiSER project does not offer a typical day! We are lucky to be able to offer flexible support as and when it is needed in our service users' lives, as such the role varies from day to day. My work is community-based, and I offer outreach support. The emphasis is on meeting women where they are, and ensuring my support is trauma-informed, with the hope of engendering trust in future and further support services.

Today I am heading to a new referrals' accommodation to meet with her and the person who referred her. I have a new mobile phone for her. We meet at the property and the service user is not home. We speak with the upstairs neighbour and then discuss best ways to locate her and I introduce WiSER to the referrer. I leave a letter with my contact details



and another agreed date and time to meet with her. It is the nature of the role that one must be creative when trying to locate & engage a service user who does not have a direct means of contact.

This could mean anything from attending other services, to physically searching for someone at known locations (outside tube stations etc). This period before meeting a client and being able to offer support can be challenging. I have been trying to get in touch with this woman for a little over a month now. Any frustrations are assuaged by the knowledge that another service would have had to close her case.

After this meeting, I head to the police station to support a client to submit a follow-up report of an incident of DV. We meet at the police station and we speak briefly outside. She does not know if she wants to report; the perpetrator is a long-term partner who is

pressuring her to withdraw her statement. We talk through her options and in the end, she decides to go and speak with the PC. As I sit and listen to her statement I am struck by the resilience and strength emanating from this woman. This incident occurred some time ago; I submit my own statement and photos taken the day after the incident, as evidence. We walk to a café nearby, as the process at the police station was arduous and emotionally draining for her. Over a coffee, we speak about what her reporting means and what her options are going forward. We go over any updated safeguarding in terms of this reporting and the impact it will have on her relationship with the alleged perpetrator. We then speak about her taking time today to do something nice for herself, acknowledging that this morning was difficult and trying to actively take space away from it.

During this time, another client has texted to say she is off her Script and does not know what to do. I return to the office (home, these days!) in order to contact her Substance Misuse (SM) worker. My client has a history of missing appointments due to her mobility issues, and various other daily challenges. Her SM worker has frustrations about cancelled appointments and about her deteriorating physical health in relation to her substance misuse. There is often a disconnect between service goals and the goals of service users. I ask her SM worker to book a final appointment and I phone my client to update her and help her plan her journey there. She confirms a time and I report this back to her SM worker.

I write up my case notes from the day and complete any admin that needs doing.

What I love about what I do

The WiSER Project was created out of an understanding of multiple disadvantage and the way it impacts on people's lives. As a result, I feel I can give consistent support to women in the community who need it the most. I love working with these amazing

women, and I am in constant awe of their strength and humour. We work with women many services have declined to work with due to high risk, a person 'too chaotic' to be reached. I appreciate that I can work with someone closely, on a schedule that makes sense to them, working towards goals they have set. Sometimes the support I provide is as simple as emotional support, helping someone to book a GP appointment, or talking through their day. This, with the longer pieces of work we do, keeps the working week dynamic.

I love the flexibility of this work, and that no two days are alike. I believe working outreach in the community builds trust, as you are working in someone's environment. For many reasons, the WiSER project is successful in supporting women who are experiencing multiple disadvantage, and the structure of the project has been set up thoughtfully, to support both the service user and the Advocate.

One thing I wish I'd known when I started out

The WiSER project is driven by an understanding that women affected by multiple disadvantage may have a distrust of support services. Constant and conflicting everyday challenges stop women attending appointments and accessing support. I wish, having worked in other services, that this knowledge was widespread and reflected in practices!



Contact:
recruitment@solacewomensaid.org