

# Case management interview with Angelique Flemming

Angelique Flemming from Targeted Services for Young People, Liverpool.



## Introductions – can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

I have worked in youth offending services for about 18 years now, having worked across a range of roles, including restorative justice, offending behaviour programmes (developing, assessing and implementing), court and case management. I was also an attendance centre officer for many years. I am currently based within the prevention/out-of-court disposal team.

Originally, I couldn't get my head around how you would get children and young people to work with you voluntarily, but I love this element of my role, as the young people are much more engaging when they have personally committed to working with us.

I bring insight from the range of roles I have worked in; the experience has given me real-life analogies and examples to use to motivate children to change. I continue to work with probation services as a sessional community payback supervisor. I share the experiences of the adults on probation to deter further the children and young people away from offending.

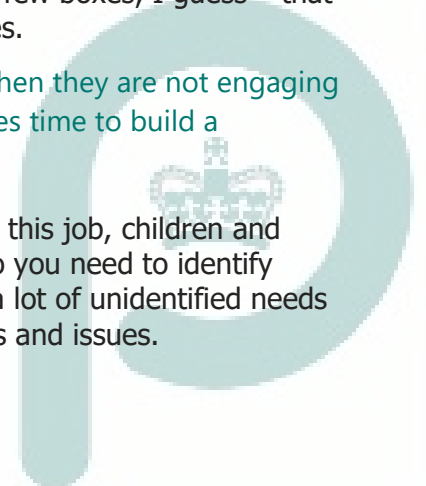
My experience of working with Looked After Children in residential care allowed me to develop resilience skills to deal patiently with the challenging behaviours presented by children and young people, and understand how important it is not to come across as judgemental.

## Inspectors were impressed with the skills you demonstrated in your practice; we would be really interested to learn how you have developed your skills to work effectively with families from diverse backgrounds?

I come from a diverse background myself, so that probably ticks a few boxes, I guess – that and working with children and young people across a range of roles.

I think it's about having patience and not personalising it when they are not engaging or not warming to you and accepting that sometimes it takes time to build a relationship.

I bring all my practical and theoretical experience into my roles. In this job, children and young people are more likely to be out of the education system, so you need to identify their needs. The young people I currently work with present with a lot of unidentified needs and we are the bridge that can help remove some of these barriers and issues.



Working with young people from diverse backgrounds is not dissimilar to working with those with special educational needs, disabilities etc. – it's a personal characteristic to be recognised and explored, but also may be a barrier to that child or young person reaching their full potential.

You must have to have a level of consciousness and awareness to talk about how someone's race or ethnicity may impact on their overall wellbeing.

Some will tell you that this is not a barrier for them, but I believe you should let all black and mixed heritage boys know that you are seeing them and giving them an opportunity to open up about any negative experiences, as you may be the only person to have offered this safe space to the child or young person.

Let them know they have been seen and they are getting heard. Let them know you are interested in learning how they are functioning as a young black male in what can often be a racist society and how they are coping in that world?

Even when you perceive a child's heritage as obvious ask, just ask the awkward questions about a child or young person's personal characteristics. If you offend them, then just apologise, as you would with a friend or colleague. Be willing to explore the uncomfortable stuff with the child or young person, to help them to move on from negative experiences related to their ethnicity.

Be patient – if they don't want to explore this area of their life, then that's okay but at least the child or young person knows that it is open for them to revisit.

Just like when I promote therapy to them, they will often decline, but I will always revisit this before my involvement ends, just in case they have changed their mind.

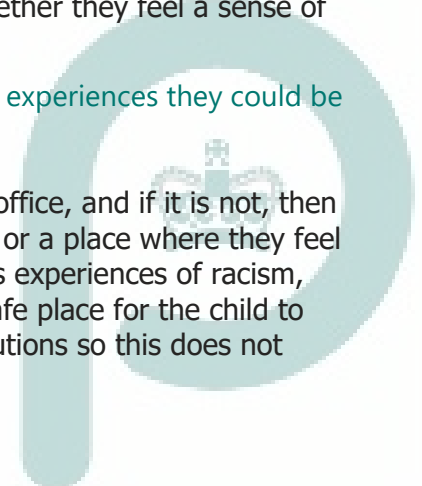
I see the exploration of a child or young person's experiences of racism or discrimination as significant; sometimes we can see the issues for them, but they can't, so it's about letting them come back to this if they want and showing them you are still here, you still care.

**Being culturally aware and considering race and ethnicity within our work is an important element to understanding children's behaviour, risk, and safety and wellbeing. How do you consider race and ethnicity when working with children, particularly when completing assessments?**

First thing I look at is where they live in Liverpool, especially those that live in the north of the city, which is predominantly white British populated and historically suffers the most racism-related issues. I ask questions around the use of public transport and the areas travelled through by the child or young person, and how safe they feel travelling around the city, and, more importantly, within their own community, and whether they feel a sense of belonging and citizenship.

So, I am already building it up in my head – what negative experiences they could be prone to, putting myself in their shoes.

I try to make it easily accessible and safe for them to attend the office, and if it is not, then I will always meet with children or young people at school, home or a place where they feel safe. I will ask the direct question about a child or young person's experiences of racism, particularly in school and out in the community. I will offer this safe place for the child to talk openly about these experiences, and offer strategies and solutions so this does not become a barrier to that child achieving their full potential.



For me, racism is one of the worst discriminations because this personal characteristic is so easily and automatically visible and is the one part of identity that you cannot change, but can be the first thing to be seen and used against you. It is so unfair – I have a real sense of social justice that has always driven me in my work with children and young people over the past 25 years.

You **have to** ask the questions.

**It can be difficult for practitioners to challenge colleagues and partner agencies when they feel children are being discriminated against. What approaches have you taken to challenging behaviour that you feel discriminates against black or mixed heritage children?**

This makes me think of a case I was recently involved in. A knife was found in the young person's school bag by mum, which led to dad taking it into the school to ask for it be disposed of safely, as his son was saying he had found it in the park. The school then permanently excluded this young person for possession of a bladed article, even though this incident had occurred at home, not on school premises.

I attempted to intervene to overturn the exclusion but was unsuccessful. He was then placed into a unit and was at risk of being taken out of mainstream education. There had been no previous behavioural issues at school with the 14-year-old and he was academically bright. He was also from a black African background, attended school and lived in the north of the city. The social worker involved stated that she felt the school had reacted like this due to fearing gang issues, based on an assumption that the young person was involved in criminality. This young person was involved with the prevention service due to his vulnerability, rather than offending behaviour. I escalated this to management but was advised to encourage the parents to advocate for their son. However, the young person had decided he did not want to return to that school due to fearing further discrimination, so this complaint was never taken any further. I did empower the parents to make a complaint on the grounds of unfair treatment. I feel this experience will have boosted the parents' confidence to deal with such issues in the future.

We are here to advocate and improve lives. It doesn't stop you from trying, even if you feel like you are not getting anywhere. They are at our doorstep – it's a bad doorstep to be at, but they are here, so we should help them; something has gone wrong which we need to help sort.

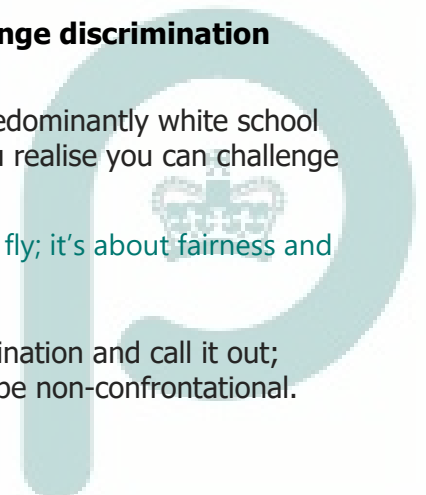
Sometimes, they don't want the help, but I'm still going to try, especially for those who are over-represented in the system.

**How have you built your confidence in being able to challenge discrimination effectively?**

I guess, growing up, challenging racism was a thing. I was in a predominantly white school in a white area, so I started off young in challenging attitudes. You realise you can challenge without fearing what's coming back.

I have a strong sense of injustice – it's the biggest flag I will fly; it's about fairness and equality, it provokes something in me.

My parents gave me confidence, I guess, too, to recognise discrimination and call it out; there is only one way to challenge it – directly – but this needs to be non-confrontational.



You need to read the situation when challenging; the worst thing you can do with a racist is to tell them they are racist – I use education examples, maybe of myself and when I have changed my attitudes. I explain, I break it down in my head and challenge myself, I share times when I have fallen prey to the stereotyping of others, but go on to say that it's about educating yourself and teaching that we can all be guilty of mistakes, but it's about learning from them.

**What advice would you have for others who want to build on their knowledge and understanding of race and ethnicity to improve their practice?**

Speak with the children and young people and show them that you are comfortable exploring this area of their life. Let them know that you can help them – to help themselves!

Imagine wearing the child's skin for the day, put yourself in the young person's shoes. Assume that this child in front of you has experienced discrimination on some level; this should then promote a consistent thread with all children and young people from a black and mixed heritage background, to ensure that ALL their voices are being heard and ALL can open up.

*It is so important to start off the conversation – they will not start it.*

They may not have the maturity to start a discussion like that with an adult and they probably don't have a lot of people on the outside that they can have those discussions with.

Show them you are on their side but also have the confidence to get a young person to understand how they themselves may be fulfilling societal stereotypes of black and mixed heritage boys.

*Always give 100 per cent to the children and young people, as they may never get the chance again to explore their identity, to help them to move on from negative experiences of discrimination.*

