

POSITIVE SOCIAL WORK

THE ESSENTIAL TOOLKIT FOR NQSWs

Julie Adams and Angie Sheard

Second Edition

**CRITICAL
SKILLS FOR
SOCIAL WORK**

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TOOLKIT FOR NQSWs

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Meet the authors

Julie Adams

Julie began working in residential care in 1992, working within children's disability before moving to mainstream settings. Having qualified in 1999, she then moved to field social work and has worked in a variety of settings including child protection, adoption, looking after children and within a hospital setting. Julie worked her way through the ranks from social worker to team manager. Julie mentors social workers, is a Practice Educator and delivers training for students entering social work. Julie has also co-written a second book.

Angie Sheard

Angie began working in residential care with children in 1982 and qualified as a social worker in 1987. After having moved to work in the voluntary sector, she returned to statutory social work in 2002, where she worked predominantly with children, young people and families; she left full-time practice in 2010 to work on other projects and has since worked in advocacy, adult mental health and drug and alcohol education and now combines part-time work with ad hoc project work and training.



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Preface

Hello new colleague and welcome to the world of the social worker!

This is an exciting and challenging time for social work with many changes happening all around. Over recent years there has been much negativity both within and around the profession; however, ongoing developments now present us with a good opportunity to move forward positively and embrace the future. We, too, must confess to being sucked into negative ways of thinking ourselves at times but having the opportunity to write this book has been great for us as we have been able to take stock of where things are at for ourselves (you will hear more about taking stock – or ‘pressing the pause button’ – later on) and for the profession as a whole, and we now find ourselves looking forward to a brighter and more positive and productive future. There are many new developments in social work and we hope that we have managed to give credit to all, and to get things right too, in our work here. We also acknowledge the hard work of colleagues in the development of the service and recognise that we are part way down the path to a new future, and that this continues to be strewn with challenges.

This is a great time to qualify as a social worker and this book is written for all Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) wherever you live or practise. Though we discuss developments in England, this book applies equally to all NQSWs in the UK who are about to enter the profession and who will be looking to thrive in their first year of practice.

Things are happening fast and you are a part of it! This book is designed to help you along the way – throughout your Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) and beyond. For existing workers in England who are directly affected by new developments, there may be uncertainty and this in itself may lead to some experienced workers becoming uncertain in the short term and thinking that too much is happening too quickly. The advantage for you is that this is all new to you as an NQSW and you will be in it from the beginning with no preconceived ideas or expectations of ‘how it used to be’.

The book introduces a Toolkit which will assist in gathering evidence for the ASYE (for those of you in England) and each chapter is designed to link to the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF). Once you have worked through the chapters you will be encouraged to think about which areas of capability you are developing, to fill in the Toolkit and to build up your evidence portfolio. The earlier you begin this process the better, and the Toolkit is designed to be used as a prompt and a talking point in supervision. If you do not need or want to use the Toolkit then the chapters stand alone and will be of great benefit to you all.

The chapters in this book will help you to gain a greater understanding about yourself and how you deal with stress and difficult situations, help you achieve a positive work–life balance, develop your emotional resilience, show you where to look for support and what to watch out for along the way; in short – how to be the best you can be. Each chapter contains a case study and activities designed to make you think about your practice. At the end of each chapter you will be given ideas on where to look for further information and support and you will be encouraged to think about what new habits you will develop from your learning. There is a wealth of public information on the internet, and many good publications which cover the topics in this book; your colleagues, family and friends are all there to assist too.

This is not a theoretical book – although some theory is referenced – rather, it is written as a practical, down-to-earth guide which aims to help all NQSWs as they move into practice. Though specifically targeted at NQSWs, this book is also written with students, practice educators, tutors, managers and university colleagues in mind. All of you will find this book useful and the chapter which looks at how assessors and supervisors can utilise the Toolkit will be of particular interest to anyone who is assessing during the ASYE; Practice Educators may also find the Toolkit invaluable when working with students who are being introduced to the PCF.

All that is left for us to do is to wish you good luck and a long, successful and rewarding career.

Best regards
Julie and Angie

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Our colleagues, friends and families, who have listened and encouraged us, but most especially Darren and Mike, who showed great patience – and cooked our tea – while we were writing this book.

Karen Gilbank and Kerry Welch, NQSWs, for their review of the first chapter and words of encouragement.

Our newly qualified colleagues who are just starting out on their journey, and who have worked hard to get this far and who will take the profession forward.

All social workers who continue to work extremely hard under often challenging conditions, to protect and support the most vulnerable in our communities, and of course, the many people who use social care services, and who face daily difficulties, the likes of which most of us can only imagine.

Last, but by no means least, our four-legged friends who ‘helped’ along the way. Sadly, during the writing of this book both Mollie and Bobs passed away, but Henry continues to make his presence known quite loudly.



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Introduction to your Toolkit

Welcome to the first chapter in the book which will help you along the way during your first year in practice. By now you will have probably completed or be reaching the end of your social work course and should be looking forward to your first year working as a registered and qualified social worker. How are you feeling? Excited? Scared? Or a bit of both? Great – and lucky you! Well done and congratulations on your success so far.

In this chapter we introduce our Toolkit and discuss what it is and how it has evolved, why you may need it and how you can use it to your advantage as you start on your new career. Readers in England will be undertaking their first year in practice assessed under the new Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) requirements and the Toolkit will help collate your evidence for this. Those of you who may not be obliged to fulfil the requirements of the ASYE may still find the Toolkit useful in helping you to reflect on practice. The Toolkit forms only one part of the book – the chapters themselves are designed to support you with or without the Toolkit and will be greatly beneficial to all. Remember too that our Toolkit is one of many tools that have been developed to help you as you begin in practice and by no means do we claim it to be the best, but rather another option which some may choose to make use of.

Years of study, learning, placements and assignments are behind you and you are about to enter a new world, one in which you will be expected to practise to the highest standards of capability and to uphold the ethics and values of the profession. As we have already mentioned, things continue to change rapidly in social work and one of the most important areas where this can be seen is in the changes to the way in which NQSWs enter the workplace. The ASYE was one of the many recommendations made by the Social Work Task Force following their work which looked at the profession and how things might be improved and developed. This book is designed to help you to get the best out of your initial year as a social worker; it will provide you with a level of confidence and a firm foundation as you progress and develop within the profession.

The ASYE is part of a much wider range of developments within the social work profession and as such should not be viewed in isolation. In addition to the links we make here, it should also be viewed in the context of many ongoing developments within the profession including changes to both the standards for supervision (ie, the Standards for Employers and Supervision Framework) and continuing professional development (CPD), the introduction of the Knowledge and Skills statements and the proposals for increasing the effectiveness of working with other agencies, both voluntary and statutory. It is well worth reading up on what is happening in all of these areas as you may well be directly affected by these developments.

WHAT IS THE TOOLKIT?

(Please note – though we will discuss the Toolkit now, you will find it at the back of the book and it is also available to download from the Routledge website www.routledge.com/9781911106760.) A short example is included below.

The Toolkit is a simple but very practical tool to help you as you work through your first year in practice. In essence it is a document that is designed to help you to collate some of the evidence for your portfolio and we encourage you to develop this as you go along. It is a working document and you will see as you read through the book that we talk about developing good habits, and continuing the ones that you learned throughout your journey through university. Developing the Toolkit is the first good habit that we suggest you get into, and as soon as you possibly can.

Have a look at the Toolkit. It is quite a big document with lots of questions on it but please don't be put off by that. You are not expected to answer all of these questions – you may choose not to answer any! The questions are there simply to encourage you to reflect on practice. We all get stuck at times and the aim of the exercise is to support you when this happens. If you are in the habit of gathering evidence for your assessment as you go along, then you may not need to use the questions as much – they are a prompt.

As you will no doubt be aware, during your ASYE your professional capability will be assessed through the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF), which is the overarching standards framework, applicable to all social workers. (You will also have to meet the specific role requirements set out in the Knowledge and Skills statements, for whichever area of work you choose to enter.) As you study the Toolkit you will see that it contains nine sections, which correspond to the nine sections of the PCF – you may hear this referred to as 'the fan' or 'the rainbow'. You will be familiar with the PCF and you will know that there are different levels of competence which need to be demonstrated and which relate to your level of experience. The Toolkit relates directly to the PCF levels for NQSWs who are working through the ASYE.

As you will see in the Toolkit, for each area of professional capability in the fan (eg professionalism, diversity) there are five distinct sections.

- The first relates to the corresponding PCF domain.
- The second gives a general statement regarding the area of practice covered in the section.
- The third gives you an idea of where you may find this book useful in supporting your evidence base, though many issues will overlap across the domains.
- The fourth is a series of statements and questions – the purpose of this section is to make you think and to allow for critical reflection. This should prompt you to recall incidents or events which you can then use to evidence your development. Remember that these are only prompts but they do address the areas in which you will need to develop capability throughout the year. Answering these questions alone will not guarantee you success – this is one part of your journey.

- The last section is the most important for you and this is where you are invited to fill in notes and examples of your practice. Together with the other evidence you will have collected, this will build into the portfolio which forms part of the work that is required for your assessment.

EXAMPLE TOOLKIT

PCF 5 – Knowledge

Overview: The knowledge you have developed in different areas including the law, policy and procedure, human development and the influences upon this. Different social work models and theories, and how you use this knowledge in practice.

Predominant links to [Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, 9](#)

- Describe your knowledge base. What knowledge do you need to do your job effectively and where does this come from, how have you used the knowledge gained throughout your time at university to your and the service users' best advantage, do you feel that this effectively equipped you for your role, what areas of knowledge do you use daily, weekly or less often, which specialist areas of knowledge do you use in your current role?
- Which areas of theoretical knowledge do you currently use and how, how have you developed this in practice, what further reading or research have you completed in this area, which areas do you find particularly difficult or challenging, how have you addressed this, are there any theories that you particularly use and apply methodically or habitually, or are there some that you don't – why not? Are you heavily reliant on a few theoretical models, which ones and why? Do you test out different theories, why do you do this?
- What are the most significant policies and procedures that your practice is guided by, how familiar are you with these, how do they shape your work, do you feel that you understand them all fully?
- What legislation does your service work under, how does this impact upon your role as a social worker, which pieces of legislation do you use the most, which pose the most challenge, how do you implement the legislation with service users and ensure their understanding and compliance, what action do you take when legal agreements are breached?
- What social work models do you use when working with service users, are there some that you find work better than others, others that you have yet to try, or some that you find do not work for you – why?

- What new knowledge have you acquired since you qualified, how did this come about and why, how are you using this in your practice, where has this learning come from, what have you learned from reading, supervision, colleagues, service users or others, what do you feel has been your most valuable lesson and why, how do you keep up to date with new developments in social work, what articles, journals, books or magazine articles have you read?
- Where do you go when you do not know the answer, what happens when you are faced with a situation or question that you do not have an answer for, how do you use others' experience and knowledge to further your own and to benefit the service user, have you identified any gaps in your knowledge in terms of theory, policy and procedure, legislation, what have you done to address this?
- Use this space to add your own examples, evidence, plans, reflection.

BACKGROUND TO THE TOOLKIT

You might be thinking – what is this 'Toolkit'? Where did it come from? How did it come into being? How was it developed? One thing is certain: it looks and feels very different from our original idea when we were asked to write this book. The idea for the book came about following training that we developed which addressed the issues of stress and burnout for social workers. The training originally included sessions on work–life balance, time management, stress versus burnout, taking work home and many other issues which caused concern for those already working in the profession. Throughout the session the participants were encouraged to complete what at the time was called 'My Personal Survival Kit'. This was then taken away to be developed by the individuals into a resource which would enable them to care for themselves in a more positive way.

Course members began by thinking back to why they wanted to be a social worker initially and to what gets them up in the morning. You will see that we have kept that question in the Toolkit in its current form, as we feel that this is a good way to get back to basics, and to keep us grounded. Following this initial question, the group went to fill in sections about how they managed stress, and how they would develop their own support network. They also identified their own strengths and vulnerabilities and planned what they were going to do to address some of the issues that the course raised for them. This course was well received and we gained some excellent feedback from it. Many of these elements are included in the book as you see it today.

However, as times have moved on and the changes and improvements in social work have now begun to be implemented, the focus of our work has changed. Following

discussions with peers and feedback from other professionals we reflected (as all good social workers do!) and recognised that we needed to change the focus of our work to be more in line with current positive changes in the profession. We felt that we had been guilty at times of being caught in the culture of cynicism and negativity around social work and wanted to change this for ourselves, for others but mostly for you, the NQSW who is just starting on what will hopefully be a long and rewarding career path.

Together with this change in focus, the development of the ASYE and the PCF and the change in regulatory body, we felt that a more positive approach to the Toolkit was required and so out went the concept of 'surviving' and in came 'thriving'.

HOW YOU CAN GET THE BEST FROM YOUR TOOLKIT

Our suggested way for using the Toolkit would be as follows but this is only one example; this is for *you* and the most important thing is for you to make this tool work for *you*. What works for one may not work for another.

- Have a read through the book and familiarise yourself with the Toolkit.
- Either download the Toolkit from www.routledge.com or make up your own Word document – you don't need to type in all of the questions. Either way ensure that you have a paper copy which is your working document – you can add to this easily wherever you are.
- Additionally you might want to set up a folder on your computer to store evidence and/or have a paper folder to put things in.
- Discuss how you will use the Toolkit with your manager/assessor as soon as possible and let them have a copy. You might want to include it in your learning agreement (this will be negotiated between your manager/assessor and yourself when you begin your ASYE and is similar to the learning agreement you had while on placement).
- Have the Toolkit as a standing agenda item in your supervision sessions.
- As soon as you can, start to collect your evidence.
- Set aside a regular (short) time each week to jot down your thoughts on the working document.
- Set aside a longer time each month to review where you are at (this may be your supervision time) and to then type up your Toolkit fully.
- Refer back to the book regularly as you go along.

You will be surprised at how quickly your evidence builds and you will be also on top of any areas where you need to improve things.