

Val Jacobs

Role: Volunteer Mentor



Kent
Surrey
& Sussex
Community Rehabilitation Company



Background: I was made redundant in 2006. I decided to change my career and start studying for a degree with the Open University. I started volunteering with Kent, Surrey and Sussex CRC to gain some new work experience.

My role: I have been supporting Harry* during my time as a volunteer. He lives in a flat but it isn't really suitable because one of his children has a severe disability. I have acted as an advocate for Harry with the local housing association and helped Harry to make calls and to fill out all the necessary paperwork. Within a month, Harry was offered a new home – one that is suitable for him and his family.

Paul* who is on a life licence, is another service user I've been supporting. He suffers from ill health and had been claiming Disability Living Allowance. However a year ago, he stopped receiving this benefit following a reassessment of his health. I supported Paul through the appeals process. At his last assessment, his score went from 0 to 29. As a result, his Disability Living Allowance was reinstated.

I have also been meeting with Stuart*. Stuart has a history of prolific offending linked to substance abuse. Stuart was referred to me because he didn't have a great support network. Most of his old associates were drug users. I initially met Stuart in prison and then arranged to meet him weekly on his release. I spent time listening to Stuart's problems and helping him to find his own solutions. I was also there to remind Stuart of how far he had come and what he had achieved if he was tempted to use drugs again.

My work kept Stuart engaged with the CRC and not only did he spend the longest period of time in the community without being rearrested, he also successfully completed his licence. This is because Stuart felt he had someone to turn to for support.

Best part of volunteering:

Flexibility: you only need to spare a few hours a week to help someone. It doesn't have to be a huge time commitment unless you want it to be.

Making a difference: the work I do may seem simple, such as providing help to fill out a housing form, but it can be instrumental to a person. Housing, employment, benefit/debt are linked to offending and if I can help to resolve these issues then I am also reducing the person's risk of reoffending in the future.

Building your skills: I get to build my skills while doing something worthwhile and rewarding. I have received lots of training and gained experience by directly working with service users and alongside probation staff.

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