



On temporary reception cover, a Programme Tutor helps to avert a potential tragedy

A Programme Tutor in Probation's Harlow office took a call in reception from an offender asking for his Offender Manager. On being told she was away from the office, he became very agitated and said he was going to kill his wife and children. Other officers alerted the police as the Programme Tutor continued to speak to him. She could hear a baby crying in the background, while the offender described some 'bad thoughts' about hurting his family, and asked to be sectioned to prevent it happening.

The offender's speech was slurred, but he appeared serious about his intentions. In the Programme Tutor's view, he was hyperventilating, and she suggested that they did some breathing exercises together. This seemed to help for a while. Asked where his wife and baby were, he started to cry, saying they were upstairs. Soon the offender stopped crying, and started shouting and swearing, becoming increasingly agitated. The member of staff believed that his intentions of hurting his family were extremely serious. She continued to talk to him, encouraging him to respond, and telling him he was not alone. He again asked for help. When asked if he had any weapons, he replied that he was holding only a glass of cider, and told the staff member that he had consumed two two-litre bottles of it that day. He then offered to let his wife speak on the phone.

She sounded distraught, saying that her husband had been drinking day and night since the weekend. The Programme Tutor advised her to leave the house, taking the baby with her. She seemed ambivalent, saying she wanted to feed her baby. It appeared unlikely that she had heard all of her husband's conversation. She left, however, after agreeing to provide her mobile phone number so that Probation could check on her safety a little later.

The offender returned to the phone, crying, saying he could not get the thoughts out of his head, and that he would take his own life too. The Programme Tutor kept him talking until the police arrived, then encouraged him to go with them, as in doing so he would be helping both himself and his family.

It is likely that serious harm was averted through the calm and sensitive response of the Programme Tutor, and swift actions of her colleagues.