

“About fifty years ago my dad saw an advert asking people if they fancied becoming probation officers. They were looking for applicants with life experience rather than academic qualifications, and that was him all over. I followed his footsteps, and he was always a bit miffed with me for retiring before he did!

Recently the Probation Service asked me if I'd write a poem for them because so many years down the line they were looking to recruit in the same way. I spoke to officers currently in post, and drew on my own memories. It's tough work, but shaping, and rewarding. Here's my piece. What do you reckon, dad? Think we can do it? ”

A Life In The Day Of

A's sprawled in reception, he's sofa surfing, needs a bed.
B left a message, she's hearing voices again in her head.
Make a plan. Rip it up. Boil the kettle.
C keeps his third appointment in a row - minor miracle.
Tell D a hard truth.
Give E some tough love.
Juggle custard, plait sawdust, meet a deadline,
get F over the breadline
for another week, clear emails, having a good morning
till G fluffs his final warning.
Team meeting: we're ghostbusters, sort of, we're
tightrope-walking the high wire
between care and control, calm and chaos, we're magicians
conjuring big difference from small changes.
Proud of H, she's kicked the habit, found work, high five.
Say a few words at I's funeral, he was one of mine.
Count to ten, breathe deep on the fire escape;
big heart, thick skin, the patience of Job - that's what it takes.
J got banged up overnight, he's going to prison.
K needs a shoulder to cry on - sit and listen.
Lunch break: open a can of worms.
L's stayed clean, M's paid her fines, N's learned
a life lesson and texts THANK U.
O asks me to turn a blind eye - no can do.
P's done some terrible things but I need to keep seeing
P as a human being.
Boxes ticked: Q, R, S and T have planted

saplings, picked litter, strimmed verges, painted
the park gates, paid the community back. U's failed
a drug test again and gone AWOL, it's jail
for him, but could I have done more? Home visits:
get V on a waiting list, sort W's benefits.
This time last year X was suicidal,
now she's a mum. Talk Y out of a downward spiral.
Z comes into the office and says I helped him become
an actual person. Handshake. Case closed. Job done.

Simon Armitage

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find out more.' March 2025