

The five most important skills for social workers

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The five most important skills for social workers to possess include flexibility and a keen eye for detail, according to NonStop Care.

It's well documented that the social care industry is facing a severe and widespread skills shortage but it is also a field where soft skills are key, which means people can easily move into social worker careers should they have the following traits.

David Lord, a Team Leader at NonStop Care and a finalist in the Best Consultant category of the 2016 Recruitment Business Awards, outlines the sought after qualities:

Flexibility – “The situation for any social worker can change rapidly and you need to be able to react accordingly. The average social worker has between 14-75 caseloads to deal with and the scope of these can vary dramatically. One minute you might be conducting interviews with a client and the next you might be dealing with a completely unrelated incident or even a conflict between the service user and their family or friends. Being able to think on your feet is hugely important, particularly at a time when professionals are being pushed to be ever more time efficient.”

Time management – “It's because of this drive for efficiency that social workers need to be able to allocate their time effectively, in order to fit in the numerous tasks they'll likely have to complete. We all know there are significant shortages across a number of sectors, and the issue is particularly acute within social work. You'll have to juggle responsibilities regardless of your role and will likely have to deal with a number of clients, so being able to manage your time independently is critical.”

Empathy and resilience – “You may think these are two drastically different qualities, but in social work they often come hand in hand. Professionals need to be understanding and approachable and will have to deal with loss, grieving families, distressed service users and numerous other hurdles they'll face every day. Being empathetic allows you to better deal with these issues, but it's because of them that you'll also need to possess a significant amount of resilience as the role can be extremely demanding and emotionally draining. That said, it can also provide you with job satisfaction that is essentially unrivalled.”

Eye for detail – “Whatever your position or seniority level, after a certain point you'll have to be involved in areas like making referrals for medication or behavioural treatment and will have to maintain and monitor patient records very closely in case you have to prepare them for legal reports. In addition, you'll also have to keep in mind various people's different care plans, as well as their personal preferences and needs and also keep track of their mood. The people in your care might not tell you when they are feeling down, but it is important someone is able to pick up on the signs in order to help them, which leads onto the next point.”

Communication – “Being able to communicate effectively with a range of different people with various beliefs, backgrounds and psychological needs is absolutely critical if you want to be a successful

practitioner. In many cases you might be one of the client's few points of contact and being able to build trust and speak to them on both a professional and personal level can make them feel considerably more comfortable. You'll also have to interact and work together with your colleagues on occasion, many of whom may be new to the country as well as the expectations of patients' families, who might be unaware of the extent of the support they may require. And of course, like any industry, if you have knowledge of foreign languages, you're going to become considerably more employable."