

Coaching in Practice

Supporting newly qualified social workers

Over 30 executive and leadership coaches have been recruited to support newly qualified social workers throughout the UK, funded by the charity Frontline.

Frontline was set up in 2013 to recruit top graduates and career changers into social work to work with vulnerable children and their families. Trainees qualify as social workers in the first year, then in their second year, become employees of their local authority while studying for a master's degree. All programme participants have access to five one-on-one coaching sessions in their second year.

'We felt it was important to offer an independent space in addition to their supervision where they can feel comfortable about being vulnerable,' says Katherine Fisher, Leadership Coaching Officer. Since 2014, 384 participants have become newly qualified social workers through the programme, and a cohort of 340 starts this autumn.

'In their first year, trainees get peer support from other course participants, but in the second year, they move into new teams trying to make sense of the complex system around them, so coaching is important at this point,' says Anoshe Waheed, Frontline's Head of Programmes (Firstline and Coaching). 'Social work can be extremely challenging, especially when you are dealing with vulnerable children, so the coaching is there to help build resilience.' There can also be a lot of bureaucratic processes involved in working for local authorities, and coaching can help social workers reconnect with their values and self-reflect on why they became social workers in the first place, says Waheed: 'On a practical level, the coaching programme has also helped participants develop their sense of professional authority and self-confidence in advocating for families and we are already seeing this have a positive impact on outcomes for children and families.'

For more information on Frontline's work, see www.thefrontline.org.uk

Meet the member

Anni Townend is a leadership consultant, executive coach and author. She offers 'Walk and Talk' coaching for senior leaders across a wide range of organisations. www.annitownend.com



How would you describe your journey into coaching?

During my degree in communication studies, I became more and more curious about people, about their motives, preferences and behaviour, and particularly about their backgrounds. For a while, I trained as a child psychotherapist and got into my own therapy. I realised that I wanted to work with adults, trained as a co-counsellor and did a diploma in Humanistic Psychology. This led me to becoming a group facilitator and a leadership consultant in organisations. I continue to work one to one as an executive coach and as a leadership consultant.

Do you have a coaching niche?

My niche is working with the whole person, meeting people where they are and helping them to develop more of themselves. I help leaders to make sense of their story, to get clear on their values and beliefs, on the impact that they want to have on others, and the reputation that they aspire to create. I often do this with Walk and Talk - coaching on the move, often on the South Downs Way. I encourage people wherever they are to have these side-by-side conversations, to help facilitate moving through things and seeing things differently.

Where do you practise?

Place and space matter to me. When I am working with groups and teams of senior leaders, I usually work off-site in a hotel or similar. I always ask for a room with natural daylight, a circle of chairs, no tables, one flip chart and easy access to the outside, for Walk and Talk. I work one to one, either via

Skype or Zoom, and at my kitchen table, with easy access to the South Downs Way. Many of my clients enjoy not only the space but also the opportunity to have side-by-side conversations.

What are you most proud of having achieved?

In my personal life I am most proud of my family, in particular my two daughters and my relationship with them. I am proud of myself for having the courage and the confidence to follow my heart and passion. I have found a path that has enabled me to do the work I love, and to help leaders in organisations create environments in which people feel safe enough to be themselves and to understand each other better. I am grateful to all the people who have helped me along the way, and trusted me with their stories and their confidences.

What advice would you give to anyone interested in becoming an executive coach?

Get clear on your own values and beliefs, on the impact and reputation that you want to have and the difference you want to make through being an executive coach. Think about the environment that will help you flourish. I love the world of business and organisations, and it's important to find your love. Do get ongoing support and help - keep going for therapy and have supervision. And keep up with your continuing professional development (CPD) and learning.

Photo: Katie Vandyck