

Caroline Gentry

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Name - CAROLINE GENTRY

Age 36

Role Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) - Rural, Wymondham Police Station

Hours/Shift Pattern

Quite complicated! I work 4 'day' shifts in week one (8am – 6pm) then I have 3 days off. Then I work one 'day' shift followed by 4 'lates' (2pm – midnight). Then it's another 3 days off and back onto shift for 2 'days' and 2 'lates'. I have another 3 days off, work 3 more day shifts and then I start at the beginning again!



Any Education/relevant qualifications required or useful to the role?

A good educational background is useful, but life experience and the right attitude and personality are what are really needed for this role.

Any training requirements?

You train for an initial 3 weeks at the Operations and Communications Centre which is quite intensive and includes defence and diversity training and 'paperwork' - taking statements, writing crime reports and how to carry out vehicle and people checks. You learn how to use the radio equipment and use the Phonetic Alphabet and then you have the opportunity to apply everything you've learnt in role-playing exercises, which is good fun. Following that, you will go out with a Police Constable or PCSO for a few months - better if you can get to go out with a PCSO as you can then learn more about your specific role. During

the whole of your training you are assessed via your Personal Development Plan. Once your Supervisors are satisfied with your progress you can take the big step of going out on your own!

Any other skills/qualities required?

Definitely Communication skills – you need to be approachable and fair, so that people feel they can come forward and talk to you about the problems in their community. You must also be resilient as you will get a lot of stick from people and have to be able to bounce back.

Caroline Gentry off duty ... and tigger comes too!



the water looks lovely today

It is a job with highs and lows so you need to be able to keep motivated. You will have days when you ask yourself, 'why am I doing this?' You need to be flexible, able to think on your feet and work well as a team player. You should also have a strong personality and be confident

and assertive to be able to deal with confrontational situations.

And finally – stamina. Although you don't have to do a fitness test for this role, you have no idea how much walking is involved!

Describe a typical day

I arrive at work, grab a mug of coffee and check my e mails and the computer for events that may have happened in my area overnight that I need to be aware of. Then, after checking my tray for paperwork and the 'to do' list I have made for myself the previous day, I get my body armour and kit on and go out on foot patrol. I usually aim to spend about six or seven hours on patrol depending on what I have been targeted to do by my Supervisors. Because I work on foot patrol on my own, I usually get to choose where I go and what I do. This is a great way of working as I gather a lot of intelligence and feel more approachable in a small rural community. During my day, I may also pop in and see the staff in the local High School. I feel very supported by them – they tell me they love to see me and find it very reassuring that I am around. People are always coming up to talk to me and inviting me in for a cup of tea or coffee - I guess this is the highly important part of my role in public reassurance.

Other things I get involved in.....only recently I rescued a lost kitten from a busy main road and reunited it with its distraught owners. I helped Officers deal with a large bull that had escaped from a local farmers field and successfully returned to its field. I helped recover terrified 'Sally the Rottweiler' who had got scared, run away from her owner and sought shelter under a large horse trailer. I managed to get her out and into the Police Landrover and off the site to calm her fear down. (Later, the Health and Safety implications of tackling a 15 stone Rottweiler were brought to my attention, but I feel that the way we had dealt with this incident at the time was the best way. It was a successful and safe outcome and that is the important thing!)

I am beginning to sound like Dr Doolittle so let's talk about people next! I have helped obtain statements with a major shoplifting case in Wymondham, resulting in 7 charges and 133 'taken into consideration' offences and around

£10,000 of retail stock being recovered and returned to local retailers. I have successfully written Intelligence reports that have assisted Regular Police Officers with relevant information and received written thanks for this from an Acting Inspector. I have also been on duty at the Royal Norfolk Show.

The best thing I feel I have done so far has to be when I was on my way home one day off duty. I found a distraught elderly gentleman walking along the road searching for the Police Station. He explained that he had broken down in his disabled motorbility vehicle and his disabled wife of 83 was in the car. He could not find out who to call and was very distressed. So, I walked him to the station, sat him down with a cup of tea, made all the enquiries for him and arranged for the relevant people to come. Then, I went back to the car with him and stayed with him and his wife until assistance arrived.

To me this was all just part of my job, but this elderly gentleman sent a lovely letter to the Chief regarding this and even sent me a box of chocolates as a thank you! (I hasten to add I shared these amongst my traffic officer colleagues!) It still makes me smile when I remember this and I also now have a personal invite to call for tea

what a spectacular shot - click the photo to zoom!



beautiful Aysgarth Falls in Yorkshire

at the gentleman's address in Hethersett!

What did you do before you became a PCSO?

I was a full-time mum for a number of years and then spent two years as a Special Constable in Lowestoft. This experience was of course useful in me applying to be a PCSO, but previous relevant experience is by no means the key to achieving a PCSO post. It really is about life experience and your attitude and enthusiasm for the role that counts most. These are the things that will make you stand out – for example I later found out that 700 applicants had applied for the PCSO roles and they picked only 18 of us!

What are the people like that you work with?

There is a big team spirit at Wymondham and we really do support each other. There is always someone to listen to your problems and give you advice which is really important in my role.

Why did you want the role?

I wanted to put something back into the community. Like many families, mine has experienced problems with Anti-Social behaviour and I really wanted to help to do something about it - which this role enables me to do.

Also, from the age of 8, I have wanted to be a Police Officer but I have diabetes and current legislation prevents me from being one. I understand that this may change in the future and in the meantime, I love what I am doing and know I made the right choice.

What do you like best about your role?

I love getting feedback from the public, often somebody will come up to me in the street and tell me how safe they feel to see me walking around in the community. People take time to write and thank me for help I have given them and you just can't beat that for job satisfaction, knowing that you really are helping to make your community a better place to live in.

Anything you don't like and would like to change?

I wish PCSOs had even more powers! We do hear 'You're only a pretend copper' often which is rubbish as we have more powers, including arrest, than people realise. However, in some confrontational situations we can be restricted in what we can do to control them and it is frustrating to have to radio for assistance from an Officer when you are already there and would like to be able to do more to diffuse it yourself. The Government allows PCSOs around 60 powers but so far in Norfolk we have only 12 of those. With PCSOs still being relatively new in Norfolk we know this will be improved and I know I speak for all Norfolk PCSOs in saying that we are really looking forward to that.

Are there any over-riding qualities you need to be successful in your role?

The ability to talk to people.

A bit about you – do you have a personal ambition?

I hope to continue to love what I am doing – and one day I'd like to be one of the first Police Officers in England recruited with Type 1 Diabetes.

What do your friends and family think of your work?

They are very proud of me, pleased to see me so happy in what I'm doing and very supportive and understanding of my role.

How does your work impact upon your personal life?

I think the shifts must be the major factor. My husband is a Police Officer in Suffolk so as you can imagine with us both doing shifts we really have to plan ahead to make the most of our days off together. Achieving a good work/life balance is difficult and something to be aware of in this type of role.

What tips can you give to someone wanting to be a PCSO?

Don't even think about it unless you are a big 'people' person. Also, be prepared for a rollercoaster ride! The job is full of highs and lows but just keep going, enjoy the challenge and remember you are doing something really positive for the community. The PCSO role is all about preventing crime before it happens. Remember that even just being seen on the streets could be making someone think twice about smashing that window or mugging an old lady.

Oh, and get yourself a really good pair of walking boots!!!!

Anything you would like to warn them about?

Other than the walking! Well, your animosity definitely goes straight out of the window. To begin with you will be very aware of everyone looking at you in your uniform and this is quite scary and intimidating – although you WILL get used to it. Once you are in uniform, you can no longer walk away from a situation. You are wearing it for the reason that it is your job to try and deal with that situation or problem as best you can.

Would you recommend a career in the Police Force?

Yes, because you will never do the same thing twice – every day will be a different experience. It is a constant challenge and you can make your job whatever you want it to be. Plus needless to say you are making a difference and you simply can't beat that for job satisfaction.

If you were in power for one day, what improvement /change would you personally like to make within the organisation?

It has to be parking. I would like to see improved parking

particularly for front-line staff. When I've been on my feet for 10 hours, it's really tiring to walk that extra distance to a local car park - when all I want to do is just to get in my car and get off home!

[For the Norfolk Police 'Real Life Profiles'](#) [CLICK HERE](#)

CG: The off duty photos were taken at Aysgarth Falls in Yorkshire.....beautiful location if you ever get a chance to visit....its claim to fame is that it is where part of Kevin Costners Robin Hood Prince of Thieves was shot.....(you remember the waterfall scene and river crossing bit where he meets the " merry men...") Another piece of useless trivia...

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