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WHAT IS YOUR STORY?

Where Are They Now...
Hayley Atkins?

This short article aims to review my career within the probation service. It will consider the reasons and factors leading to joining the probation service, where I am now, some career highlights and my views on the future of probation.

I have always had a strong interest in crime, criminal justice and the psychology of people who commit crimes. I completed an undergraduate degree in Forensic Psychology and Criminal Justice and during the latter part of my degree, I volunteered as a Special Constable in Cheshire Police which I continued following graduation until I applied to the National Probation Service. In 2014, in the aftermath of TR, there was a national recruitment for trainee probation officers who would complete the Probation Qualification Framework. This involved six months of work-based learning with the completion of some VQ units, followed by nine months of further VQ units alongside a post-graduate diploma in Community Justice. I completed my training in Cheshire, however, as a newly qualified probation officer, I was appointed to North Liverpool.

Working in North Liverpool brought a new dimension to the role and new areas to apply the skills I learned during my training. I was positioned within a tremendous team that instilled loyalty, support, knowledge and resilience. Working within this team at that time will always hold such fond memories. From the experiences within this team, I gained confidence in my abilities which I will always remember. The complexities of gangs and violence went from being something I was apprehensive and anxious



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about, to being something that was part of my generic caseload. The team was normalised to chaos and extreme violence being committed by people on probation and were great at supporting each other as a sounding board or jointly attending appointments. The management was appreciative of hard work, and as this was before working from home became normalised, they were physically present in the offices most of the time. One of my fondest memories was joining up with a colleague once a fortnight to complete our home visits. This ensured they were always completed on time, and together we enjoyed a day out of the office.

There was one lovely gentleman that we often visited in Crosby, who always had cakes ready from a local bakery when we visited. This person had been to prison and was released on licence. He was so appreciative of the home visits as his health conditions meant he could not travel on public transport to the office. He sadly became very unwell and passed away, at his funeral he made sure to mention our visits to his friends. His eulogy shared how much it had meant to him to gain support from people he thought initially would be there only to punish him. This truly highlights the impact that probation practitioners have on people's lives.

I began a Master of Law in 2018 as I had a desire to learn more about the law, the statute and the underpinnings of the provision I was working in. I completed this part-time, one day a week having condensed my hours in Probation. This reignited my learning, the love of knowing the "why" around things I was seeing in practice. I completed my master's at Liverpool John Moore's University which is also where I had studied for my undergraduate degree before joining Probation. During my master's degree, I moved to North Cheshire Magistrates Court to gain experience as a court report writer. This was a temporary position to provide maternity cover for a fixed term, providing experience in the court system and a change from case management.

I returned to case management in Cheshire in September 2021 and in a full circle moment, I returned to the office where I had originally trained. I was allocated a general caseload of males to work with however, I was keen to consider options for professional development. I saw an advert for a Stalking SPOC within my PDU

and was then allocated the role. This meant that in addition to holding a generic caseload, I gained responsibility for those convicted of Stalking or Harassment who posed a high risk of serious harm and I was the linked Probation Officer in one of the three Multi-Agency Stalking Intervention Programmes (MASIPs)- the Harm Reduction Unit (HRU) within Cheshire Police.

This role appealed to me as it provided further multi-agency work and a new experience as I had not previously worked with people convicted of stalking. At the time I began working with the Unit, Stacey Dooley's documentary about stalkers had just been released. I was able to see some of the work and victim focus of the Unit from the front-line perspective through the TV series. It was quite strange to see Stacey Dooley on TV sitting in my Probation Office in Cheshire. By watching this and meeting the team I could see that the passion for tackling stalking and supporting victims was so evident. It also reignited my passion to learn, to contribute to this team and I felt like I had found my niche in the Probation Delivery Unit.

I was funded to complete an online course in Stalking Risk Profiling by Dr Rachel MacKenzie and Professor Troy McEwan which encompassed the stalking profiles presented by Mullen et al. (2000). The awareness and understanding of the psychological profiling of those evidencing stalking behaviours was a powerful tool to me as a Probation Officer. This profiling is also used by the clinical psychologist in the Harm Reduction Unit, so it not only aided my understanding of stalking but also developed the skills and ability to actively participate in case discussions.

From this I noted the key themes within stalking typologies, and the likelihood that many people convicted repeatedly for breach of non-contact conditions may be exhibiting a pattern of stalking behaviours, I then spoke to my manager about delivering training to my team. I developed a stalking briefing which highlighted the behaviours of stalking, the motivations and the risks. The briefing also highlighted details of my role as the SPOC and the support offered by the HRU. This was the first presentation I had created and presented to my team during my career. I remained in this role for a couple of years but felt ready for a change when I saw an advert for a position at Liverpool John Moore's University.

The advertised role was to be a PQiP Academic Tutor for the PQiP Programme at LJMU. The university had secured the contract for the North-West and Greater Manchester region, and it was the university where I had completed two previous degrees. I applied for the job and one of the questions was to provide evidence of creating and presenting information to others so the Stalking briefing that I had created fulfilled the requirement perfectly.

I was appointed and began my transition from probation practitioner to academic. I have loved being able to use my experience and love of learning to support and inspire the learning of others. I have been able to use my experiences to ensure that the content of the PQiP programme relates to practice. I have maintained a strong passion for stalking awareness and research. I attended the Alice Ruggles Trust Conference in November 2024, joined by some of my previous colleagues from the Harm Reduction Unit. The

Ruggles Trust Awards took place on the first evening of the conference and Cheshire's Harm Reduction Unit won the "Working Together" award. In the true spirit of this award, I was invited up to collect their award as part of their team. This was a real highlight and embedded the importance of that SPOC role as a catalyst to my continuing career.

I now have a wonderful opportunity to work with the next generation of Probation Officers and the enthusiasm, quality and work-ethic of the PQiP students I have met fills me with confidence for the future of the Probation Service. I hope that the short-term quick fixes of workload management are stopped and that the focus of probation is clarified following a long-term review involving front-line probation staff.

Joining Probation as a trainee Probation Officer is something that I will always be proud of. The journey of qualifying was such an achievement, and I felt proud to have the responsibilities that I had. I would recommend people work towards their areas of interest and push to be as equipped and ready for change as this will best help them to support the people on probation. Whilst I have moved away from the Probation Service, I proudly disclose being a qualified probation officer in my current role and this will remain closely linked to my roots for the rest of my career.

Reference

Mullen, P.E., Pathé, M., Purcell, R. (2000) *Stalkers and their Victims*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge