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**KAREN FOLEY:** Hello and welcome back to the *Student Hub Live*. That was a good session wasn't it? Well, now we're joined by Ann Flynn. Welcome to the studio, Ann. And we're going to talk a little bit about geocaching.

Did you know that some students at the Open University are doing nursing degrees or social work. So there's some vocation stuff going on here. And we thought it would be a good idea to fill you in. And as usual, we like to bring people's expertise to help everybody.

So Ann, you used to work as a social worker. And you're now doing some staff tutor work. So you're oversee the associate lecturers, and you're involved in the social care programme.

Now, a lot of students doing K modules, like K101 for example, will start progressing along this side of things. And we have some students who are doing vocational qualifications and some students who might just think doing health or social work or some of these modules around some of these areas could be really nice addition to something else, like maybe psychology. So some students will be doing those as part of their open degrees.

But we wanted to talk specifically about people who are doing vocational things with the Open University, and how their journey might be the same and also slightly different to other students. So why did you come up with the idea of geocaching then to had to demonstrate this?

**ANN FLYNN:** Well, we thought, in particular, our students who are coming on to the social worker nursing programme bring a wealth of experience. They have to be sponsored, so they're already in employment. And so they're bringing in the experience that they have in social care work or nurse health care work to the Open University.

Perhaps at the first time, they're not really sure what a wealth of experience, actually, they have got. And so both programmes help the students deconstruct sort of their life experiences but also help then build social work or nursing skills.

So for example, although people might not know very much about social work, if you haven't needed to use a social worker, but you may have had experience of social work, but everybody has an experience of nursing. Everybody's been to the doctor, everybody's

experienced that awkwardness that you have when you're talking about your personal life.

And so people are bringing that type of experience and then developing empathy, and so understanding things from the patients' or the service users' point of view to help them understand their journey through whatever service it is that you're working in. So actually, what we're asking our students to do, which may be slightly different to what other students are doing, is bring themselves into their social work nursing studies and develop it from there. So not the ins and outs of exactly what happened with the doctor or the social worker but actually just those feelings that are inside them.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Gosh. That sounds really, really interesting. And you've touched on quite a few of the things I'd like to pick up on there, because obviously, people are approaching it from a very subjective viewpoint. And a lot of the things that make people great nurses and great social workers is their personality and how they sort of are interpreting things. But equally, we have a curriculum, and we're teaching things, and there are various skills as well, that one needs to combine with the subject areas. How do students negotiate that?

**ANN FLYNN:** Well, I think like every student really, which is that all the time, they're following the module planner, if you will, week by week. They're being taken through the modules. They're being taken through the whole programme, if you will.

And so sometimes, you have to hold on to the experiential aspect of it and sort of up the academic aspect of it. But actually, both social workers and nurses, both take those experiences but also their academic work into the workplace. And then they have people in the workplace then, practise tutors, programme tutors, who help them blend all the different experiences, whether it's the academic theory aspect of it all or the experiential aspect or actually listening to what the service users and the patients are saying, and take that on board as well. And that way, it helps them develop their studies. It helps the patients or service users develop their experience as well.

And I suppose, when I talked about geocaching, I think that that was the aspect that we saw really did work with nursing and social work. Obviously it's a geography term, it's not our term as such. But it's a term or it's a model of working, if you will, at the moment that anybody's using, in terms of, for example, the Pokemon app, if you will.

But on our programmes, the students are very much bringing something onto the course.

They're leaving a bit of that something with their students, because they all meet in workshops, they actually meet, well certainly the social work students do, not always the nurses. But they meet in workshops, and then they have discussions.

They understand things from a different angle, perhaps their experiences or somebody else's experience. Apply the theory to it, and then that helps them develop through their studies. So it kind of takes them through the different levels or the different modules of the study that they have.

And each time, yes, they're developing themselves. But they're also helping develop each their student--

**KAREN FOLEY:** So you're both finding, navigating, seeing something new. And also, I guess with geocaching, sometimes you're leaving something as well. And that's that part of you isn't it, that's sort of imprinting? So it's a very dynamic and fluid -

**ANN FLYNN:** I think so.

**KAREN FOLEY:** - area. I'd like to go to the hot desk very briefly and also mention Lynn, poor Lynn, who'll be receiving a lot of nursing, because she's broken her leg, so she can't be with us in the studio today. But do let us know of any questions. Sophie and HJ, are there any immediate that we need to touch on in the chat?

**SOPHIE:** I don't think so. People are just getting into it, really. There is someone, I think it was Lisa, who is a social worker. She studied for social worker a little while ago. So she's sort of catching up with it. It's nice for her to come back to this topic. People are just sort of getting into it, really. Asking, geocaching's such a beautiful bit of technology is the comment we've had from Charlie. So people are just really starting with the session.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Excellent. Thank you very much for that. Well, Lynn must be very, very unwell, because she's not able to join us in the chat right now. But I'd also like to just clarify this idea of geocaching and how we wanted to structure this, because the whole idea is that it is a journey.

Now, I haven't really, I geocached once, purely by accident with a range of people. And this involved going around in a car, finding all these navigational points, then doing a very long walk. And then I think we found this really mad little house. And we were sort of, I don't know, I was just up for the walk, quite frankly.

But geocaching isn't something everybody has done. But the whole point, I guess, that you wanted to really raise with this is, it's about finding coordinates and navigating points. And what we've seen throughout some of the boot camps here is that, the virtual learning environment, the VLE, can be a little bit like one of these things that you need to navigate.

And so if you're familiar with the systems, which I'm not with geocaching, but I am the VLE. If you're familiar with systems, it's all very easy to do, but it can be quite overwhelming and hard as a concept for people who aren't used to it. So I guess this was the main point, is that something very, very foreign needs to be negotiated.

How does that then work for students who are maybe in a different sort of setting? So you've mentioned the vocational side of things. Some students will be doing these K modules just because they want to. And other people will be doing it in a very different setting. So they'll be in a hospital environment or maybe a social work environment. They'll have to log on, they'll have to do different things. How different is it for them in this journey? And do they feel isolated then, as a group of students, or do they have more connectivity because they're physically together in that real life environment?

**ANN FLYNN:**

I think they're all in different placements. That's the other thing to say. So obviously, that can be quite isolating. But they do come together, whether it's either on OU Live workshops or actually in physical workshops where you meet with your tutors and you physically meet with the other students. So I think they're all the touchstones if you will, through the course that helps you on the social work aspect of the course.

The other aspect, I think, is it is a rocky terrain. Whichever degree you're doing, it is quite rocky. So there's ups and there's, perhaps, downs, if you will. And both courses are very much structured about the first year being about K101 or K118, which is the nursing aspect, foundations of nursing K113, foundations in social work.

And that's very much about learning to learn. It introduces you to the professional standards of your profession and how you kind of start to apply that or recognise, in the work that you're doing, what it is that you're actually, how that fits with the professional standards.

And when you get through the first year, then you're on to the next level, if you will, the stage two of your courses. And that's very much applying what you've learned in the foundation year. So you're building on those foundations.

And then when you get through that year, you're into the final stage really. Maybe that's the hardest, because there's more expected of you. You're expected not just to do and repeat or something. You're certainly meant to blend all the information that you've got together. But also say, what can I do differently? So all the time, you're reflecting on what you're doing, how it's being done, how others have done things, and saying, well how was that? How was that for the patient, the service user, the people that I'm working with?

And what do I need to do differently? Because that certainly perhaps one of the keys to both social work and nursing, which is your in a change environment, and you're constantly trying to look at what can be done differently. How can I improve on what I'm doing?

It's also, by the time you get to your third year, you're very much looking at evidence-based work. You're also looking at your professional standards again, how you're practicing those. But also, you're starting to be very critically aware of how you're working, how other people are working. And that again, helps you in a changing environment, really, to survive.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Well, Lynn I'm glad you've been able to join us in the chat. I hope you're feeling a little bit better. Our thoughts are with you. And thank you for answering people's questions. Lynn specialises in the nursing side of things.

So some of these students then, are doing vocational things. And we've spoken a bit about those differences. How do students actually get involved? You mentioned they need to be sponsored. So are they in the setting before they then get access to this OU stuff that's going to support them in their studies, or can you just go and say, I want to be a social worker, I'm going to enrol in an Open University course? How does that work?

**ANN FLYNN:** For the Open University courses, you do need to be sponsored. In very exceptional circumstances you might not.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So you need to get a job.

**ANN FLYNN:** That's in social care. Many nursing - different hospitals do different things. So we have some hospitals that we work alongside in partnership and also with local authorities. But it's also true that a lot of the voluntary sector also buy into the Open University model. And they will sponsor the students.

And in sponsoring students, they're agreeing that the student will have time to study, that they have employment, but also they will arrange programme tutors that work alongside the

students when they're in the placements to make sure that all that different type of information that they're negotiating comes together.

**KAREN FOLEY:** OK. Brilliant. Now, we had a really nice geocache idea here, but we aren't allowed to show it to you for a variety of reasons, including our technical problems that we were having a little bit earlier. But I just wondered if you could imagine some sort of rocky terrain. I'm thinking, you mentioned about the peak and about the levels that people were going through.

So students then are starting their journeys. You've mentioned that they have very rich experiences to share, and this idea of giving and taking, feeling and empathy that's very, very important in both of these disciplines.

How do they then start navigating? How do they find things? And what sorts of things, I guess, are they looking for in terms of their personal development, this mixture of combining the emotional and self part of the practise with the academic side? What is the key thing that people are looking for?

**ANN FLYNN:** I think one of the key tools in social work and in nursing, I think everybody does it anyway, but they don't have a posh term for it. But we talk about reflection. So you're reflecting in practise. You're reflecting on what you're doing, on action or inaction, as you're doing it.

And I think that's something that both courses actually make very just surface and sort of bring alive for you. So then, when you're in those different work environments, you're constantly thinking, well, this is a very good case example for me to take back to the classroom. And in the classroom then, you're discussing it. And then you have everybody, 360 input from all your student colleagues and your tutor. And it's helping you mould your way of looking at things, which then of course, you take back into the practise.

So actually, everybody's benefiting here, because it's not only you in the classroom with your students, they're benefiting, your benefiting from them. And then you're taking it back into the workplace. And then the workplace is benefiting, because actually, it's getting a bit of challenge, it's getting its ideas refreshed. You're more likely to be up to date with cutting edge information than perhaps they are, because now they're qualified, they can settle into more of a routine.

So I think that's where the geocaching idea comes from. I'm not in any way suggesting it's straight sailing. It's quite difficult. Some students have different challenges than other students.

They might need additional support. But actually, the majority of our students, it's like 99% of our students, complete their degrees and go onto sign up to one of the two professions. So it's a very successful course for both nursing and social work.

**KAREN FOLEY:** I'm going to ask you in a second what happens when you get lost. But while I do that, can you let us know in the chat what you think, what qualities you think would make a good social worker or nurse? And also if you've got any questions that either Lynn or Ann can answer about either of those disciplines. Our wordles aren't working today, so we had tried to arrange some word clouds for you, which those of you who are familiar with the *Student Hub Live* will hopefully enjoy. But we don't have those right now.

So could you let us know what some of the attributes that you think would be useful in terms of being a social worker or nursing? And is there anything that you think you might be able to bring to that discipline? Even let us know if this is one of the qualifications that you are doing, and what your experience is of that as well.

OK. So getting lost, which was what happened to me when I went geocaching. So sometimes, you can think you're on the right path and you aren't. When would this sort of thing happen? Aside from obviously, thinking that you're answering the right TMA question, a topic we've been covering quite a bit. When might this happen in social work and nursing?

**ANN FLYNN:** I think, probably very early on, the academic aspects of it is more challenging, perhaps for students. But when they start their placements, nurses start earlier, so it might be an earlier experience for the nurse. But for social work, when you start in your level 2, stage 2 part of the programme, and you start your placement and after your induction, and you seem to be getting on well, and you start to get a few more challenges from, perhaps, your placement supervisor, and I think that's perhaps where people think, oh, dear this is bigger than, perhaps, I expected.

Also, from social work, we want people to have the best experience. So they may come in from having been working in a children's centre or working with children. And actually, we ask the contrasts within our placements. Well, actually, that's what the HCPC, our professional body, asks for, so that students have a challenge and that also they have a wide experience.

So you're quite likely, at some point, if you're working with children, to have to work with adults in a placement and vice versa. And I think that's, perhaps, where students feel that they may be out of their depth.

But there's loads of support around for them. There's support from their module tutor about their academic work. There's support in terms of their practise from their work-based supervisor practise educators. And also, if they're struggling in any other way, with either tying it all together because of some other learning support need they might have, then obviously, then, there's student support. And they're very skilled at giving support to students. And I think you've probably had sessions on student support and support for disabled students as well.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yes, absolutely. No, we have. Sophie and HJ, I'm getting some qualities that are coming through in the chat. Can you give us an idea about some of those?

**HJ:** One of the ones that Alice said was, empathy. And Lisa said willingness to listen and use the service user's needs not those of the system.

**SOPHIE:** Yes, Hazel said, kindness and understanding above all. So some really nice qualities coming through there.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yes, I would agree. Some people, I know this is, as a psychologist, particular case in this sort of area, will think, oh, yes, I really want to do that. And nursing social work, I imagine, attract these empathetic, very kind, caring people. But equally, they're very, very difficult roles. Is there much of a discrepancy between what people think these roles might involve and what they actually do involve when you're studying them academically?

**ANN FLYNN:** I think so. And I think, when I took you back to that question about, well, what do I do - I've had this experience, I know this academically, putting those two things together, actually, what needed to be different for the next time? And I think that's the key. And by the time you get to your third year, you've honed that, but then you also have to be brave, because then you have to challenge. And sometimes, you're challenging your line manager for example, you might be challenging somebody who's quite animated in the way that they're talking to you as a service user or a patient, because they might be a little bit in denial about, actually, what's happening.

You may have clarity of vision, because you've stepped back, you've seen this experience before. But actually, you've got to challenge them. And you have to do that respectfully. And you have to do that and somehow bring that person along with you. So you're changing them as well.

So I think that social work and nursing require a lot of soft skills, if you will. I think those nice



ones that we've heard. But actually, you also need some sort of leadership and also some vision, so that you can hold people's anxieties but also bring them on to the next level. But you have to be able to challenge as well.

**KAREN FOLEY:** This sounds like a very difficult skill. And one of the things you mentioned before was this idea of being critical. In particular, I guess, once you're going further from level two and into level three. How do we teach those skills? How do we support people in developing them?

**ANN FLYNN:** I think one of the key social work skills, and it's also a nursing skill, which is you are supervised. So I think for most people, they think, that's your boss keeping an eye on you and making sure you're doing things properly. But actually in social work, there is a little bit of, that about the performance aspect of how things are working, but it's also a reflective aspect.

So you're looking, as I said earlier, about your feelings about things. Are they blocking you going to the next level and challenging somebody, or are you gushing a little bit too much in that scenario? Are you trying to protect or save whoever. It might be a child, it might be an adult, whoever it is. And so you try to unpick, well, what's going on in that dynamic between you and the person that you're working with? And is that actually helpful to the situation, or is it less helpful?

And I know that sounds like it might be a bit indulgent. But sometimes, there are barriers for the service users and the patients but also within you that are actually helping them to get to the next level. So it's somehow unpicking all of that and dealing with it.

So it's quite complex, those relationships are quite complex. You don't get them at first. I think when I was talking to Lynn about this session, and I was saying, some of the issues that we'd like to come up. We thought very much that, as people, even if they have they're very experienced people coming on to the course, they've worked for ages in their job, and now they're being sponsored onto the programme. The thing is, they start to see what they're doing through fresh eyes. But actually, sometimes there's a tendency to kind of either be paralysed a bit or step back and do what you're told, if you will. And that's fine, that's good.

And by the time you get to your second year, you're starting to integrate a little bit more about the academic work, get a bit more confident and pushing it. But by the third year, yes, you are able to handle a lot more of those complex dynamic relationships that are going on with the people that you're working with. And all of that feeds into the risk assessments, that whether you're a nurse or a social worker, you're constantly doing.

How am I working with this person? Are there any risks? Are they safe? Am I safe? If they leave the office today to go home, will they be safe? If they're not safe, what should I do? So constantly looking at those kinds of issues, not just moving on and going, oh, well that's fine.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yeah. Sonia says - and I completely agree, Sonia - that she takes her hat off to everybody involved in the caring fields. She says she would cry hearing some of these stories. Finally, how do people differentiate between the genuine empathy and desire to do things and hearing very, very difficult situations and being in very difficult scenarios?

**ANN FLYNN:** I think, when you work with the public in nursing, social work, psychology, lawyers, all of those professions, you meet so many people. And from everybody, you take a little bit of that situation, perhaps. Builds up your knowledge, builds up your confidence.

So although the person in front of you is telling their story and it's dreadfully sad, actually, you've got a wider vision about, yes, it is sad, but that doesn't have to trap you as sad forever. We're going to look at how we can move on and move you out. That might be simple. It might be about benefits. That might be about getting emotional support. That might be about getting other supports around the person. But it's to move them on.

One of the things that social workers are described as is as change agents. And I would say that's probably true of nurses as well. So we're not going to leave people in this.

They've come to you with a problem. they've already made the first step. You have to look at, where is the next step going to be for them, and for their safety and how to improve their situation?

**KAREN FOLEY:** And moving on can be such a wonderful thing in such difficult situations. And Ann, that's all we've got time for today. We're going to have to move on too. So thank you. And thank you, Lynn, in the chat also for answering a lot of questions.

We're going to have some links on our resources page on the website. So if you'd like to find out more about nursing and social work, you can go there. HJ and Sophie, that anything I need to mention before we log out?

**SOPHIE:** I don't think so. Julie said, a good quality nurse is not treating a patient like they're incapable simply because they're in a hospital bed and you aren't. So it's nice to leave on a very positive note from Julie. So yes, no people have really enjoyed it. So it's been nice. So thank you.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Wonderful. Thank you for joining us. OK. We're going to show you one of our boot camp videos. This is a session I really liked, and it's with Terrell and Steve. And it's on being a reflective learner. So it's something that we did in our boot camps a couple of weeks ago, in fact.

And if you miss those, you can catch up on the website. They're all cut into short sections. There's a whole range of study skills things. But we're moving on to a sort of different area this afternoon. So we're going to have that video.

The chat will still be open for the next half an hour. We're going to take a short break. And then I'm back talking about mental health for right now Matthias. And we'll be developing the afternoon session, looking at some various issues around that.

So we'll see you very, very soon, keep those emails coming in. If there are any questions you want to know [studenthub@open.ac.uk](mailto:studenthub@open.ac.uk). And the chat room that will still be open. But we'll be back live in about half an hour with mental health. For right now, see you very soon.

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