

Your first...time setting up a services

Rose speaks to Ellie Jo, an occupational therapist about her first experience of setting up a service during the Covid pandemic.

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Rose [01:00:04]

Welcome back to another episode of your First of Everything. Today I am joined by Ellie, who was an occupational therapist, and she's going to talk to us about her first experience of setting up a service during the Covid pandemic. Hi, Ellie. How are you?

Ellie [01:00:18]

Hi, I'm good. Thank you. Thank you for having me.

Rose [01:00:21]

Good know, You're very welcome. So tell me about this service that you set up. What? What is it? So the service that I ended up setting up was actually during the Covid pandemic. So it was a homeless service looking at kind of offering health needs assessments to those experiencing homelessness. It was a really. Yeah, good service to, to be part of setting up. Yeah, that sounds really, really good. So what made you want to set that service up?

Ellie [01:00:50]

So it was actually due to a government initiative. So I was actually in a physical health team before the pandemic kind of came around as a newly qualified occupational therapist. and as the pandemic kind of came upon us all and we were kind of stepped down when we weren't urgent services, the opportunity came up really, that the government wanted to get everybody in. It was the initiative, the everybody in initiative, and they placed people in temporary accommodation, hotels, bed and breakfast bedsits almost anywhere they could get anyone. Yeah, what we recognised is I say we I mean that very loosely obviously, but what the government recognised really was that there was a real need for these people to have some input from health and they needed some support in the settings that they were putting them in. So they came to. The National Health Service at large, I believe, and asked for some support and some help. And the trust that I work for, they decided to put a role of homeless health care practitioner and was the kind of title and we started doing it. There was a few of us actually within my team that started doing it

as kind of over time to begin with. It wasn't a kind of post at the time, it was just a case of anyone that wanted to volunteer some time to help. And we obviously all had quite a lot of spare time, sadly, with being stuck indoors for for a little while. Yeah. and it was a case of anyone that wanted to help could do these assessments over the telephone. So I started doing it then, and then the role kind of came out and it was a case of, you know, we're looking for an occupational therapist, a social worker, you know, a physiotherapist. It could have been anyone to come and, and interview and apply for this role and set up this service and make it your own. Really. So I took it as an opportunity to kind of develop as a practitioner, and I felt my skills as an occupational therapist, looking at the person as a whole would have been really useful. So I applied for it and I definitely didn't think I was going to get it at first. That's just my imposter syndrome, I think, kicking in. But obviously I was successful and that's kind of how it began, really.

Rose [01:03:13]

Well, So you qualified during the Covid pandemic, didn't you?

Ellie [01:03:17]

I did. I was about, I think, maybe nine, ten months in before the pandemic hit. And I'd practised I'd kind of trained out of area as well. So it's kind of already trying to get my head around all the different systems and the way that the trust that I now work for obviously back home operated, and then, yeah, got hit by a pandemic kind of very early on, just as I'd started kind of settling in, I suppose.

Rose [01:03:42]

So you qualified. Then you set up a new service. You were quite busy during that time. I was.

Ellie [01:03:48]

I was. I mean, initially after qualifying, I kind of came into a there wasn't many jobs actually in the area, so I was panicking, if I'm honest. Yeah. but actually I kind of came into a lovely team that were really supportive and it was a really good move for my career. It's given me a really good kind of ground knowledge of physical health and obviously mental health, but it was a primarily physical health service. And then, yeah, then it was kind of nine months in the pandemic hit. And then I think I was 18 months in before I took this job to develop the service. But again, within the first two years of my career, I've done more than I probably thought I would have done when I was at university. I know role emerging placements, role emerging practice was something that really concerned me and was very clear that I didn't want to do it when I was at university. So it was just really kind of ironic that 18 months in I've ended up well. I ended up kind of having a role emerging service that I set up and created. Yeah, it was like my little baby.

Rose [01:04:44]

I think it's absolutely fantastic, though, that you've, you know, you've gone from that point where you thought, Oh, no, I'm never going to do this. I don't want to do that. And then actually you're thrown into the deep end and you've done really, really well. You know, it's admirable for what you have done and to where you are now. So how this is always a question that I think sometimes people go, oh, hang on, but how

does it feel to know you've made a difference in some of these lives in a lot of people's lives setting up this service? How does that feel?

Ellie [01:05:16]

It is a hard one. Yeah, it's absolutely a hard one. I think especially in our profession, we don't like to. Well, we don't talk about ourselves enough, do we? Occupational therapists. But I think the biggest thing as well is that we don't like to take credit and it is because it's a team approach. You know, we can't do what we do without having support from other people. So I think the way I see it is, like I say, my physical health team that I was working with to begin with give me a lot of knowledge and skills. I kind of took every opportunity I could to begin with, develop my knowledge as fast as possible. and then, yeah, to be given this opportunity and I recognise this opportunity doesn't come around for everyone. It's not something that's offered everywhere as well. And I think really value the fact that I was kind of given the job. And I think, you know, looking back at it now, I've done nearly three years in the service. and I think really, yeah, I see it's those with multiple disadvantage that really need the support and you can have so much valuable interaction with them in a way that you don't necessarily, you know, you do see it in mainstream services, but we're so short on time and we struggle so much kind of with waiting lists and with all them kind of day to day things that we have to do admin wise, that when I was able to set up a service, I was able to make it my own. So I was able to spend more time with people. I was able to have them conversations with people that, What do you actually need? What can I do to actually help? What matters to you? The biggest thing in occupational therapy, what matters to you and to see the outcomes of that was amazing. And you know, the feedback from, from the individuals didn't call them patients. you know, it was kind of a little bit different. But to have the, the feedback from, from clients, from these people experiencing such a hard time at the moment to say that actually, you know, it's been lovely to speak to someone who listened and to have that kind of feedback. It wasn't all the time. You know, sometimes people, you know, just didn't say it or sometimes people maybe didn't feel that way or and but the majority of the time it was just a case of just thank you for listening to me and thank you for being part of my journey. And, and yeah, it's really humbling, isn't it? I think, to, to be able to try and even offer just a listening ear and, but then when you can actually find some solutions, it does make you feel, you know, really proud of yourself as a practitioner, as a clinician, to see them skills you've learned at university and work so hard for and are benefiting people. And to hear the success stories. I mean, I had a particular individual that was in the newspaper because it was such a success, a veteran who we'd managed to rehouse close to family links and was really settled, you know, ended up in a relationship that he felt was impossible for him before. And, you know, attending to his kind of self care and looking after himself and feeling so much better. And, you know, it was things like that that didn't feel real at first. I didn't feel like I'd done much to contribute. But as I've looked back and reflected, I've realised that, yeah, that that is wow, that's it just makes me feel, you know, really, really privileged to have been part of this journey and, yeah, well, it's part of part of the journey for anyone really. it's great.

Rose [01:08:39]

It's moments like that, I think, when. Working in the healthcare sector regardless, it is when you actually feel like, Wow, I've really done something there. You don't realise it in the moment like you've just said. But when you sit in there, you know, you reflect

back, you realise that actually what you've done has impacted someone's life, not just a little bit, but a lot. It's life changing and you know, you should be extremely proud of that. I know that a lot of people that would listen to this will also feel probably extremely proud of you for doing what you've done. and also, I think a really important point in there that actually take note of the things that you have done in people's lives, you know, the difference that you've made for them. Often we don't do that, and that is something that I think we should do more often and also celebrate those little wins or the big wins that we have. often, you know, it is that a lot of the time it's negative. Oh, I didn't do this or I forgot to do that. Actually, look at what you did do that day.

Ellie [01:09:45]

Absolutely. And I think you're absolutely right. I think it's all about reflection. And I know that as students on placement, reflection and do a reflective piece is something that you kind of go, Oh, yeah, but actually you use it far more than you realise when you are qualified. And it's it's such a valuable tool because you can get sucked into the kind of 9 to 5, the Monday to Friday, the, you know, seeing patient after patient or, you know, trying to kind of meet targets meet demands and and you do forget you forget what you're doing to someone. And it could be something really small. But what something really small to you or what something really small to the general public or to that individual that you've supported can be huge. And I think it's recognising that, isn't it? And it's, you know, if you ever think you're having a really bad day and you think, I've just not done, I can't get anything right, you actually just sit and look because you've probably got more right than you think.

Rose [01:10:39]

Yeah, completely agree. And sometimes it is literally for me, you know, I'm a registered nurse, So looking back at that, for me, it's getting somebody a blanket or that sandwich that they really, really, really wants.

Ellie [01:10:52]

Yeah. When they have no they can't get out of bed themselves to go and get it or, you know, obviously from an occupational therapy point of view, we encourage independence as possible. We recognise it's not always possible, like you say, for somebody to kind of get that. But when you have your choice taken away from you because you become unwell, things like that do make a difference. They give a bit of a smile, don't they?

Rose [01:11:14]

Of course, of course. What advice would you give to any student that is trying to set up a service of their own?

Ellie [01:11:23]

I think my biggest piece of advice is probably be believe in yourself. Believe in yourself, even if it's a case of fake it til you make it. I know it's a very cliché saying, but sometimes you just have to back yourself. Just, yeah, believe in yourself and you can actually achieve things that you didn't think possible. I was like I say, complete anti no, I don't want to do anything role emerging. It's too muddy. The boundaries aren't clear enough. It's too waffle. I'm scared I'm going to do something wrong. But actually I'm three years in nearly to a service that's had nothing but positive

feedback. And you know, we've had really, really good outcomes. And I just think if I wouldn't have taken this opportunity, I'd have regretted it, I'd have really regretted it. And I think it was just a case of I've yeah, I just took it with both hands, even if I didn't think I was good enough sometimes. And yeah, I look back at it now and I just think, yeah, I've learned so much as a clinician, I've learned so much as a person and I don't regret it for a moment.

Rose [01:12:22]

Brilliant. That that is wonderful feedback. Have you got any future aspirations?

Ellie [01:12:28]

I think I want to go into more mental health at the moment. I think that's kind of where my journey is taking me at the minute. I don't know specifically kind of where that's going to take me, but I think being in the service that I've worked in, I've seen the real need for occupational therapy and mental health possibly and maybe a different setting than just kind of the, the ward based and or we have the community teams as well. but I'm kind of looking at, you know, other opportunities maybe within the primary care sector, or potentially completely going a different route or, and setting up a different service. I'm always on the lookout now for things that can put my stamp on and ways that can help make change from a health perspective for the benefit of obviously the people that we work with and potentially, you know, myself in future. In the future, you know, I might need these services, my family might need these services. And if I've gone away, can influence what their services look like using my occupational therapy skills, I'm going to take it from now on.

Rose [01:13:28]

Fantastic. It's been an absolute pleasure speaking to you. I wish you all the best in the future and thank you very much for coming today.

Ellie [01:13:36]

Thank you very much. It's been lovely speaking to you.

Rose [01:13:39]

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