

## Case study

Bev Woolmer discusses how her lived experience and career in social work and mental health help her in her role supporting service users in AWP.

I've worked in social care for 30 years and in mental health charities and service user-led organisations, including Rethink and Mind, for 15 years of this.

I applied for a role as Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust's (AWP) Service User Involvement Coordinator almost two years ago, when I was moving back to the South West. The role covers some of Bristol Mental Health and AWP services. I was really interested in BMH being a partnership of third sector and statutory services working together. I was also keen to continue my work on coproduced projects with service users, which is what I'd been doing in Cambridgeshire before this.

I've got lived experience of mental health problems which has given me a different perspective and experience of seeing services from 'the other side'. This experience makes me more passionate about my role and working in mental health. During the very dark times, it often felt I wouldn't have my life back but now I do, even if it's not quite the same. I'm open about my past as I want to make other people see that recovery is possible. It might look different to what you thought and life might not be the same as it was before but things can get better.

My job is a mixed bag of many things! I work across Inpatient and Community Services and the main part of my role is to support service users in getting involved in services. Involvement can be a really positive experience that supports people's recovery and I spend a lot of time enabling service users to come to groups and give their views. I also help to recruit service users for various representative roles, run recruitment and selection training, and attend meetings to ensure service user voice and concerns are heard, both locally and within AWP centrally. I work closely with colleagues in Inpatient Services, supporting teams to look at how involvement can work best on the hospital wards and to look at how we can develop opportunities further.

The best part of my role is getting to meet so many different people, hearing people's stories and experiences and working with them to make a difference to the services they receive. No two days are the same and the role is busy, so you do have to be fairly organised and flexible, but that's exciting and gives the job a buzz.

I'm passionate about involvement and know first-hand how therapeutic it can be, so I like to think I'm a positive advocate for involvement. I'm committed to seeing service user involvement embedded across AWP services and making sure that service users are always part of the conversation.