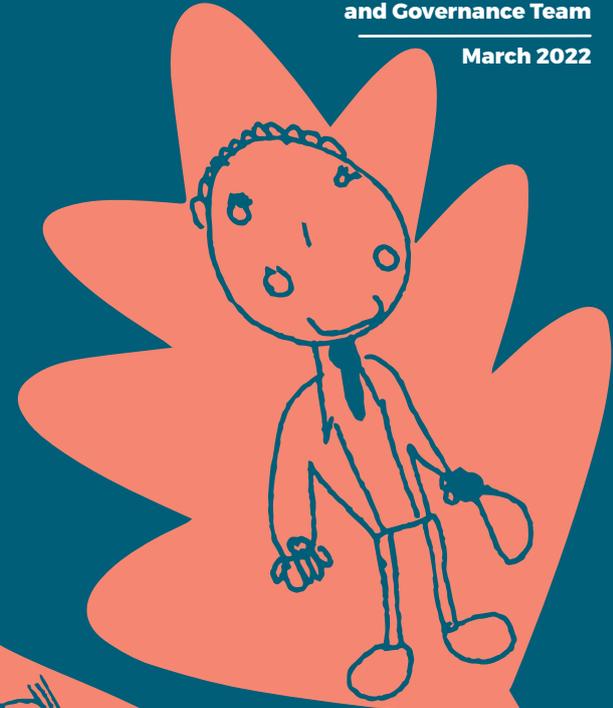




So, you think you want to be a social worker?



A compilation of stories, advice and wisdom from service users, carers, social workers, and students about what makes a good social worker.

Acknowledgements



Sincere and heartfelt thanks are extended to the parents, carers, children, service users/recipients, residential and day centre staff for contributing towards this book. Sharing your experiences through your powerful words and pictures will undoubtedly help anyone considering a career in social work to really think twice about what the key ingredients of a good social worker are, and whether it's the right profession for them.

Thank you to the social work students and staff who were involved in listening to and compiling the stories of service users and carers as part of their Community Development projects. Your projects have helped bring this book together and may well have helped you tune into what kind of social worker you strive to be.

The book is complemented by the voices of social workers and social work students and gratitude is extended to you all for sharing your own stories and reasons for pursuing social work as a career. Your practice wisdom and tips for those thinking about undertaking the studies is welcomed and valued.

Thank you to Martin McCrory, PPI Lead in the Western Trust for your support and guidance and thank you to our fabulous

graphic artist Michael Robertson who has brought these stories to life through his artistic creativity.

Thank you to WHSCT social work managers Norma Cairns, Joan Byers and Stephen McLaughlin for their ongoing support and commitment to this project.

This book is dedicated to all the service users and carers who contributed to it. May your words and pictures continue to improve the social work profession.

Finally, this book is also dedicated to one particular young person in care who started the conversation about key ingredients to make a good social worker. You made us think and hopefully this book will influence social workers in the future.

Thank you.



Introduction

Prior to the global pandemic, each year Careers Fairs would take place face to face to help young people think about their future study options. I stood at tables, handing out pens and leaflets, talking about the rewards and challenges of a career in social work and hoped that they would consider this profession when completing their UCAS applications for university courses.

Many young people would ask similar questions about social work - what was it like? Is it scary? What's the most rewarding thing about social work? Is it a stressful job? How long have you been doing social work? Why did you choose social work? What advice do you have? We would chat as I handed out pens and notepads and as I looked around the hall, I would notice other stalls with pens and notepads and wondered whether this was the best way to help these young people think about whether to apply for social work. It really shouldn't have any bearing on how fancy your loot is (although, pens and notepads are very handy, granted).

These discussions, coupled with a throwaway comment by a young person in residential care who was thoroughly disgruntled with their social worker, made

me question how could we really get to the heart and soul of the issue and communicate this to prospective social work students? That's where the idea for this book came from.

I spoke with some colleagues and service users who were willing to take part in this compilation of stories about the key ingredients that make a good social worker. I didn't want it sugar-coated - social work is often about dealing with a wide range of human emotions and it can be both stressful and rewarding. I wanted to hear from people who use our services about what their experiences had been and what advice could they give, even when their experiences were negative. I have been humbled and encouraged by what people have shared and realised very quickly that this book isn't just for people thinking about a career in social work. It is for all social workers- whether you have been qualified for a month or 40 years, as it reminds us why we do what we do and how we can do it even better.



My heart has burst with both pride and sadness listening to stories where social workers had lifted people up and let them down. It has affirmed for me that although it can be a rollercoaster for us all, and it's never going to be dull, we can never stop learning how we can do things better.

I hope that you are enlightened by the stories in this book and that it gives you some guidance on whether social work is the right career for you. If you are a social worker, I hope this book reaffirms why you do what you do. If you are a service user, I hope this book helps you gain an insight into what has motivated social workers to take on this career and perhaps see things from a different perspective. Some of the stories tell us about service users who have gone on to be social workers themselves. Indeed, some social workers may also be service users at some time in their lives and some may straddle both service user and social worker. The reality is we are all united by our humanity and we all experience the range of human emotions and challenges. These feelings are clearly shown throughout this book and, as a health warning, please be advised that the content may be upsetting.

There are contact details of services at the end of the book should you wish to seek further support or information, particularly if these stories have triggered something in you.

You might cry, but you may also laugh or just reflect on the profound messages people have shared. To each and every person who has been so incredibly generous with their time and shared their stories, from the bottom of my heart I want to say a huge thank you.

Debbie Greaves
Social Worker
March 2022

**“Social
work is not
a job, it’s a
vocation”**



Contents

Voices of Service Users and Carers

When Wonderful Things Happen **10**

Reflections From a Grandmother and Kinship Carer **12**

Get to Know us **13**

That Parent you are Working With did not Plan to end up Here **14**

Make Sure we are Ready for Endings too! **16**

When you can Work Well Together Things get Done a lot Quicker **17**

Left in the Dark for Weeks During Covid **18**

False Promises and Unreturned Phone Calls **19**

They do more than enough for us **20**

It Would be Nice to Receive a Courtesy Call Occasionally... **21**

I Never Read Anything Nice About me in Reports. I Always Felt **22**
Ridiculed. Meetings Became a Warzone

The Voices of 25 Adults With Learning Disabilities **26**

Voices of Carers of Adults With Learning Disabilities **29**

I am a Human Being, With Rights and More Importantly, I Matter! **30**

Small Steps Changed my Life **31**

She has Persevered With me **32**

I Felt Understood and Non-judged **33**

Our Voices, Wishes and Feelings are Heard in Meetings **34**

All the Staff are Outstanding, Earth Angels **35**

Build Your Services Like the Japanese Build Their Cars - Think of the Future **37**



Pictures of the Perfect Social Worker by **39**
Adults With a Learning Disability

Children's Pictures of Their Perfect Social Worker **40**

Voices of Social Workers

Building Trust can Change Everything for the **44**
Families we Work With

Self-care is the Most Important Thing **45**

Be Kind to Families Both in Your Actions and Thoughts **46**

It has Been Rewarding to Help Reduce Dangerous Behaviours **48**

Try Working in lots of Different Areas to get Different Experiences **49**

Parents Feel Rubbish Enough About Their Situation, **50**
Don't add to That

It's ok to not be ok **53**

You Won't Regret it! **54**

It's a Privilege to Help People **55**

Helping Someone to Believe in Themselves **57**

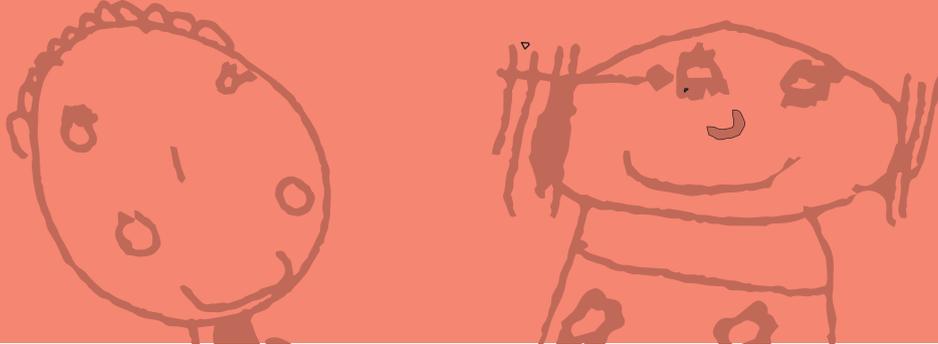
Make Time for Self-care. You Don't Have to Learn **58**
Everything the Hard way

Be the Kind of Social Worker you Would Want to Have **59**

You are no Better Than the People you Serve - **61**
Walk Alongside Them

Building the Confidence of Young People in Residential Care **63**

Residential and Day Centre Staff Observations of Social Workers **64**
and Their Interactions With Service Users



Resilience and Confidence Will Carry you Through Each day **66**

I am Amazed Every day People Share Their Life **67**
Stories With a Stranger

Working With Cultures and Norms That Were Outside **68**
my Comfort Zone...

There's Learning From Mistakes **69**

I think Social Workers After so Many Years in Service **70**
Should be Given Medals

Every day you Will Learn Something new **72**

Voices of Students 73

Be Ready to get Stuck in With Your Social Work Buddies and **74**
Make Some Positive changes!

Make the Most of Your Placement **77**

Very Small Actions can Make Such a Difference in a Service User's Life. **78**

Learn how to Develop Relationships **79**

You Can't Risk Your own Mental Health in the Process of Helping Others **80**

At Times you Just Need to Laugh Hard and Everything Will be Fine Tomorrow **82**

Continually Reflecting to Ensure I can Improve my Practice **83**

Being an Example for Other Disabled People and Their Families is Rewarding **84**

You Cannot Pour From an Empty Cup **85**

Whether They Want to see you or not - you Will Learn so Much **86**

It's a mix of Emotions but it's Worth Every Second **88**

Support Services 89



voices of service users and carers



**A compilation of stories, advice and wisdom
from service users and carers about what
makes a good social worker.**



“When Wonderful Things Happen”

“My first experience with social services was frightening. I was untrusting, sceptical and it was a bit of a nightmare. I had stereotypical view of social services. When the social worker was coming to visit, I spent the entire day cleaning my house. I had this pre-conceived fear, like a stigma that social workers are there to take children away from me. I thought they were judging me so I watched what I was saying and pretended that everything was great and nothing was wrong but inside I was screaming.

When my first social worker came out, they came with the pen and paper and started to ask questions. I felt like I was being judged and interrogated. I was wondering what they were writing down about me.

One social worker came out and done something different. He put the pen and paper away. He opened up about himself and some of his own struggles. At that point, I stopped seeing him as a monster and I related more to him. We were able to build trust and a relationship. I got the confidence to speak to my social worker.

Social work is a vocation not a job. You have to want to do it, enjoy it and love it. It's all about relationships and working

together. If you work with social services, they will bend over backwards for you and that's when wonderful things happen.

My advice for someone thinking about starting a career in social work would be: Don't go in with your note pad, put it away. Talk about yourself and your own experiences. Explain that you are busy and that you have a lot of cases as people might not understand and get frustrated when you don't get back to them. Let people know that you might not always be available to take their calls right away but reassure them that you will get back to them when you have time. Do this and the person will empathise and understand and know that you are still there to help them.

Don't forget the parents. Know that sometimes, the parent needs help too. Communication and relationship building



is key to a good social worker. Explain what you are doing and why you are doing it. People are paranoid, if you have to take notes, let people know before you start writing. Build the best relationship possible with both the parents and the child. When you tell someone what day you are coming, come that day. My social worker had great communication with me. He would have always asked how my child has been. This communication was fantastic and helped me and my social worker work together.

My child had been through so many social workers. One of the worst experiences was when I thought my child had given up completely. She felt that there was no point talking to social workers and building that trust and relationship and tell them everything for them to just move on. It can be very frustrating putting time and energy into these relationships for the social worker to move on. I feel like to avoid this there should be a proper handover when a social worker moves on so the new social worker understands the situation.

When one social worker was moving on, he organised a meeting that involved me and my child and the new social worker. This gave us the opportunity to explain what works for us. This helps massively when social workers are moving on.”

Father

“Communication and relationship building is key to a good social worker.”



Reflections From a Grandmother and Kinship Carer

“When I was first involved with social service I had to transition my role in the children’s life to being a parent. This was a hard transition for me and also for the kids. There was quite a big generation gap which meant that a lot of things changed. I had support which helped me through this. Also my social worker helped me to change my method of discipline to suit today’s society.

My advice to someone starting a career in social work would be when you tell a child something, follow through. Children don’t forget. It might be a small thing to you but if you cannot deliver something you said you would, explain why you can’t. Before starting your degree, look and learn through your own family and experience. Don’t be surprised at anything you see. Get to know people. Know that every family is different. Get feedback from the people you are working with on how they deal with certain things. Social work isn’t just a job. If you do the career and you realise you don’t think you can handle it, you can learn things from it and use it to go in another direction”.

“...when you tell a child something, follow through. Children don’t forget.”

“Get to Know us”



“I have been involved with social services for a long time. There can be stages where you think you are getting there and then all of a sudden, you’re back to the start.”

My experiences with social workers were mainly good. I have no bother speaking to social services as I am an open book. They came in and got to know me and my family.

My advice for someone starting a career in social work would be not to make false promises. Follow through with what you say. Get to know us.

The ending stage can make people feel like everyone is leaving. When social workers left in the past they did not come out to tell us. Endings are as important as introductions!”

Mother

**“Endings
are as
important
as
introductions.”**



“That Parent you are Working With did not Plan to end up Here”

“I actually had two completely different experiences with social services. When I was first involved, I was not the person I am today. I was told I needed to stay sober to get to see my child. When being involved with social services is not good but it’s about making it easy. I hadn’t a clue what to expect. I was asked to a meeting and I didn’t understand what it was about. I went into a room full which consisted of professionals sitting around the table. I felt like my heart was going to come out my throat.”

I feel like social workers should learn more about alcoholism at university. Behind most addicts and alcoholics, lies serious trauma in their past. You should let people know you are going to ring them and try to keep in contact. I would wait and wait for a phone call to see what is going to happen next.

When I had a good social worker, they would explain that they are really busy but they would ring me back when they had time. Be honest with people. If you want to take note to remember things, explain that you have a terrible memory and ask if it’s ok to take notes. One social worker came out and followed me around every room in the house. Another came out and told me they would sit in the car while I had time with my child. It’s all about weighing up the situation.

Know that people can lie, but understand that 9 times out of 10, that parent you are working with did not plan to end up here. You should try and find out the reason they got here.

My second involvement, I was kept up to date with what was happening. My social worker explained things clearly. I had to learn a lot of new words and learn the court processes. Social workers should be mindful that people don’t understand these things, if I had someone sit and explain to me what the reports mean it would have made it a lot easier for me. Understand that every child needs to be with their parent, so you should work closely with the parent to ensure they can keep their children at home.

It’s all about trust and respect. Be open and honest. Let people know what you need to see and why. If you need to look in someone’s cupboards, let them know, ask them is it ok if I have a look around. Don’t be sneaky because people will notice.



One social worker came and talked to me for about an hour and a half with no pen and paper which was good, I felt listened to. When my social worker was taking notes they explained to me that they had to take notes and told me why.

Each time a new social worker came out it was like starting from scratch again. My social worker went above and beyond the second time around.

I think communication is very important in social work. Make sure and attend all meetings and keep the parents or carer up to date with everything going on as most parent live and breathe waiting on those phone calls. Make sure you understand what phase of recovery someone is at. Don't empathise with someone when you don't truly understand.

My second involvement, my social worker was so good. When she said she would meet with you she stuck to it. If she couldn't make it she would let me know.

If it wasn't for this social worker I believe I wouldn't have got where I am today. I didn't understand the big words and I felt insignificant in the big meetings but my social worker helped me through this.

Also, be mindful when information sharing. My dentist doesn't need to know that I am involved with social services! When I was involved, I felt like everyone knew my business. Ask yourself how much do these people really need to know?"

Mother

**“Also,
be mindful
when information
sharing. My
dentist doesn't
need to know
that I am involved
with social
services!”**



Make Sure we are Ready for Endings too!

“I feel like communication is very important in social work. Take time to get to know people’s situation. Don’t pussy foot around people. Be open and clear about what you are doing and why. It took a long time for me to open up and be honest with my social worker. It helped that my social worker took time to build the trust and relationship. I have now learned that it is ok to ask for help. My advice would be to ring back when you say you will and don’t bring the pen and paper.

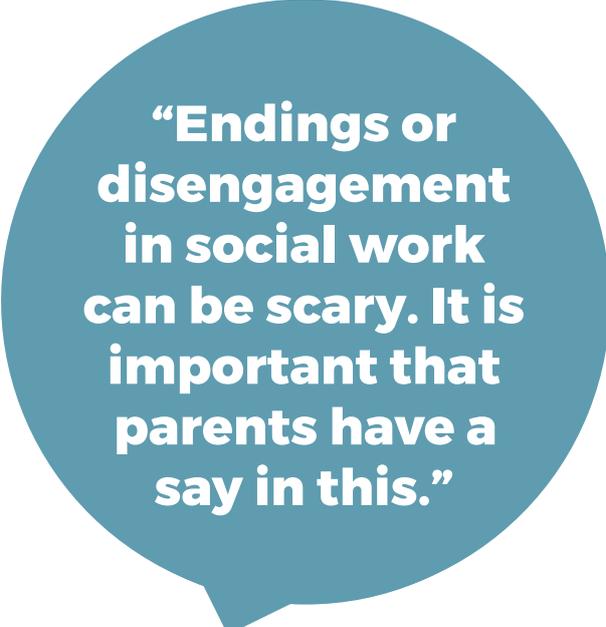
Endings or disengagement in social work can be scary. It is important that parents have a say in this. It can be a difficult stage as that person may have built a reliance on you. It is important to ensure that people are ready to move on. Go with your gut, do you think this person is ready for disengagement? It is hard to admit or ask for help so make them feel like they are contact you again if they need to, or point them in the right direction of someone that can help them if they need it.

Remind yourself to remind parents about confidentiality. If you think someone is about to disclose something to you, you need to constantly remind them the whole way through that there is certain things you may need to take further. Remind the person that if someone is put in danger, the information may need to go further.

Keep the parents in the loop. If you don’t they can feel blocked out.

Social work can be complex with older children. Always remember to work with the family. Do not exclude anyone. Work with the entire family”.

Mother



“Endings or disengagement in social work can be scary. It is important that parents have a say in this.”

“When you can Work Well Together Things get Done a lot Quicker”



“The values I think a social worker should have are things like: kindness, respect for humanity and maintaining professional boundaries. Also have dignity and worth for the person.

My First Social Worker!

To be honest, I did not like the way she handled anything. I didn't receive anything in return through my hard work, especially when I think I deserved it. She just left me and others in the dark and did not give me anymore days or time with my two children.

Social Worker Number two

I loved everything she done, from giving me extra days to letting me have more time with them and seeing how much I care and love my children. Just giving me credit and showing me how proud I should be of myself, she is what a social worker is all about.

Ingredients I Think a Social Worker Should Have!

Good understanding and respect

Have a heart

Meet you halfway and recognise the goal to change

Listen, not judging until they know you, and notice the effort you have put in

Old Social Worker Impact

Did not make a good impact on me at all. I felt she was rude and very judgemental, put words in my mouth, and she did not take on anything I said. Therefore, she left a negative impact on my life, so I don't think she's the social worker type.

New Social Worker Impact

Made an amazing impact on my life. Just being so understanding, caring, kind, seeing your hard work and rewarding you in return, which I think is so important because when you can work well together things get done a lot quicker and the process can move forward. So, she has of course made a difference.

My new social worker managed my work in stages by breaking it down and explaining it bit by bit so that I would understand each stage of what is happening, which give me a better idea of how long I'd be waiting to get my children back, really left my mind at peace.

So overall, that's my view and honest review on everything a social worker should be and how different they can be. It's just getting the right one for you with any luck”.

Mother



Left in the Dark for Weeks During Covid

“I am a single carer and I care for my son. I have seen a lot of social workers come and go. When I first moved here, I had a fantastic social worker. He really looked after me and my son, I couldn’t fault him. He would call every week to see how we were and would check in to see if we needed anything. I was going through a tough time myself and he always checked in to see if I was okay, not just my son. But he left his post and got a new job. Once he left everything went pear shaped. I have little to no support network around me and I’m always left on my own to deal with everything.

My son was given a new social worker. We never met them; I just received a letter in the post to inform me my son was getting a new social worker. I received no contact after that. My son and I were left on our own for eight weeks. We were left in the dark with no contact, just waiting. We waited and waited but received nothing. I rang to see where this new social was, but they informed me that the person had left, and my son would be given a new social worker. I had to find this out for myself, I was so upset. If I didn’t ring, we would still be left waiting on that social worker that was never coming.

This is an ongoing issue and Covid-19 hasn’t helped it! Covid-19 has restricted direct contact, meaning no home visits but they don’t even pick up the phone and ring me. I am left completely on my own to care for my son, no help or support around me.

I’m finding the current situation challenging enough without this added stress. I feel like I’m running after the social worker trying to chase up something, the promised they would do. I feel as soon as they have got my son all the resources they can, I’m left on my own again. Contact and communication are very limited and there is no consistency.

For me confidentiality is a major issue. I feel that my son’s life isn’t kept private. On many occasions I have seen first-hand how quickly information about my son has been passed around between family support workers and social workers. His personal life isn’t kept private at all”.

Carer

False Promises and Unreturned Phone Calls



“During my time as a carer, all my experiences of social workers have been negative. All I hear is false promises. They promise me this and that, but nothing ever comes of it. I have to chase after the social workers all the time and I feel no one is listening to me. It’s the professionals such as the doctors and social workers that aren’t listening. This creates more stress for me and an added pressure which really upsets me.

I feel I have accessed more help through friends than I have through social workers. I feel I am left on my own to access support and resources. I am always ringing and leaving messages, people saying they will pass it on, but I get no word back. I’m left waiting and waiting on a response which never comes. Contact and communication are continual issues.

For all the years I have been a carer only recently I was informed that my partner can attend respite. I feel this is something we would have benefited from years ago. The only support I’m getting is a carer coming in the morning and evening. The rest I do on my own.

I feel there is no help for me and my partner when we need it, especially in the current situation with Covid-19. I feel constantly stressed and the social worker

does nothing to try and alleviate this pressure, in fact they are adding to it.

I feel that social workers need to be in my shoes to fully understand what I’m going through”.

Carer



“They do More Than Enough for us”

“All my experiences of social workers have been good. I am always pleased with all the work and services they have provided for me and my son. In some cases, I feel they do more than enough for us. During Covid-19 lockdown I fell, and the social worker arranged an emergency placement for my son, this was a great help. My son’s social worker phones every week to see how we are, and check do we need anything. Lockdown was a difficult time for my son and I, but the social worker kept in contact and helped us through it. I feel there is good communication and they keep me informed”.

Carer

“It Would be Nice to Receive a Courtesy Call Occasionally....”



“I have had mixed experiences of social workers within the time I have cared for my son. Communication and contact haven’t always been consistent, but I know if I ring them, they are there for us. It would be nice to receive a courtesy call occasionally, instead of me having to make the first line of contact. They have been supportive and have offered my son a range of different services but unfortunately due to Covid-19 restrictions my son is unable to access them”.

Carer

“I Never Read Anything Nice About me in Reports. I Always Felt Ridiculed. Meetings Became a Warzone”

“I remember one day just sitting on my bed and asking myself, “what happened to my life?” I looked at my son, who has special needs and thought, “how did this happen?” I had a good job. A good education. I thought my life would be like other people’s lives- I had a partner, we were engaged and excited about being pregnant and had made our home together. He used to look after our garden, we were happy, like other couples. I had never had social workers in my life before. Before I knew it, my life changed completely and became a blur of meetings, social worker after social worker and complete and utter exhaustion. Again, how did I end up here?”

When I was six months pregnant my fiancé left and started having affairs with other women. He got bored of me and probably didn’t want the responsibility of being a dad. We were both young, not even in our 20’s and he wanted both worlds - family and a social life. Before long, things started to fall apart. He became violent and abusive. He eventually left before our child was born and had moved on. I hadn’t moved on. I didn’t want to move on - I still wanted what we had planned together and he took that away from me. My mum told me that really you should only ever have a baby for yourself, because even if the dad wants kids, he may not want the responsibility when it’s in front of him. My child was born with special needs and didn’t sleep for any real length of time. He’s nearly an adult now and still doesn’t sleep much. You can’t prepare for sleep deprivation. I was exhausted and heartbroken as he ran off and started a new life not just with another woman but

with my best friend. You need to think about that - some of the people you are working with are going to be heartbroken because they - like me - have been left and didn’t want to be left. I lost my friend and my partner all at once. I had no-one.

Anyway, I didn’t have any help. My mum wasn’t able to help me because she had her own difficulties at home and found my son’s behaviour too exhausting. She couldn’t keep up with him and he would sometimes kick out and she would get hurt too. I had to quit my job to care for my son and a vicious cycle started. His dad eventually came back into his life and wanted to take over. He had lots of family support and they saw me as inferior to them because I didn’t have what they had - a lovely big home, family, somewhere for my son to run and play. His new partner was pregnant and they wanted to start a family together and cut me out of their lives. I gave in from sheer exhaustion and allowed his mum to take my son for a week and I slept. By that stage I was done. I was not coping on any level, my brain

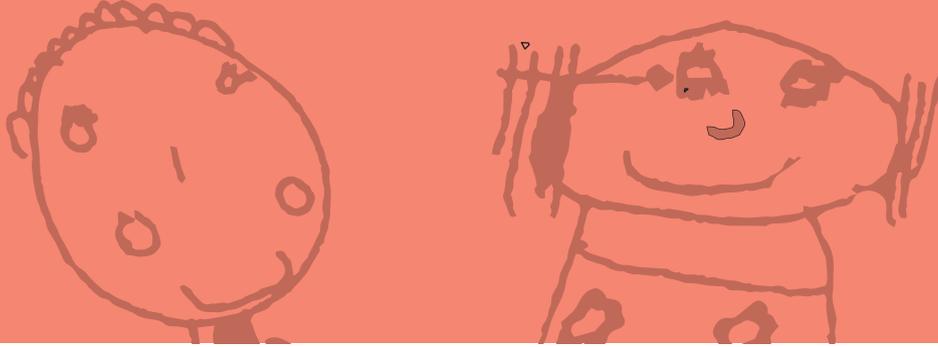


had completely stopped working the way it should. I knew I couldn't keep it up or I would end up in a mental hospital. Before long social services were involved, his family said I wasn't coping and wasn't a good mother. They wanted to take him off me. I wasn't in a good place at that time.

In my experience the social workers I dealt with saw me as just another single young woman who just wants to go and party and not have the responsibility of being a mum. I wanted help, I didn't want to go out clubbing or drinking with friends, I wanted someone to teach me how to be a mum. I didn't know what I was meant to do and didn't have anyone to ask. People think you should just know these things but how could you? I remember seeing a mum once order spuds and gravy for her child and I copied her and ordered the same. If someone had helped me with budgeting and how to cook a healthy meal that will fill my child up that would have been so helpful. I didn't know these things. When I asked for help with my child, I thought the social workers saw me as not coping and that I was weak. I wasn't weak, I was just exhausted. I had been on my own for years and I had very little sleep. I remember crying when my son woke one morning at 5am after only sleeping for a few hours and I knew that he'd be up for the rest of the day. I had no money, no support and that kind of isolation wears you down. I was depressed and used to worry all the time about how I was going to pay for things.

After getting nappies and some food I had nothing left. We never got to do things that children should be able to do, like go to the beach for the day. How could I afford to do that and how would I even get there?

As the years passed, it didn't get any easier. My son still didn't sleep very much and he was fearless, I couldn't do things like have a nap and put on the TV as I had to watch him all the time as he would not be afraid of anything. I felt like a zombie. Then there were the meetings. All these meetings. All talking about you not being able to cope but still not giving you any help. I felt ridiculed by everyone there. No one said anything nice about me. The meetings became a war zone. My son's dad was there with all his family support and he was able to come across as all perfect and wonderful but I am no faker. What you see is what you get. I got angry in meetings; I broke down and cried. That doesn't mean he's strong because he doesn't cry and I'm weak because I do. He had everyone fooled. He had everyone there to speak up for him. I went to meetings alone and came home alone and had no one to stand up for me. Some of the things they said about me were so ridiculous - like being a prostitute - I honestly didn't know what to say. My life was so much more interesting in the reports. I have had so many phone calls with social workers telling them the same thing, "that's not true" but they don't listen because they put it down in reports and then it becomes fact. As soon as it's wrote down, you can't do anything about it.



Anyway, looking back I know what I could have done differently. If I said I was tired rather than I needed help, maybe they would have understood that? If they had just said to me, “you’re sleep deprived, we can help” rather than write reports! I didn’t need them to write a report! I needed sleep. People don’t understand what it’s like to care for a child with special needs. If only they could have taken him for a couple of days they would have understood. When I started my adult life I had a job, a good education. I was sober, I didn’t use drugs, I wasn’t partying or neglecting my child, I never hurt my child, I was just trying to get by. I never had enough money and used Foodbanks to feed us. I went without all the time. If you use a Foodbank they see that as a problem. They write that in the reports too. I was trying to feed my child, how can that be seen as a negative thing?

There’s a lot I would say to you if you were thinking about becoming a social worker. Firstly, listen to us. Really listen. When I said, “I need help” don’t see this as, “I can’t cope” and start judging me. The social workers who I liked didn’t judge me. They didn’t turn things around and treat me as though I was the problem. They really cared. The others just wanted a ‘quick fix’- take my child off me, put him in a nice, happy home and leave me to my single life so I can go out and party. That’s not what I wanted.

Even if you had said something good about me, that would have given me a bit of a boost. You could have told me things like, “you’re doing great! You are strong!” rather than saying so many negative things about me. I never read anything nice about me in reports. I always felt ridiculed. When that happened, I started to talk myself out of the job - maybe I’m not a good parent? Maybe I can’t do this? I was tired, young, heart broke and afraid. I was living in a house on my own. I didn’t want to be on my own, that’s scary. I wanted to go home to my mum and have someone look after me. I was still so very young when this all happened. You need to remember that the person in front of you who is angry or crying has a story to tell. You need to listen and not judge. I sometimes felt like they wanted to take my son off me and saw this as doing me a favour so I could go on with my life and be a twenty year old - partying and having fun like other twenty year olds. Of course I wanted to do that too, but that didn’t mean I didn’t want to be a mum. If I had been given a night a month to just be ‘me’ and have some fun and a good night’s sleep that would be something to look forward to and I might have been able to cope better. But if you say you want a night off so you can let your hair down they see you as a bad mum. There was one time I went out and went to a bar - my son was not with me. That was wrote down in a report. It was written in a way that put me across as being a bad mum. How could that make me a bad mum? My son wasn’t with me at the bar! Just because I wanted



a night out to be a twenty year old doesn't mean I don't care about my son. Even now, even though he's nearly an adult himself, I keep telling him to eat properly, drink more water, brush your teeth, all those things that will keep him healthy. Just because I needed a break doesn't mean I don't care.

My life became one social worker after another - I don't remember their names - so many meetings. There were a couple of social workers I felt I could open up to and they listened but then they'd go back to the office and wrote it up as being so much worse than it was. I dreaded getting the young social workers who had no experience- no life experience or parenting experience. They'd come to my house driving their nice cars, nice life and they had no idea what it was like for me. They had their book to go by but I didn't care about their 'book'. When they turned up I was just me. Some days were better than others. You need to remember that. When you visit someone they may be just trying to get through the day. They may have gotten a bottle of wine the night before after the kids were asleep to cope with what's going on. The next time you see them they may be grand, they may have a dinner on and might be dressed and looking well. You have no idea what's going on.

Social services finally realised what my ex was like. He beat up his girlfriend. He beat up the kids. My son eventually was returned to my care and I got the help I needed. My best friend, or the girl who was my best friend, soon realised what he was like. He beat her up, nearly killed her.

As I said, I just needed help. I didn't ask for all of this. No wonder I sit and ask myself, "how did my life end up like this?"

Mother of a Child With Special Needs



The Voices of 25 Adults With Learning Disabilities

What we like...

“My social worker sorts things out for me, if I have any difficulties they always help me”

“I like when my social worker talks to my family as well as me because my family are very important to me”

“I like when social workers send out the introductory letters with their faces on it. It makes me feel less nervous about meeting them in person”

“I was isolating in my room for two days and my social worker phoned me and asked me how I was keeping and told me if I needed anything that she would send it down to me. She really helped me feel less lonely and even mentioned that I wouldn’t be able to go out for my walks for a few days. I really liked this because it made me feel important that she had remembered something that was important to me”

“A good social worker is kind and honest with me”

“My favourite social worker always came to see me and even took me out places for coffee”

“I liked when my social worker came to see me and explained why she was leaving and she contacted my family too, which is important”

“If I get a new social worker I like them to phone to introduce themselves before coming out to see me”



“I think a perfect social worker would say, ‘I’m glad to meet you’ and say ‘tell me everything about you – what you like and don’t like and all about your family’. They would arrive at my door with a happy face and probably be smart and well dressed, maybe in a party dress”

“I like when my social worker phones me up to see how I am and chats to me”

“Social workers have all been friendly to me, every one of them that has came through the door”

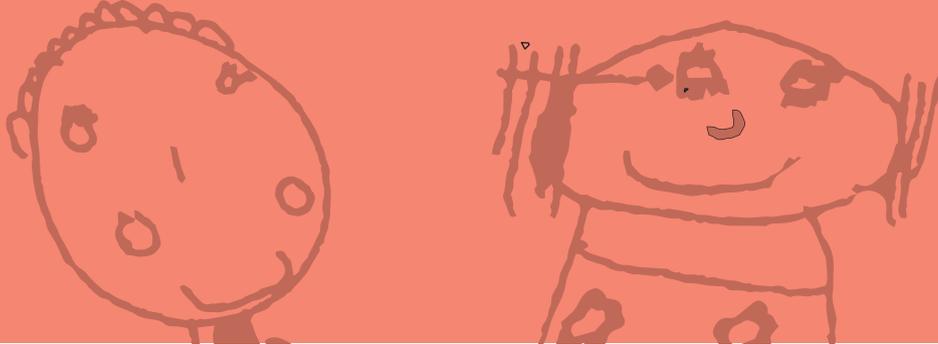
“My social worker sent me a card and I keep it in my room. It was lovely to know she was thinking of me even when I haven’t seen her in a while”

“I like when they get to know me and listen to what I want to say. My last social worker kept saying ‘I’ll look into that’ but never did”

“My social worker is always helpful, they are welcome to my home any time for a cup of tea and a chat”

“Sometimes I find reviews make me nervous because I’m being asked lots of questions. I do like having all the women around me though!”

“My social worker got me in touch with family support who take me shopping and to appointments. I don’t know what I’d do without them”



“My social worker rings me to see how I am, I would be lonely sitting staring at the same four walls if it wasn’t for my social worker and the family support workers”

“During COVID my social worker rang me every week to see how I was – it was really nice to have someone care about me”

“My social worker helped me to get involved with social farming and through this I have made lots of friends which has made a difference to my life”

“I feel like I could pick up the phone at any time and chat to my social worker. Social workers are nice, friendly people”

What we don’t like....

“One time I rang in to the office to speak to my social worker and she had left – no one had told me”

“When social workers are leaving their post I like them to visit or phone me to say goodbye”

“One time a social worker phoned me up to say ‘I’m your new social worker’ and I never met her and then she left. This made me a bit upset”

“Some social workers forget to actually listen – they think they know what’s best but don’t take on board what you want to talk about. I would like the chance to talk things through instead of having my worries not listened to”

Voices of Carers of Adults With Learning Disabilities



“Any social worker my sister has had she has got attached to so it is obvious that she has liked them and they have had a good relationship with them. I never really hear from social workers except at my sister’s reviews. I feel happy with that as I feel the care home that my sister is living in does a great job in working through any problems that arise and keep me updated on her care”

“I like a friendly down to earth social worker that understands my concerns, listens with their heart as well as their ears and will give good advice and reassurance that the problem will be dealt with and supported”

“A social worker can listen professionally but not empathetically. I have been told that something was not of great concern when it was to me”

“Someone read on my son’s file that they had been diagnosed with a condition that I had never heard of and that he as far as I was aware hadn’t been diagnosed with – they wrote it down in a social work document and it has been copied across on to new documents ever since. I have tried to correct them but it still keeps being used years later”

“I’ve had a social worker visit who talked about their worries and didn’t let me talk about my own”

“I don’t like when social workers use a lot of professional jargon that meant nothing to me and I felt stupid when I asked what they meant”



“I am a Human Being, With Rights and More Importantly, I Matter!”

“I have had a long history with social workers involved with my children and now with my own mental health. I can see the benefits and many drawbacks from social work involvement. Such as my children being put in care I felt I wasn’t listened to and I was judged. I have seen and witnessed times of social workers telling lies or in my opinion twisting things I have said in meetings. Compared to my support from my mental health social worker, I have found my voice and through their support I am able to advocate for my rights as a parent.

For me good practice is personalization for each client. When a social worker really got to know me the care and support changed me for the better. Although I only wished this type of support was available within children’s social work. It makes me question the social work role that does is depend on the person within the role and their use of the profession? That if the social worker for my mental health who has only ever supported me had been involved with my children would I have been acknowledged as my parent role?

The best advice I would give anyone treat your clients how you want to be treated. Speak the way you would like to be spoken

too. If you have a loved one in your life think how you want them to be supported and offer that support. Remember we are not just clients or someone moaning on the phone I am a human being, with rights and more importantly I matter”.

Parent and Mental Health Service User

“Small Steps Changed my Life”



“Social work in my view I had only seen it relating to children. I had no idea the role has such an impact in mental health services. I had struggled with my mental health for many years and have seen many different professionals from a medical background. I was so worried when seeking mental health support when I was linked with a social worker. From the very start my social worker really put me at ease. This was led through a positive initial meeting that clearly identified the work we would complete while also clarifying their role within mental health. As we built a relationship, we had open communication right through all our sessions. This ended by the social worker concluding and summarizing all the key areas we had covered. This changed my views on the social work role that in the news I only ever hear of negative. In my opinion I have received such good support. This was through practical small steps that supported my mental health that previous medication had gave only temporary support to. The positive impact will support me continuously. Using the small steps that were encouraged changed my life. These were only made possible through my social worker. I feel it is a role that should be highlighted more and would discourage the fear highlighted too often. I would love if more positive stories of social workers were voiced and this would support for people to engage within services involving social workers.

Mental Health
Service User



“She has Persevered With me”

“My current social worker I work with on a long term basis for my mental health diagnosis. I have ongoing support. I feel so supported with extra effort made to detail around my needs. I am aware how busy the role is and I always appreciate the attention to detail with all aspects of my life from mental health to social aspects I know I can seek support when needed. This includes which is the most important part is initiative. Before I ask they read and research to find the best service or ensure I am being cared for. Through this the social workers willingness for me to build upon my own skills and resilience. This is demonstrated through her continued committed to me of a long term relationship she has persevered with me that I continue to engage. Regardless of the obstacle, empathy is shown to me that I can communicate in the privacy and know I will be understood and know what I say is listened to”.

**Mental Health
Service User**

**“My advice
to other social
workers would
be take your
time and remain
consistent with
support”.**

“I Felt Understood and Non-judged”



“With my social worker I have had the best experience gaining support for my mental health. My life had a lot of personal stressors that impacted on my mental health. This led me to regrettable life choices. My social worker always took her time and allowed me to work at my own speed to understand how my choices impacted on my mental health. This was completed in a trusting environment where I felt understood and non-judged. I would shy away from professionals through initial telephone calls but these led to home visits. This flexibility and understanding of needs I loved. I was always really impressed with how they handle challenging projects! But the way they took it on, and broke down this complex project into manageable pieces, helped everyone. They were able to communicate with my family members and me so openly. I found the sessions were so helpful and flexible to how I was that day. The way they adapted to my mood made me feel so encouraged. Through these sessions I was helped to obtain new housing. This reduced a personal stressor that I wasn't even aware was impacting my mental health. Through the assessment and intuition my social worker was able to identify these stressors within my life and educate me on how to reduce and move forward in my life to improve my mental health. This was effectively completed with researched advice and support”.

Mental Health
Service User



“Our Voices, Wishes and Feelings are Heard in Meetings”

“As a carer for someone with mental health I have found the role be so challenging at times. It is hard to see the care and support they receive and wish it was to a higher standard. I do recognize how stressful and challenging a social workers role is. I recognize this that their hands seem tied at times. That they are the ‘middle man’ between Trust money and myself as carer to their client and then the client. I wish the limits the Trust place on social workers were not there but unfortunately at present funding for mental health is non-extensive and this is evident through lack of resources.

A key positive is the effort placed in outsourcing resources and services in other organizations and charities. However I do appreciate to the extent social workers will advocate for the rights of the client and myself as a carer so our voices, wishes and feelings are heard in meetings. Although at times my frustration was voiced, I was impressed the calming nature and understanding for my feelings. That she stepped up to the plate after what other social workers may have considered a knock back. Regardless of tension between us, she always remained professional with the client and non-judgmental to the relationship held between myself as the carer. I really appreciated how she did check-ins to keep me up to date. Presented this to me clearly and concisely and this was hugely

beneficial rather than telephone updates, I was posted information that allowed me to re-read and ensure information was shared with all those relevant. This was only made possible through the social worker taking the time to meet not just the client’s needs but also mine. The biggest positive to me is my carer’s assessment which is regularly updated about my needs. This acknowledges my role and that I have an opportunity created by the social worker to voice my thoughts”.

Carer for Adult With Mental Health Needs

“All the Staff are Outstanding, Earth Angels”

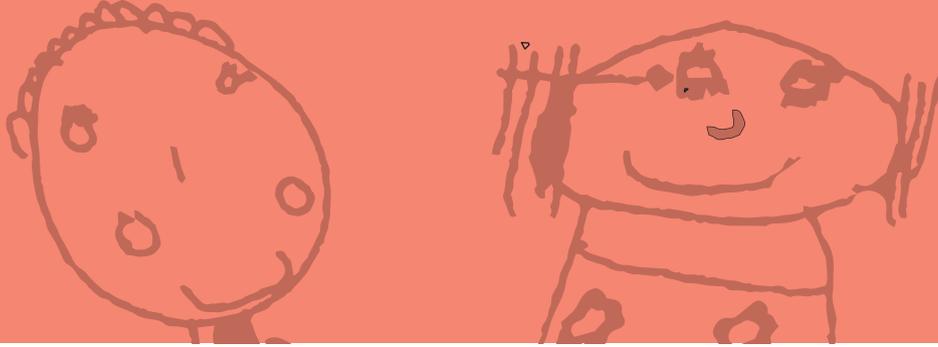


“Hello everyone, this is totally out of my comfort zone but if I can help by voicing my opinions to improve services for children and young adults with special needs, I will try my very best. Four of my five beautiful children have additional needs from learning and physical health needs. I have been working with the children’s disabilities team for many years now and have found all four of the Social Workers I have had so far to be extremely helpful.

About four years ago, two of my children were referred for short breaks. Up until this point my husband and I were not receiving any breaks at all. This was something we had decided at the time was not working out for us and our family as it just added extra pressure and stress for us. For example, the pictures that were put all over our home, but nothing was properly explained as what to do with those pictures or how to explain the purpose of them to two of our children who are non-verbal. Our Social Worker has since shown very useful ways of helping our children communicate their needs and behaviour, for example, if she has a meltdown, putting my daughter into a bath relaxes her or if my son’s bowels move, to take a picture of it and show him that this is where he is supposed to go to the toilet and not around the house. These were some of the many useful and helpful things our social worker helped with. We were offered an alternative respite service and decided to give it a go.

Don’t get me wrong, it took a lot of persuading from my husband that this was our best option for both our mental health and our marriage. My God, now when I look back at life before receiving this new respite service I honestly don’t know how we coped. Two of our children are completely non-verbal, they don’t sleep much so myself and my husband take turns doing nights. Before we started the respite service there was no time for us as a couple. I can, hand on heart, say the service and the staff are absolutely amazing. They allow me to be a better mum, wife and person. Those few days we get every six weeks allows me and my husband to get a full night’s sleep and have some 1-2-1 time with our other three children. It also allows me to make time for something as simple as a bath.

When our two children return from respite, we feel recharged with the sleep we get to take on the next six weeks of sleepless nights and challenging days. We really appreciate those days we do get and also thanks to our Social Worker. Taking into consideration our extreme circumstances, we would sometimes get a cancellation;



even over Covid we didn't miss out on respite. They were so helpful and still took our circumstances into consideration and we still received regular respite. All the staff are outstanding, earth angels.

Our two children skip into the respite centre with a smile on their face and love it. They get doing all the things that are unfortunately nearly impossible with us as they need 1-2-1. We don't have family support to help us so, not only do we receive respite, it also provides a great deal of activities for the children that they love to do: going to the park, trips on the bus, going to the beach, a lot of things that it's near impossible for us to do which also has an impact on my mental health also, with the guilt of not being able to do all of these normal family outings with my own children; but now knowing they get all this fun when they are on respite makes my heart and mind so happy. I honestly believe if it wasn't for the respite we receive I would no longer have a marriage, as extreme as that sounds, I truly mean that.

As parents of four children with extreme additional needs, your priority is them. Your full attention is meeting all their needs and care needs day and night. Their needs will and always will be Number 1 priority that yourself alone takes a back seat as well as my marriage, but these short breaks allow us to make time for us. I am and will be forever grateful to them. We do receive Direct Payments- a few hours a week

which I use to catch up on housework and do my food shop which, again, I'm extremely grateful for.

Another topic I'd like to highlight is unfortunately there aren't many services for children with physical disabilities. My other daughter has physical disabilities and reduced life expectancy, and she rarely gets to do much or anything exciting because of the significant needs of her siblings. It would be amazing if something was set up for these children for short breaks even twice a year to meet up with children in similar circumstances with physical disabilities and a fun place to go and a break for them from all the constant appointments for them and the outside world which unfortunately can be a difficult place for them to mix and be themselves.

It also goes without saying how truly blessed and lucky I am to have such an amazing, kind, helpful, caring Social Worker who goes above and beyond for my family. It's not just a job to her, it's much more. My children adore her, I adore her. She's like a mum to me. I know if I need help or something's wrong or I'm worried, I can just pick up the phone and she's always there to help and always gets things sorted and I'm so lucky and thankful for her.

Thank you everyone".

Mother of Five Children, Four With Complex Needs

“Build your services like the Japanese build their cars- think of the future”



“I’d first off like to say if myself and my boys did not have the support and help from all the services through the years and presently I could not cope. I needed and still need it all and it has been a difficult road with all the cuts and Covid - extremely difficult. Thank you so much for all your help and support now and through the years – God bless you. Now my boys are adults I look back and see what could improve to help other children and families in Children’s Services.

Early intervention on assessments, psychology, social support, respite, day care is essential to prevent catastrophe in later years which will also cost more. Lack of early intervention will also have a knock-on effect as I witnessed in school where children who were not getting support was clear to see and this had an effect on other children at the school, which then had a knock-on effect on their families which then meant more children and families needed more support (early intervention could have prevented this). The waiting lists are too long for assessments of condition, respite, psychology etc.

To Make an Example in my own Words

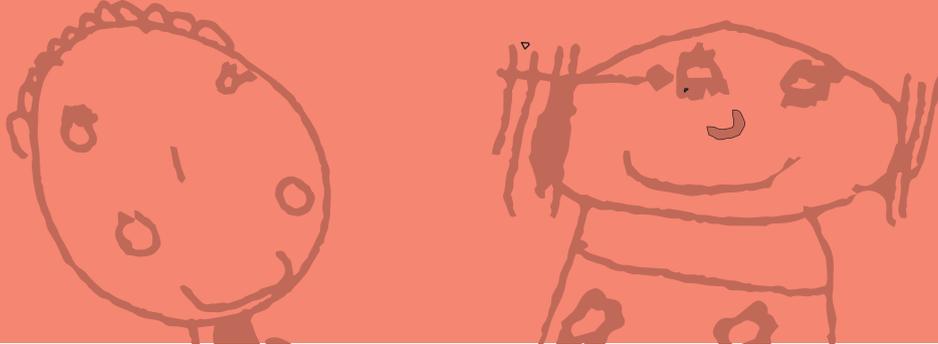
The world’s top 10 most reliable cars are Japanese. Japanese car companies work together as a team unlike American car companies who work against each other in each department for bonuses. When building cars, the Americans use cheap parts and don’t take time to make sure the car is perfect; they want the quick buck.

But the Japanese use expensive parts and take time making sure the car is perfect. This method prevents catastrophe later on. The Japanese look to the future, they look 10, 20, 30 years ahead when there will be more cars on the road. What I am saying is spend more on early intervention will prevent breakdowns on a massive scale in 10, 20, 30 years from now which will cost billions or like the Japanese be successful and save billions but more importantly save families and lives.

Respite needs to be there to be relied on for children and adults. Breaks should be bookable and planned 6 months in advance instead of lastminute.com for fear of cancellations. The misuse of respite facilities for emergency care and difficult children needs to stop.

A Duty of Care for Children’s Services Should Also be in Place.

When I was offered and other parents £100 pay off when respite was cancelled, it is useless. I, like the other parents, cannot get any other child/adult care to pay. There is no one else to watch my boys.



There should be better transition support from specialised services for autistic children.

There should be an adult service for 18 – 30-year-olds, not straight into adults. My boys are 18 but mentally they are a lot younger and still very vulnerable with 60-year-old adults in respite.

Child Psychology Services' waiting lists are too long. Once a fortnight or month appointment is not good enough. This support is essential.

There is currently not enough provision for summer schemes which is a lifeline in the hard summer months. There should be more weeks of respite during summer months.

Day Care facilities are also so essential and should be funded more as they are a lifeline also.

Recommitment of the monies meant for Disability Services and was being spent elsewhere is essential and must be put back into Disability Services. Where are you on the commitment of that money which would help all these essential services?

I'd also like to take this opportunity to commend all the Children's Services' staff: the short breaks services and CAMHS, but most of all the Children's Disability team, in particular, my own social worker. Without her help and support, me and my sons would be in a mental health facility or worse. She was always there for us. She went above and beyond her duty and God bless her. In later years we worked with another social worker who was also fantastic.

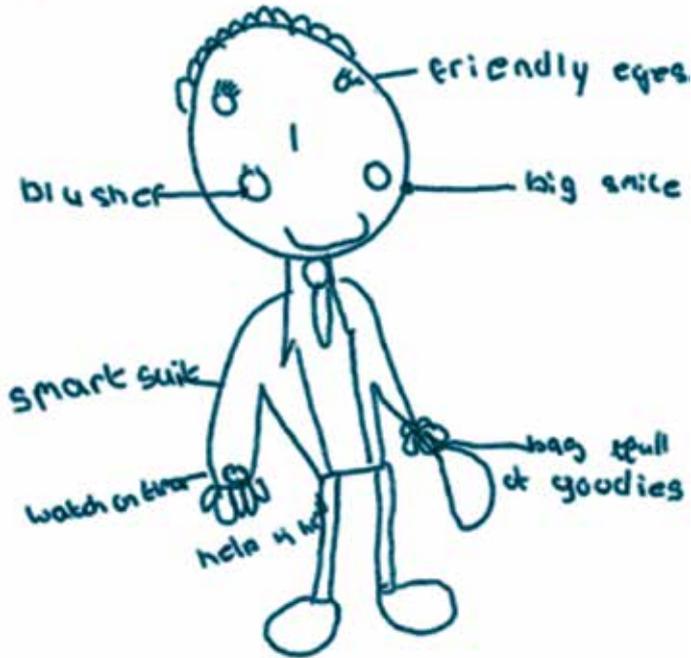
Thank you so much for this opportunity to speak and help you to help us. God bless you. Thank you”.

Father of two Adult Sons With Learning Disabilities

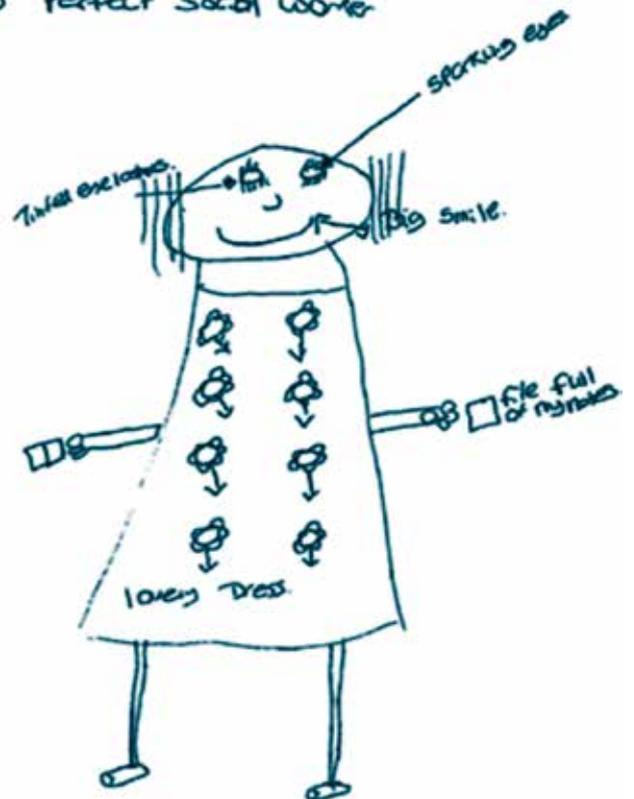
Pictures of the Perfect Social Worker by Adults With a Learning Disability



My perfect social worker!



My perfect social worker



listentome

help me

be kind

ask me now
I feel



Respect
My wishes

Listen to
me



Be kind

Be caring

Be honest
with me

Take me
places



listen
to
me

Tell
me
the
that

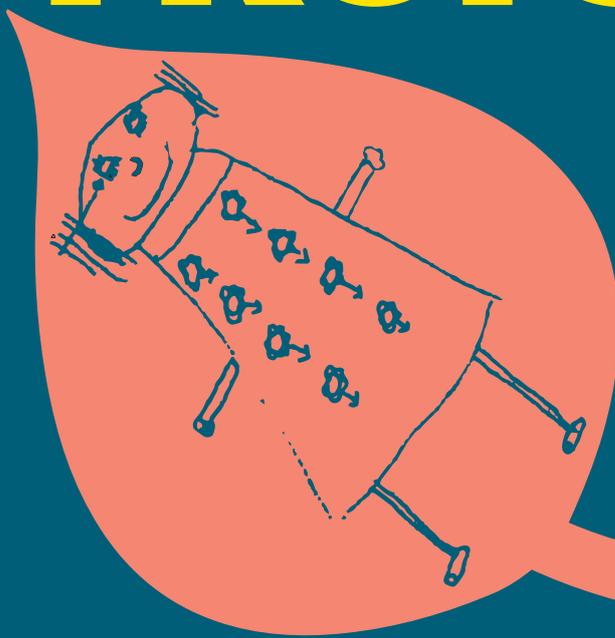
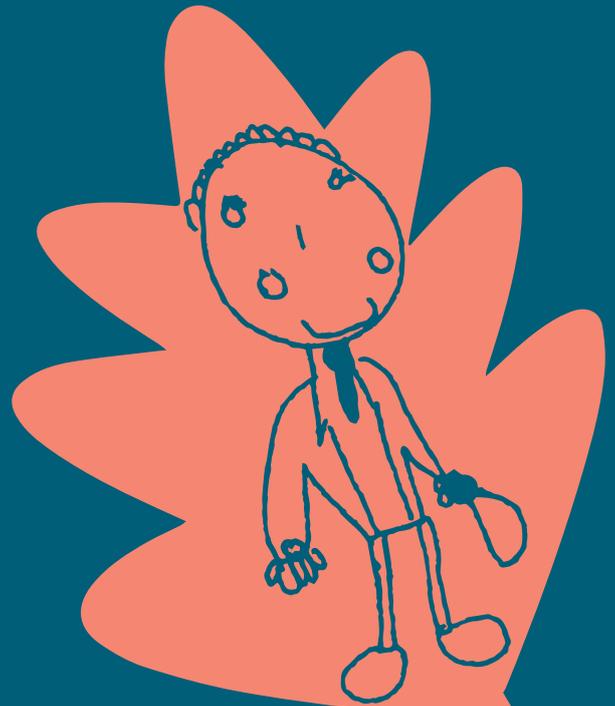
help
me
th

help
me

Be
kind



voices of social workers



**A compilation of stories, advice and wisdom
from social workers about what makes a
good social worker.**



“Building Trust can Change Everything for the Families we Work With”

“I have been a social worker for five years. I had always been drawn to a career within the sector however, for a long time I had thought that I would be a nurse or a midwife. As I got older and realized what those jobs entailed I decided that this was not for me. When I started to look into Social Work, I felt that this was exactly the career that I had been looking for. I had always felt the need to contribute to my own local community in some way and to contribute to society in general. I was aware that Social Work had a place within many different sectors of our communities however, working with children and families is where my interest always lay.

At times feeling under pressure from outside and external agencies can make this job very hard. At times, families can be very challenging which we can understand however when outside agencies etc. also have very unrealistic expectations or are collusive with parents this can be very frustrating. This has sometimes made me question if the stress is worth it. However, the most rewarding thing for me is working in an amazing team making friends with some team members on a deep level given the emotional experiences we face together. My confidence has grown meeting and building great bonds and relationships with children and families- seeing children thrive. I have worked with families whereby things were very worrying and issuing court proceedings was a possibility. While my job is to always act in the best interests of the child, I believe that children remaining at home if safe is the best outcome. In one situation, using

my personality to build some trust with the parents helped- from that everything changed and to this day we have a great working relationship.

If you are thinking of a career in social work, my top tips would be to use the time in training to really understand your role within whatever team you will work, this will help your own confidence when having to challenge others expectations of you stay aware of the emotional impact the job has. Make sure that you are always aware of how you are feeling and why, this will help you to learn strategies to cope in the long term. Be yourself have confidence don't be afraid to put yourself out there”.

**Social Worker,
Children and Families**

“Self-care is the Most Important Thing”



“I have been a social worker for 11 years. Before this, I worked as a family worker and in residential child care, I wanted to progress my career and my own learning and development as well as work more intensively with families.

Working with some really difficult cases from family support to looked after and helping parents change and get their children home have been career highs for me. I had one case where we were looking at a care plan of adoption but I believe my relationship with mum and the hope I could see inspired her to begin the process of change. The children are all home with her for a number of years and are doing well.

Some of my low points in my career include: working with parents and/or young people who have sadly died; parents getting mixed messages; our services not being set up in the right way to support families; seeing good strong social workers being burnt out by the system and management structures and not being able to do the work they want or are trained to do.

The most rewarding part of my career so far has been the privilege of being part of people’s lives- sometimes at the most traumatic and challenging times- and working with them, building relationships to effect change.

My top three tips for you, if you are thinking about a career in social work, are these:

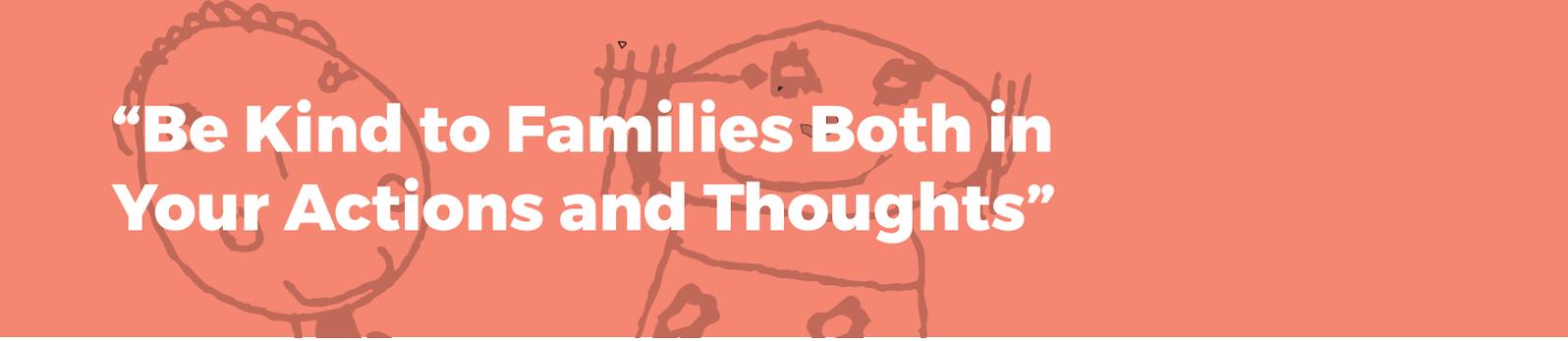
Work hard at building your resilience, social work is really hard and emotionally taxing and the system we work in is really hard

Have good people skills, don’t be over professional in your approach, learn how to work with people and roll up your sleeves if needed

Have a good and understanding support network this work is never 9 to 5, there are lots of late nights and early mornings, you’re never ‘off’ when you’re ‘off’ so you need the support of family to maintain it.

The last thing I want to leave you with is this, self-care is the most important part of social work, no-one else will look after you so you need to take responsibility for it yourself”.

**Social Worker,
Children and Families**



“Be Kind to Families Both in Your Actions and Thoughts”

“From my early teens I knew I wanted to be in a supporting role- psychologist? Psychiatrist? Social Worker? I wasn’t exactly sure what each of those professions did but knew that’s the route I was headed. I grew up in a household where we learned that if you can help then you should. I had family members with disabilities, a sibling who was adopted and a mother who took on the caring role for anyone within her radius. I completed my first degree, done 2 years of voluntary work to make sure I had experience before starting the social work degree.

I previously worked with young adults who had come through the care system. Building relationships with them and watching them develop and work through obstacles they were presented with is one of my career highlights. One particular young person had overcome adversity of living alone during the important years of their education but continued with their education to ultimately become a social worker. I supported them to attend school and higher and further education and at times when the temptation was there to give up, I encouraged them to see the bigger picture, the long-term goal instead of the immediate gratification. Seeing this achievement, their hard work and determination was so exciting. The most rewarding thing has been seeing young people who had come through the care system building relationships with me, building confidence in themselves and achieving their own goals no matter

what it was. Whether it was addressing past issues positively, repairing old relationships, living independently, staying alive or achieving university degrees. They all felt like massive achievements and I loved being part of that journey watching the progress.

It can be difficult though. Working in a multidisciplinary team can be so informative and rewarding but can also be very difficult to manage individual agendas, the approaches and viewpoints of different disciplines, sharing responsibility and actioning responsibility.

I have been a social worker now for 13 years. If I were to give you any advice, here’s what it would be

Be realistic about the career: it is not easy, you will have moments of regret and dread but the positives far outweigh these negatives but you need to be kind to yourself along the way.



Be kind to families both in your actions and thoughts. Always imagine you are the person knocking at your front door. Would you be happy to work with you? How would you feel after you'd left the house? We never know what lies ahead of us. It is a privilege to be allowed into our families lives and we must be firm but kind.

Be organised from the start. Manage a good diary, record everything as you go along. Record all informal discussions these matter as much as the big ones”.

Record any excellent practice pieces of work you do in training and within your career in a book. This will be excellent for interviews but also when you question yourself within the role you will be reminded of excellent work you do”.

**Social Worker,
Children and Families**



“It has Been Rewarding to Help Reduce Dangerous Behaviours”

“I got into social work because I wanted to empower others, uphold social justice, rights-base approaches and contributing to my local community by giving something back.

Witnessing how children and adult clients have progressed and are now living successful, happy lives are my highs, and it has been rewarding to help reduce dangerous behaviours including self-harm and suicide. Other highlights from my career include when a child who had been described as “non-verbal” said his first word. Another highlight was succeeding in reducing restrictive practices in homes and hospital facilities- despite the huge opposition faced. Over the years, I have met many good people/colleagues who have become very dear friends.

The low point in my career was experiencing bullying by a manager. This often made me think about leaving social work but I loved working with my clients, so I stayed on.

Looking back on my career in social work (I have been qualified over 30 years) I have learned to never take life for granted - everyday is precious and we must care for and look after one another at work, home, play etc.

So, my final thoughts to you are, work hard, develop a good support network and never accept poor practice/standards, speak up if you are concerned about anything that just doesn't seem right-trust your instincts- speak out”.

**Mental Health
Social Worker**

“Try Working in lots of Different Areas to get Different Experiences”



“I was motivated to become a social worker as my uncle was a social worker and he was very positive about it as a profession. I previously studied psychology and had had a range of social care jobs where I encountered social workers. I took an interest in their work and felt that I would like to apply for a social work course. I have been qualified for 22 years now.

There are plenty of positives in my experiences, for example, making a difference- enabling and supporting people to achieve positive change in their circumstances is very rewarding. This may start with ensuring access to appropriate finances, housing etc. Social work also has a broader role in addressing the social determinants of health and well-being and I feel that addressing health inequalities is a key aspect of the role. I feel that building up positive trusting relationships is key.

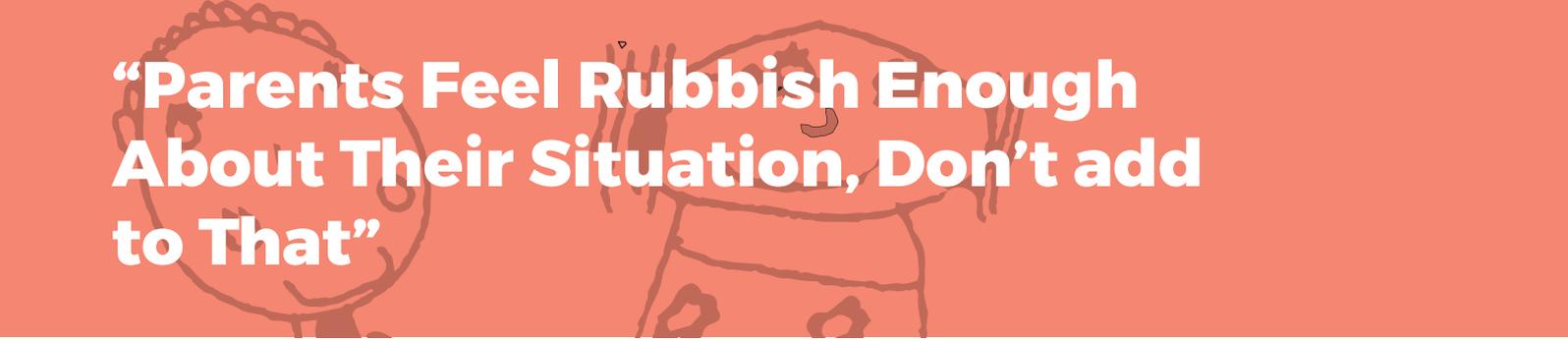
There are also negatives, for example, I worked in the same team for many years and the role became very bureaucratic. I moved to a new job which was such a positive change. My message is not to not to be afraid to change to a different role. Keep learning.

If I could give you some guidance, I would encourage you to take opportunities to try work in different areas such as family and childcare, learning disability and generalised social work. I have had the opportunity to work in other areas outside

Northern Ireland and this has greatly enhanced my practice. Find out about the different areas of social work. Try to work in different areas of social work practice to expand your knowledge and skills. There are many opportunities to work in the statutory and voluntary sector also.

Be realistic about what social work is like. It is a challenging but very rewarding career but looking after yourself is key! Have a key mentor of a social worker in practice. Accept all the support offered and provided in your social work journey. Be positive. Remember the positive work that you are doing. Learn every day. Always ask for help. We are not experts on everything. Take a team approach. Respect other professionals in their roles. You learn so much from the service you work with also”.

**Social Worker,
Disability Services**



“Parents Feel Rubbish Enough About Their Situation, Don’t add to That”

“Me and three of my siblings all ended up in care and had social workers and support workers for as long as I can remember. Some of the social workers only seemed concerned about putting me in care. Children will be loyal to their parents and it’s sometimes better to put as many services into a family as you can rather than take the kids out. I remember one time I was crying, screaming and holding onto the door and being dragged out of my home to be put into a respite foster placement when I was about 9. What did I do? Why should I have to leave? Don’t punish the kids, help the parents. Most parents try to do the best they can- you need to remember that. Some parents are going to struggle the whole time and it’s cruel and short-sighted to put in services for six weeks then blame the parents for not being able to cope afterwards. Do you not think parents feel rubbish enough about their situation? We didn’t need you to keep leaving, we needed you to stay, muck in, help, laugh with us, cry with us, don’t judge us, be firm but fair- if you can connect with us, you might get somewhere, and so might we. Not every parent you will work with has had good upbringings themselves. Some parents, and this includes mine, probably would have managed a lot better if there had been a consistent person they could rely on long-term. And I mean long, long term, not a few months, but many, many years. It’s less expensive, more sensible and humane in the long run.

I never thought I would be accepted into University. That kind of place existed in an elite, parallel universe where people talked about interesting things using clever words and ate weird shit like bagels and olives and enjoyed ‘real’ coffee, whatever that is. My self-doubt has never gone away, but I can manage it better now. I wanted to be a social worker because I was motivated

by the experiences I’d had with my own-good and bad. But there were huge gaps in my education. I missed so much primary school. We moved a lot because of chaos such as regularly getting evicted and fleeing domestic abuse. I wanted to help and protect my mum who was always sad



and often told us that she was going to kill herself. I couldn't protect her if I went to school. I lacked both a sense of belonging and actual belongings. The world we lived in was not safe; my stuff- including toys and clothing- got stolen or left behind as we fled to the next house to start the cycle all over again. I recently rediscovered a teddy I was given when I was about 5 and it made me want to cry. It sits on my bed now all the time. It won't get stolen or left behind in my new world, which is safe.

I missed so much high school and started to get in trouble with the police but had really good social workers who believed in me and didn't give me a hard time for not being able to sit in class for very long. I often felt unsafe, and sometimes that was just in my head. I didn't need teachers or social workers adding to my own internal distress by reminding me that I wasn't coping or saying stupid shit like, "you're safe here" when they were not in my head and didn't know what safe was for me. Luckily, I had access to a safe room I could go to at any time and just knowing it was there meant I could sometimes stay in

class. I received scholarships and lots of support from my long-term foster carers and got through secondary school, and eventually studied social work. I have been a social worker for over 20 years now, and wouldn't want to do any other job, I absolutely love what I do.

There has been plenty of highs in my career. Keeping people alive when they are in such pain and despair and want to die is so emotionally exhausting but we must always, always hope. I believe in people. People believed in me. We can change if we are shown how and why. When you see a parent begin to like themselves and share in your hope, that's exciting too. I have worked with some dangerous parents and it has been rewarding when I have been able to safeguard their children. The lows are when- no matter what I have done- I haven't been able to safeguard children or adults. That's really tough, but I remind myself- and it's useful for you to remember this- we can't fix everything, but we can help little by little. It may not be the child in front of you that you see significant change in, but it might be their kids. It's also a low point when I let the people down I am working with. I have said sorry to my service users when I have gotten things wrong. I am only human too. Saying sorry is so important.



If I were to give you any advice, these would be my three top tips, and these come from my own personal experiences and also from being a social worker

Don't make promises you can't keep. People will cope better if you are honest with them rather than saying, "we can look into that" as that usually means "it ain't gonna happen".

Return phone calls. Don't expect service users to chase after you. You may get paid to do your job but their time is no less valuable.

Finally, sometimes there is a disconnect between what the social work profession aspires to be and how much the 'system' allows that aspiration to be a reality. Social work sometimes feels like working in a vortex where you can be pulled in so many different directions. Don't get sucked into becoming a form-filling, box-ticking, butt-covering robot that uses words no one actually says in the real world. Be a 'social' worker and talk in a way that makes sense to the people you are talking to. Get to know the people you are working with. Respect and value them. Even when they seem to hate you or are abusive. An abusive child or parent may just be a scared child or parent. Don't be reckless with your safety but equally don't be scared off as that could add to their fears or feelings of being overwhelmed. You could be the person that makes the difference if you persevere. I don't know where I would have ended up if my social workers had given up on me".

**Social Worker,
Children and Families**

“It’s ok to not be ok”



“I was motivated to do social work because I always wanted to work directly with children and young people and had initially completed a degree in psychology. I always had an interest in behaviours and it developed from there.

I have been qualified for thirteen years. High points in my career so far include seeing young people transition out into independence and come back years later and remember you and the important part you played in their lives and how they hold onto good memories of how you cared for them. In fact, the most rewarding part of my career was when a service user came back after disengaging from the service to tell me what I mean to them. What I have learned is that it can be really hard work trying to talk and manage young people as well as emotionally draining, however when you receive that response, it lets you know you do have a positive impact on someone’s life.

Some of my low points have been when you feel very alone and feel you are not being heard as a professional or devalued as a professional.

If you are thinking about social work as a career, here’s some tips I would give you: Have Hope - cause of you don’t hold this you will not get past the negatives. Look after yourself - take care and know your limits. Be reflective- be able to acknowledge and admit when you’re not right or can’t cope, cause its ok to not be ok.

Just be yourself and be honest with service users. It’s how you do this that they will thank you for the most”.

**Social Worker,
Children and Families**



“You Won’t Regret it!”

“A desire for social justice and willingness to protect children motivated me to get into social work. If you are thinking about a career in social work, I would give you the following tips- Social work is a profession that promotes human rights and respect is the backbone of our profession. Keep up to date with your study and don’t let it pile up.

Looking back on my highs and lows, I would say knowing that a community was getting support to build capacity and resilience and did not need our help any more was a high. A particular highlight was when I have seen children being placed in a permanent home.

Lows would include feeling disappointed when a parent didn’t make the changes I had hoped for and in time for their child’s development.

You won’t regret it, Social Work is so rewarding, with brilliant colleagues that you’ll love it. I have been qualified now for 10 years”.

**Social Worker,
Children and Families**

“It’s a Privilege to Help People”



“I have been qualified for 3 years. I retrained after raising my family and was motivated to become a social worker as I have volunteered with various services for over 25 years.

Here are some of the good experiences I have had as a social worker so far, they all fall under the heading of, ‘Helping people to find their voices in a difficult and challenging system’

Helping people/families to move their trajectory slightly into a more positive outlook for them - and that they have the power to change and refocus - helping them reflect on how far they have come on their journey.

I continue to learn how fragile life is how environments can impact negatively on family life - and that some people will continue to depend and need long term support in their life.

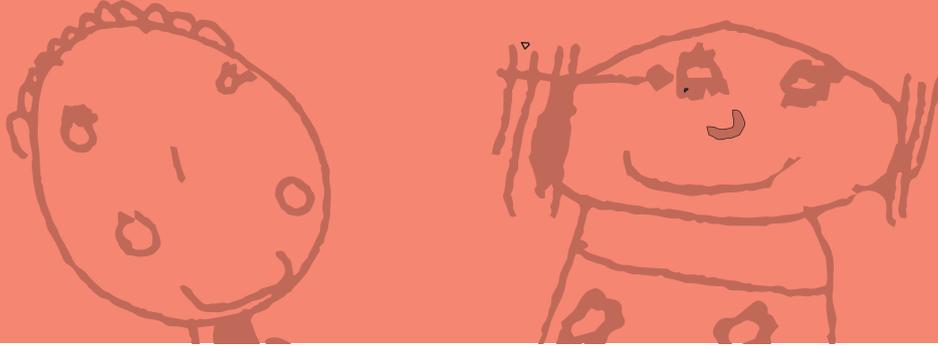
It’s always a privilege to work with people. We see them at their most vulnerable when their life can be out of control/challenging – we never see them at their best/happiest/settled.

Getting a sibling group settled with their respect Daddies and helping their Mammy to manage her time with them. Helping the Daddies gain custody of their sons - when they thought everyone would be against them as they had been victims of domestic violence and they were males.

There have also been some low points in my career so far, such as, no matter how many intervention supports are offered, people can still get lost. Frustrations in not having enough community/ financial support or being able to offer longer term support. Challenges in the Courts - massive contradictions in the system in which I work. Challenges with professionals - too many “off the record” conversations that they want to have rather than say especially at meetings.

Despite all of the lows, I’m still yet to feel that this is not where I’m supposed to be. Even on the hardest of days, I know that the majority of challenges aren’t about me as a person rather the system I represent - so I refocus and reflect if I’m ever starting to feel that things are personal.

One of my most rewarding moments was when I worked with family where there was a very difficult relationship with the Mummy. She had put me out of the home on a number of occasions; complained about me at every opportunity and was very reluctant to engage and hostile. A close family member died and I had to tell her - I stayed and made dinners for the children, brought food and went to the home at the weekends to enable her to go to the wake. This really impacted positively on our relationship we had a very good working relationship after this.



I think every family that you work with is very unique and there can be many ups and downs - but I love my job and the differences I have on a daily basis - I love working with people.

So, I've been asked to give you some top tips if you are thinking about a career in social work. This is what I'd say

Communication will always be the key to getting people to work with you. This includes listening. How you speak with people is vital - there is a massive power imbalance when people are vulnerable - remember that.

Volunteer - this helps you to build upon skills that will be vital in your role - you will be able to observe people and watch how they interact and model aspects of their interactions into your own practice.

Respectfulness - Again it's being thoughtful and understanding that the majority of people- through no fault of their own- have some dealings with social services, so think how you would be liked to be treated and then mirror that in all your actions.

Finally, it's important that you know that University is only "the A & E" of your learning. You will evolve throughout your

career - Don't sweat the academic aspects of University- you will manage to get through them and it's not all about a 1st – it's about thinking why we do what we do, it's about learning about yourself why you think in that way and therefore act in response to those thoughts.

It's a privilege to help people – it's also a very stressful job so start knowing what helps you to zone out for your self-care as this will be vital in the long run whatever sector you work in.

Always remember that your actions are always based on the information at hand - and that you don't work on your own, you're part of a team" 😊

**Social Worker,
Children and Families**

“Helping Someone to Believe in Themselves”



“I have been a social worker for nearly eight years now and was motivated by my desire to help others and I really appreciated the kindness and support shown to me by others in my life.

I believe that social workers are very blessed to be involved in the lives of others and it is of most importance to be kind to others and provide a good service and promote good outcomes. To make a difference - even the smallest one - in someone’s life is very rewarding and when you get feedback that someone felt listened to, respected, understood and supported helps you feel you did something good. An example of this is helping someone to believe in themselves and see the good things that other people see in them. Practice examples include helping parents see all the good things about their child when they are at a stage where they are finding challenging behaviour overwhelming and feel they no longer can cope.

Just doing a good job for the families I work with is the most rewarding thing, as well as being a good representative of the organization I work for.

Negatives about the work is there is lots of paperwork and this can be challenging. It’s also difficult when you feel you would like to do more to help a family but there may be lack of resources.

Advice for you if you are thinking about social work studies

Self-care - be kind to yourself - it’s an emotional job and can be challenging

Don’t be afraid to ask for help - we all need help - everyone does at some stage in their life

**Treat others as you would like to be treated - it’s all about respect - we are blessed to be in the life of others
EMPATHY AND RECIPROCITY**

Be kind to others - kindness and respect go a long way!”

**Social Worker,
Children and Families**

“Make Time for Self-care. You Don’t Have to Learn Everything the Hard way”

“I have been a social worker for over 15 years. I was motivated to do social work as I saw a recruitment campaign on TV and decided to go for it - I didn’t really think about what it entailed and thought I would work in mental health or youth justice, neither or which happened.

In my career so far, I have had the good fortune to work with children who have grown up and are now adult service users where I currently work - and they are happy to see me. It is always a privilege to work with someone at a low ebb, guide them to seeing how they can make things better and then let them go. In my current role I tried to help a young adult, supported them as best I could and wanted to do more but they withdrew only for me to meet them a few months later and they thanked me. I thought I hadn’t done enough and they thought I had done the right amount - they took over and turned their life around. One of the most rewarding things was the work I did with young homeless people. It was challenging but rewarding. My current role is very varied and I love getting to know the service users, the services both statutory and community and finding out more about how we can progress in terms of addressing social issues.

Of course, there have been many low points too. I have lost clients to suicide - you can never go through that and not wonder what you should/could have done differently. It has made me hyper vigilant at times. Getting locked in a flat by an angry man was a low point but I think I was

more annoyed at missing a parent/teacher meeting than anything else. Seeing a family break down and give up on a child has happened more than once, didn’t work out how I wanted but made me more determined to be a social worker and to represent the oppressed.

Here’s three top tips I can give you if you are thinking about a career in social work

Learn as much as you can on placements - that’s where the real learning is.

Try to balance home and work as much as possible - make time for self-care from the outset. You don’t have to learn everything the hard way.

Don’t be afraid to speak up when you witness injustice - just choose your words carefully.

Finally, give things a go, think outside the box and support your colleagues”.

**Social Worker,
Children and Families**

“Be the Kind of Social Worker you Would Want to Have”



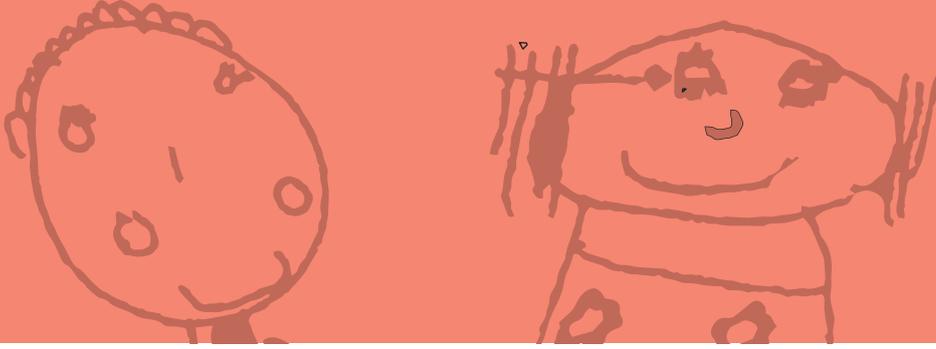
“I had always wanted to work in an area where I helped people but wasn’t quite sure how. I spent several years working in care services as a support worker before deciding to develop my career by completing the social work degree. I have always had a strong sense of social justice and strived for equality, I feel this value system influenced my decision to become a social worker.

The highlight of my career has been in helping children settle and find a family when I worked with looked after children. In some instances this was away from their birth families which is emotionally challenging but can be rewarding when a child thrives in a good placement. I have had other occasions when children have been able to return home. I worked with a family when the care plan had been adoption for the children. Mum had been out of their lives for a long time but shortly after the case went to adoption panel, she engaged in assessment and worked really hard to turn her life around and the children were eventually able to return home.

I would definitely say I have had more career highs than lows. However, a

particular low point for me was when I had a potential adoptive placement breakdown for young siblings. The children were already so impacted upon by their early experiences that the carers found their behaviour incredibly difficult to manage. The continued impact of the birth family on the children during contact was also extremely difficult to manage. They subsequently had numerous foster placements where again their behaviour was too challenging for the carers to manage. The children had to be placed in separate foster placements. While they did thrive in their respective placements, the combination of a potential for permanency through adoption being lost for them as well as being involved in decision making to separate siblings was truly heart breaking.

Knowing I have made a difference I the lives of children and their families. Helping parents look after their children and progress to the point where they no longer need social services in their lives is very rewarding. However, this is not always the case and sometimes we have to make really difficult decisions about the future of children.



Here are some tips for you from my experience so far

Even though our decisions are sometimes difficult, we can make them in a kind and humane way. This is especially important if children can't return to live with their families, remember how hard this is for everyone.

Be organised, you will have to manage a lot of conflicting priorities and will need to develop ways to use your time well.

Always be clear and transparent in your decision making and evidence your decisions. This is so important not only for ethics but if a case goes to court you need to evidence fair and thorough assessment. Do this well and you are much less likely to be on the stand.

Finally, be the kind of social worker you would want to have. Always try to think about how your interventions feel for everyone involved. Always be respectful even when you have to challenge and when you have to, make difficult decisions”.

**Social Worker,
Children and Families**

“You are no Better Than the People you Serve - Walk Alongside Them”



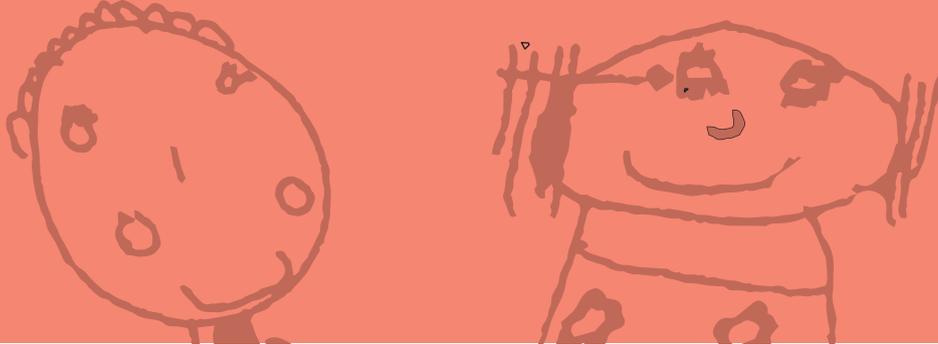
“I started out as a youth worker and was drawn to the children and young people who clearly had difficult lives at home - I could see the impact that substance misuse, child abuse, domestic abuse and neglect was having on their wellbeing and wanted to do more to help. Youth work is important but I felt deflated watching those children walking out the door every day knowing what they were returning to. I wanted to do more to help families make positive changes so fewer children were facing those challenges.

I have had so many rewarding experiences in my career. For example, some of the children and young people I worked with have gone on to third level education and become professionals themselves. Hearing about their successes is so gratifying and when they tell you that your encouragement helped them have faith in their own abilities, it makes all the bad days at work fade into the distance. Taking time to encourage and enable these young people has helped to break the cycle of poverty, abuse and poor outcomes as they have developed into good parents and their own children have not ended up in care - that's a win for me.

But of course, it's not always rewarding. Social work can be tough - sometimes you work really hard for and with a family and they can reject your input or behave in a hostile manner towards you. When this happens you can question your career choice but you have to remember that in

most cases it's not a personal thing - it's not anything you've done or haven't done - it's just the out workings of someone's life experiences. Sharing your feelings with colleagues and in supervision can help but we're all human and sometimes it just hurts and you have to work through it yourself.

Over the years I have run into many of the young people I worked with throughout my career - I never approach them in case they don't want to speak to me or don't want to connect with a difficult time in their lives but on many occasions they have gone out of their way to come and talk to me. I have been blown away by the detail they remember about time we spent together and it's clearly the small, kind things we do on a daily basis that makes the most impact on a young person who finds themselves in a crisis. Hearing their positive feedback about the small things I may have done that helped them at the time is easily the most rewarding part of my career - it lets me know that I got some things right.



I've been asked to give you three top tips but I need an extra one, so here are my four top tips for you from my 30 years' experience in social work

Always be kind - people will remember how that made them feel even if they disagree with you at the time

Everyone has a back story - take time to consider what that might have been and how that might have impacted on their current situation - no one just gets up one morning and decides they're going to be an alcoholic or a domestic abuser or a poor parent - life leads them down that path

Don't be afraid to challenge when challenge is required - that's what you are trained for - but always challenge respectfully

Never use your power inappropriately - you are no better than the people you serve - walk alongside them, don't look down on them

It takes a strong person to be a social worker - make sure you reflect on whether you can handle it before you go down that road".

Residential Social Worker

“Building the Confidence of Young People in Residential Care”



The following feedback is from three residential social workers who have been qualified as social workers from between 11 months and eight years.

What Motivated you to Become Social Workers?

From previous positive experiences of social work involvement during our own lives, this led to a need to help other young people and families during difficult experiences.

Career ‘Highs’

Whilst working as a residential social worker, the experience of supporting and helping young people to build their confidence, improve their self-esteem and promote their independent living skills. For example, one social worker shared their experience of supporting a young person to have the confidence to perform in their school play. Additionally, within residential social work the importance of building strong and trusting relationships with the young people.

Helping the young people to build confidence to transition out of the home when they are 18. Building relationships with the young people, especially when they disclose or share concerns. Engaging with the young people in activities, such as going to the gym, going away for holidays and going for walks.

Career ‘Lows’

The bureaucratic nature of working within an organisation, such as extensive

paperwork and reports. This impacts upon the time spent with the young people. Additionally, within residential social work the young people have experienced a lot of trauma, which continues to impact on them. We, as social workers, have experienced young people have suicidal ideations, self-harm and substance misuse. We have also had experience of physical and emotional abuse from young people.

Tips for anyone thinking about a career in social work

Volunteer with different areas of social work e.g. young people or individuals with a disability. This will help to improve your skills and knowledge of certain areas.

Recognise that being a social worker, you will experience hostile families and upsetting situations.

During the course you will have two placements – ask questions, research and link in with other professionals and organisations

Importance of managing your time and being organised. Self-care is imperative – look after yourself



Residential and Day Centre Staff Observations of Social Workers and Their Interactions With Service Users

“Social Workers come in and make promises to service users without having conversations with the staff. The service user then tells us information that we are not aware has been discussed – we would like more communication as we are involved in their care too”

“The best social worker is the one that’s out for the best interests of the service user, they listen and take direction from the service user and recognise that what might be a trivial problem to us can be a big problem to them”

“The social worker who takes the time to get to know the service user are the ones that you can see really make the difference in their lives”

“I feel that sometimes social workers can come across as unapproachable as they seem in a rush – perhaps this is due to bigger workloads”

“When we get a new service user we get told only half the information – I feel like social workers only tell us what they think we need to know so that we will take in the new resident. It would be better if we could meet the service user to get an overall view of their needs. Historically, there used to be big patches of a service users history left out of files that might have been relevant to us. I like the way the “All About Me’s” are done now that include a section about their background so that it is all in one place”

“Social workers that go into situations with an open mind are best – not to react immediately to the first thing they’ve been told but rather gather the facts and get an overall view of the situation”



“I have worked with two types of social workers – one that always said, ‘that will keep the family happy’ and the other who was completely focused on the service user, which I believe is really what their job should be”

“We have really noticed a difference in the consistency of social workers - they used to have the same ones for years and now we don’t feel we have the same relationship with the residents’ social workers”

“When people are referring to challenging behaviours – what do they mean? Challenging can differ for everyone. I might find someone continuously humming challenging where as someone else might define this as someone who injures others”

“The staff that are working with them have the most contact with them and know them – our opinions are sometimes made feel like they don’t matter when we see the service users day in day out”

“We can advise service users but they still can do what they want, I think social workers can forget that”

“The care homes are the service users’ real homes, sometimes social workers forget that and everything is made out to be regimental”

“We feel that there is this big push to integrate service users into the community when some people are just simply unable to cope as they don’t know how to behave in community settings – it is too overwhelming for them”



“Resilience and Confidence Will Carry you Through Each day”

“I have been a social worker for 17 years. I always had an interest in families, the different dynamics and how families function, and this is what motivated me to get into the profession.

Some of my career highs have been making the right decisions for children and their families especially when concerns have been significantly high and the children have had to be removed from their homes and then returned to their parents or placed along with Kinship carers. In particular, one highlight in my career was being able to be a birthing partner for a mother that I am working with. This was such a privileged position.

Some experiences in my social work career which have made me question if this job is right for me include when a service user made serious allegations about me as a person. At that time I was deeply upset and hurt because I felt that within this case I had gone over and above. The allegations were investigated and unsubstantiated and following a period of sick leave I returned to work stronger than ever, being able to reflect on why I initially became a social worker.

Three tips I would give anyone thinking of embarking on a career in social work include

It’s hard work and challenging- therefore you need to instil resilience and confidence in your ability which carries through to cope and manage each and every day.

Being open and honest in a respectful manner to families and professionals involved.

Treat people how you would like to be treated”

**Social Worker,
Children and Families**

“I am Amazed Every day People Share Their Life Stories With a Stranger”



“The bursary and job opportunities available immediately after qualifying were of interest to me and I was offered a place on the course and have been qualified now for 14 years.

I have had many rewarding experiences as a social worker. For example, completing transition work with a young adult with learning difficulties to adult services. I learned the importance of listening and finding ways to support everybody to communicate what they want.

Working in child protection, the day to day contact with people who are experiencing difficulties in their lives is a privilege. I am amazed every day that people share their life stories with a complete stranger and trust me to support them find a different way of doing things that may not be working in their lives.

When I was on placement I found that the staff did not value the role of social workers and struggled to identify work for me. It was difficult to explain to them the role even within that setting that helped build relationships and support people.

If you are thinking about undertaking social work studies, I would suggest the following-

Build a strong network and ‘study buddies’ because this will provide support for study during both difficult and great times. The course can be a roller coaster.

Find your voice and don’t be afraid to explore and express your views/ feelings and remember how it makes you feel. It will help when you are working with people to know what it feels like to be lost, frustrated, heard.

Enjoy and remember the social work course is only the start of your learning!! You won’t know it all when you achieve your degree. Be open to learning.

Tune in Tune in Tune in. You may not know what this means now but if you do not remember anything else remember to stop and think why you are meeting a family and always be curious. Never assume you know their story”.

**Social Worker,
Children and Families**



“Working With Cultures and Norms That Were Outside my Comfort Zone...”

“Many years ago when looking for work, I volunteered at a group supporting adults with mental health needs. Meeting social workers inspired me to do something to change the culture and stigma associated with mental health. I have now been qualified as a social worker for 27 years!

There have been many highs and lows in my career. For example, I worked with a terminally ill mum and was able to help create a memory book and box of gifts that her pre-school aged daughter could open at various stages throughout her life. Helping this mum do the things she wanted to do before she died was so rewarding, especially as her family did not want to accept the fact that she was dying. I valued being the person that she could be herself with and not have to be brave and strong (her words). Key learning for me was the ability to just listen and just be there.

Another highlight of my career so far has been completing the Practice Teacher course and having the pleasure of learning from the students that grace my path.

Career lows were during my final placement in the probation service in the Falls Road area of Belfast during the height of the Troubles. There was such a range of learning from working with the Travelling community, to those who

identified with Loyalist and Republican traditions. Accepting and working with cultures and norms that were outside my comfort zone such as punishment beatings, kneecappings, arranged marriages in addition to trying to address offending behaviour which was the reason for the referral! I struggled with how to work in a non-judgemental way, and how a probation officer could make a difference when systems and society seemed stacked against the people we were working with. It certainly taught me a lot about “systems”, the value of communities, the importance of resilience and the value of a supportive team.

I will leave you with two bits of practice wisdom

Firstly, you will need to have the ability to accept that there will be bad days and have the belief that you are making a positive difference to someone!

Lastly, always keep a bar of chocolate in your desk and car!”

**Social Worker,
Children and Families**

“There’s Learning From Mistakes”



“As a career, social work really appealed to me in terms of helping others and trying to make a difference. I have been working as a social worker for 20 years now.

Finding successful long term foster placements has been a career high for me, and in particular, knowing I’ve made a difference in children’s lives and genuinely making a difference by some of your actions/contributions. Career lows include the reality that crisis work is fast paced and difficult. If you make a mistake talk to your manager; things can be put right but feel massive at the time, there’s learning from mistakes. The work is never ending and so demanding and sometimes the hours and expectations can feel undoable. Self-care is critical.

I could give you the following three top tips if you are thinking of becoming a social worker

Ask lots of questions, there no such thing as a stupid question.

Be kind to yourself , you’re at the bottom rung of a ladder climbing up so pace yourself, it will take time to learn, develop, know.

Keep a training folder from the beginning for all materials and certificates, even a virtual folder.

Finally, it’s really important work but you so need a work life balance. It is just a job and work/ life balance and your mental well-being are more important!”

**Social Worker,
Children and Families**

“I think Social Workers After so Many Years in Service Should be Given Medals”

“After my degree in Psychology I had the option to either go on and do Clinical or Educational Psychology but a close family member who had worked in the Police felt I would enjoy Social Work or the Prison Service, so I chose Social Work. It was three years before I got on to the Masters course and as a result, I was the most enthusiastic person on it!! :-) I have been qualified for nearly 30 years now!

Some of my career highs include the reality that I was lucky in a way as I never took the job home with me. I could cut off what I had experienced that day and that was a bonus. I saw a lot of people leave the job due to not being able to do that. I always felt that my qualification allowed me to work in many different programmes of care. I feel getting a variety of opportunity is crucial in social work and your skills should be adaptable. Some people stay in the same field of social work for life.

‘Career highs’ is an unusual turn of phrase, however, maybe climbing up the management scale or post qualifying training would be career highs! For me, it’s the memories of cases I was involved in that make me think. All of the varied experiences I have had. For example, one time a teenager approached me in a supermarket carpark. He asked if I was ‘so and so’, I wondered how he knew me. He said I was his Social Worker when he was 6 years old and told me his name. He was

a kid in a pretty dreadful Child Protection case I had been involved in, High Court and all. He just wanted to say, ‘Thanks’. When I climbed in my car afterwards I had a small cry. It’s the small mercies that make the job. You will make a difference to a small number of people throughout your career but it will be a very real difference. I feel humility, empathy, advocacy and integrity are key values. I have so many memories in my so called ‘war chest’ and if you are in a Team who work as hard as you then that too makes a difference. I’m in this job 29 years today but I still feel young! It’s a tough job to do but I’m glad I tried.

Some of my career lows- well, I have worked in Family and Childcare Social Work for half of my career. It was once called the ‘coalface’ of social work. I’m surprised I lasted so long. The rate of staff turnover was very high, and continues to be. The expectations to work in Gateway and Family Intervention Service are very, very, high in terms of the workload. I worked so hard because I felt I had a responsibility. Nurses have it worse. It used to be the way that your Manager would back you up 100% but I feel that is no longer the case and that is a shame in this field of work.



You really do have to work to live not vice versa. In social work you get a real understanding of 'people in crisis'. In the summer months I used to work at festivals and would have seen people working behind the scenes having meltdowns, and saying 'this is the worst'. At these times I used to sit back and smile wryly, they never knew how lucky they were. I think Social Workers after so many years in service should be given medals. Not just one Social Worker given an award because their Manager knows how to give a spiel! My parents know how hard I worked, they saw it. There's not many jobs where you sit up the whole night typing up a report. The paperwork (cause it's now typed) was without the worst part of the job. Sorry bit of a rant here.....that's what social workers are good at....venting!! We used to do it in the Team Night Out a lot!!

So, here are my top four tips for you if you are thinking about social work as a career

Be open to experiences – it's a great opportunity to find out more about your own qualities, and acquire great knowledge and skills.

Try as many different types of social work as you can, no more than 5 years in the same field. Variety is indeed the spice of life!

Being as 'human' as you can. Advocate, integrity (look up what it means), humour, graft, empathy, speak up, so important!!

Be Yourself!!"

**Social Worker,
Children and Families**



“Every day you Will Learn Something new”

“During secondary education my strengths were listening and working well with others, this naturally led me to look at social work. I wanted a career where I could help children and adults make changes to improve their life and wellbeing. I have now been qualified for six years.

I currently work in family and childcare, this is a very challenging environment but the outcomes are so great for many families and children. It has allowed me to push myself and develop skills to communicate with parents and children who need support and guidance. The work can be very challenging and often workers need to think on their feet and find creative solutions for families and children who are experiencing difficult situations. But it's also worth saying that working with families can be very rewarding, supporting parents to overcome challenges and improving the care they afford their children is very rewarding.

My top tips

Every day you will learn something new.

You will make a difference in people's lives.

It's challenging and rewarding career.

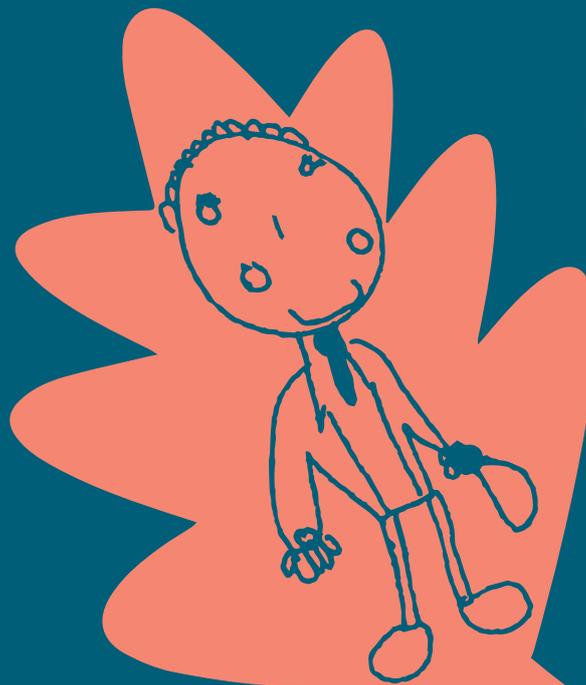
No two days at work will ever be the same.

Finally, treat the people you work with as you would like to be treated. Always put yourself in the place of your service user and ensure they receive the best outcomes you can provide for them”.

**Social Worker,
Children and Families**



voices of students



**A compilation of stories, advice and wisdom
from social work students about what
makes a good social worker.**

“Be Ready to get Stuck in With Your Social Work Buddies and Make Some Positive changes!”

“I am just finishing my final placement in my final year as a social work student, having undertaken the three-year programme.

It may sound simplistic, but I always wanted to be in a profession where I could help people and social work appealed to me. Although I had no previous experience in a social care background, I found that there were numerous transferable skills from my previous career where I was meeting people from politicians and dissident groups to bereaved families and angry citizens. I found this set me in good stead to build people skills, diffuse difficult situations if they arose, deal with resistance and be empathetic and compassionate in more delicate situations. Social work, although admittedly a very challenging career, is one that can make a real difference in people’s lives and, in turn, offer great job satisfaction.

One of my highs so far in my social work journey was during my first placement, where I worked in a domestic violence setting. It was encouraging to work with abused persons to help them recover and realise their worth after being in abusive relationships. It was also very rewarding to help families see how destructive domestic violence can be- particularly to children- and help them set about making positive

changes. In one particular instance, I had to carry out a long-term assessment on a mother who had lost custody of her child and decide whether she was ready to have him back in her care. While it sounds daunting, I had to tell her that she wasn’t ready to care for her child; however, it was done in such a way that I had prepared her throughout our time working together, regularly telling her if I thought she was making enough progress. Rather than being angry or bitter when I finally told her what the decision was, she was grateful I had explained things to her and prepared her. I was extremely touched that, when I was leaving that PLO, she thanked me for my honesty and for listening to her and understanding her; she even bought me a box of chocolates from her and her little boy.

Similarly, I worked with a mother who had been in care all throughout her life. She had been domestically abused by her current and past partners and was having some difficulty controlling her children. Through protracted work with her and the children and by speaking to the perpetrator, I used a systemic approach towards the whole family and offered help in every way I could. I was very touched when I was leaving the PLO and she



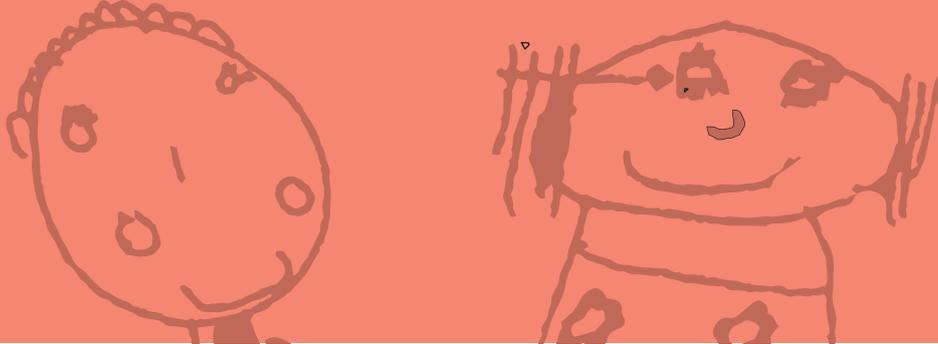
told me, through all her years dealing with dozens social workers, she only had three she really liked and that I was one of them. Her eldest son gave me a bunch of flowers on our last meeting. This was such a rewarding moment, particularly as I was student on my first placement. I was delighted she felt that I had helped her and her family reach a more positive place.

In my second PLO, I was given a fantastic opportunity to work in a relatively new role as a GP social worker. Although interventions in the role are brief, it allowed me to engage with people across a diverse range of need including older people, young people with autism, patients requiring palliative care and families. This was an invaluable experience.

I have had some other really positive experiences that have affirmed my decision to become a social worker. Feeling I have helped make a difference in people's lives is the highlight and a driving force. In my final placement, I worked with a woman coming through cancer. She was extremely anxious about treatment so I got in touch with services who called her regularly to answer any questions she may have. I had struck up a great rapport with this woman and I also offered to give her a quick call every week just to see

how she was feeling. To hear her become more and more positive every week was so heartening, up until our final call when she thanked me for being there for her and said she hoped our paths would cross again, wishing me luck in my career. That job satisfaction is hard to beat. Just as with the two women I worked with in domestic violence, helping people to help themselves reach a more positive place in their lives is my reward.

In terms of advice I could give you, I suppose you have to come to a realisation that you do not have a magic wand and you cannot fix every situation. Although I am a mature student, I still believe I was somewhat naive when I entered social work. It is a complex profession but very rewarding. It can also be difficult to achieve everything you want to due to time pressures, the unpredictability of day-to-day life for people and your caseload - even though students have protected caseloads, it can be difficult to work to an agenda if you face avoidance or resistance. To be very honest, there have been times I have questioned whether I am doing the right thing, especially with the pressures of academic work, on top of a PLO, on top of your own personal life...but when something goes right and you see a look of gratitude or hear a word of thanks - you know it is worth it. Some of our own short-term struggles can pale into insignificance when you consider the changes we may



be able to help make with people in need, so that they help themselves live a happier life. However, always remember to make time for yourself if you feel you are becoming overwhelmed.

If you are thinking about a career in social work, first and foremost, be ready for a challenge! This is a demanding degree that brings with it a lot of responsibility, so your heart must really be in it. There is a lot of written work and assessments, some of which include being vocal, participating in role plays etc. - so, you mustn't be a shrinking violet! If you are to be an advocate for others, then you need to become comfortable with speaking up and having strong convictions. That said, please remember to look after yourself. It is a stressful degree, so self-care is very important. Rely on the support of your family, friends, classmates and tutors. There is also help at the university if you're feeling overwhelmed.

Last but not least, enjoy it as much as you can, you will make many new friends on the course and we are all in it together, so be ready to get stuck in, shoulder to shoulder with your social work buddies and make some positive changes!

Finally, I would recommend that you check out the NISCC guidelines on how to engage with service users and you can't go far wrong. You may find much

of how you relate to service users will come naturally, but there is a wealth of learning to engage with too. Remain professional but approachable, listen and learn, take good notes and treat people with respect. Empathise - put yourself in the service user's shoes- how would you feel talking to a social worker? Tune into who they are, their situation, their feelings, hopes and expectations...this will help how you approach and relate to them and they will appreciate you taking the time to do that. Don't be condescending, rude or distant but be firm and assertive when necessary. Try and keep emotions in check if something is upsetting. Of course, use supervision to talk all of these feelings out with your practice teacher/ tutor. It's a lot to take on board and, in first year I felt completely daunted, but you will be surprised how much you grow professionally and personally by the end of this degree!"

Final Year, Social Work Student

“Make the Most of Your Placement”



“I am a 1st year student on the 2 year programme. I am looking forward to qualifying. I am doing my first placement working with children and families.

I decided to study social work because I have a desire to work with people and have the opportunity to create positive pathways for individuals/families. In my experience so far I have supported people who had social workers that were not helpful, not empathetic, not understanding - then I worked with social workers who were amazing and this had such a positive impact on the young people I worked with at the time. I wanted to become a social worker to be one of those social workers who is more understanding and can work better with individuals and families.

If I could give you advice as a student, I would say, make the most of your placement - take the opportunities available to you. It is a fantastic learning experience. Don't be afraid to ask questions and don't doubt yourself”.

First Year Student



“Very Small Actions can Make Such a Difference in a Service User’s Life”

“I worked with children for 15 years in a school setting and witnessed many children suffering from abuse or neglect and was only able to pass on information and be consistently supportive to the children even on their bad day. I decided then I had much more to offer, I realised I could help on a much deeper level. That’s what motivated me to study social work.

I found placement extremely rewarding- working with service users, supporting them, understanding their needs and advocating on their behalf then witnessing the positive impacts this can have. I was in a family and childcare setting for my final placement.

In terms of negatives, I found the paperwork side of social work a bit overwhelming on my first placement as I have dyslexia- there was more than I had expected. I did wonder if I could manage this within my new career. But I got support and realised it definitely is possible.

In terms of the positives- I am a “people person” and this career is just all about people. Fighting for equality and every life and every single person being valued, respected and protected. I am motivated by how very small actions can make such a difference in a service user’s life.

My top tips for studying social work would be the following- don’t be afraid and understand that you deserve to be there. Take good notes, read and don’t miss lectures and you will do well in this degree. In terms of the placements- reach out for support if you hit a road bump, staff are extremely supportive.

I have built so much confidence in myself since beginning this degree, I would not have been able to speak in a group or deliver a PowerPoint when embarking on this degree, I have overcome this fear and even presented in professional panel meetings which is empowering for me”.

**Final Year,
Social Work Student**

“Learn how to Develop Relationships”



“Working in close contact with social workers within my job inspired me to pursue a career in social work.

I have just started my first placement a few weeks ago and am enjoying meeting service users and being involved in the assessment process. I have started to learn how to develop relationship building and techniques around questioning. So far I have not experienced any lows to date.

What I am really enjoying is meeting and learning from experienced social workers. Some positives for me so far on the course have been achieving good grades for the hard work/effort I am putting into my course.

If I could give you some advice if you are thinking about studying social work, I would say the following

Be organised

Manage your time/diary

Think before you speak

Really want and be passionate about becoming a social worker

Ask lots of questions

Be available to support others”

**First Placement,
Social Work Student**

“You Can’t Risk Your own Mental Health in the Process of Helping Others”

“I completed a previous degree in health and social care. Upon graduating, I worked as a care assistant, then in two support worker roles. I have worked with adults with complex needs and a range of issues which allowed to me to work alongside social workers. In my last job as a support worker I conducted risk assessments, support plans and reviews and that gave me the confidence to apply for social work.

The positives so far have been being able to support individuals and families to have home adaptations made or to support them to move to suitable accommodation which has increased their independence. For me, it is an honour to meet individuals from many walks of life and to watch them grown and develop in confidence. For those with disabilities, brain injuries and mental health issues it is amazing what a small change can do for their confidence and independence. You realise issues or situations you take for granted but you have the power to support a positive change.

At times, I found it difficult when I experienced the feeling of my “hands being tied”. For example, if a service user has been denied support due to not meeting certain criteria and having to explain why that is. I had gone and sought support with the intention to empower them but hit a dead end. Although I never promised any

outcome, it’s difficult to not feel frustrated and upset and therefore, how much more would your service user feel?

Rewarding experiences so far within my studies have been developing my knowledge on children’s legislation and services. My work experience has been adult services and this has allowed me to see working with children as a possibility. In addition to this, I have attended invaluable training from placements. The classroom and practice placements allow you to meet so many new people and discuss ideas. You develop your own knowledge and learn to express yourself in a calm and respectful manner that will be vital for working with service users. If you are thinking about studying social work, here’s some tips from me

Look at your life and work experiences- can you relate anything to social work?

Research common interview questions to help you focus on what the course/ professional is about- this will also help with tip 1.



Be open- don't be too confident or cocky. You need to learn to be open to new ideas, viewpoints and cultures. That goes for the classroom and in practice.

Finally, learn to develop a work switch! - both children and adult services have their highs and their lows. It is important to not burn out too quick. Try your best that once you leave you turn your work switch **off**. Have relaxation methods and a supportive network to rely on. You can't risk your own mental health in the process of helping others. It's normal to feel your being "selfish" but remind yourself self-care is important too".

**Final Year, Social Work Student,
Adult Disability Placement**



“At Times you Just Need to Laugh Hard and Everything Will be Fine Tomorrow”

“I love seeing the delight in the eyes of someone who everyone thought was a hopeless case when things start improving for them. I am a strong believer in finding something positive in a very bad situation and holding on to that one small positive and build on it. That’s what motivated me to study social work.

My best PLO (placement) experience was when a young person was so proud of their life story that they went on to show it off at school and clubs despite the fact that there were very sad issues in the story about their life. The bright, shiny and happy eyes were priceless.

The lowest point so far was when I supported a young person and they ended up overdosing with drugs and ended up with severe, life-changing injuries. They had potential and everything was tried in terms of providing services to protect them, but nothing worked. A lot of professionals were involved and working very well as a team in supporting the young person, but that was not enough to save this young person from a near fatal accident. I have questioned myself so many times as to, “what is the point” of all the work that was put in if at the end it does not help the person intended?

In contrast, the most rewarding part of my studies and experiences so far has been making a positive change in the life of a person who had lost hope.

If I could give you some advice it would be this. Social Work is a vocational course, one has to love working with people. If you join social work for money then it is not for you as most times it is heart breaking situations you will be dealing with. You need to be able to look after yourself to be able to support other people. Supervision is important, use it. You also need a strong support system at home with family and friends as at times you just need to laugh hard and everything will be fine tomorrow morning to start a new day.

To prepare for the studies, I would recommend reading and researching as it’s key to keeping yourself aware of current changes in society. Society builds a person and knowing the societal issues helps you as a social worker to understand people issues.

Final words - Love, laughter, cry and wisdom”.

**Final Year,
Social Work Student**

“Continually Reflecting to Ensure I can Improve my Practice”



“I came into social work as I wished to make a meaningful difference in the lives of service user(s). I have a keen interest in safeguarding and assessment from previous experience; this is an area of work that I feel my skills and knowledge would be beneficial and valuable to the profession.

I am only at the beginning of my first placement, however, engaging well so far with service users, gaining an understanding of what is expected of me, getting to grips with the assessment and reviewing process. Because I have only started, I have not encountered any ‘lows’ so far. I am continually reflecting to ensure I can improve my practice.

The most rewarding part of my studies so far has been understanding how my knowledge of theories can be applied to the assessment process and also using my skills of relationship-based work to engage with service users.

Advice I could give you is this

continuously read and research core areas, speak to professionals and carers to understand their concerns. It is also very important to have a friendly approach and be empathetic towards clients”.

**First Placement,
Social Work Student**



“Being an Example for Other Disabled People and Their Families is Rewarding”

“As a person with a disability I had social work involvement my entire life. The majority of which were negative including my social worker retiring and me not knowing for 3 years. This lit a fire in me that people deserve better and service users with lived experience and passion are best suited to do this. So that is my motivation. To improve the system and support others when possible.

A high for me was when I asked a mum of a child with ASD to describe a typical day. She broke down as she had never been asked or felt like anyone cared before. It was such a rewarding experience when I was able to get self-directed support for them- I could tell this was life changing. Being able to be an example for other disabled people and their families is also very rewarding for me.

A negative experience for me was being told I wasn't able to apply for more funding because a child wasn't "disabled enough". It made me question whether it was really about being needs led and not service led. Another negative is the reality that social work is very bureaucratic at points and despite the monotony of paperwork, it is a means to an end. To push against this, I would suggest that you use your passion and intelligence to help others, even if at times it's hard to see. You can make a difference with this degree.

Final words of advice if you are thinking about social work studies- be open minded. Go above and beyond and if you disagree, challenge something in the right way. Sometimes your perspective or lived experiences may never have been heard”.

**Final Year,
Social Work Student**

“You Cannot Pour From an Empty Cup”



“What motivated me to become a social worker was working alongside social workers in previous jobs and seeing first-hand the impact they made on service users. I knew I wanted to be that sign of hope in a crisis time of someone’s life.

In terms of positive experiences so far, my first placement enabled me to change an individual’s life in many ways. For example, one particular client was known to our team and was at a very low stage in his life. When we were ending our involvement he was in, “the best position of his life”- his quote! This made me feel accomplished. It has also been rewarding to support people to improve their social skills following Covid-19 and the impact of the pandemic! For example, supporting individuals to get involved in social clubs.

With the positives there are also negatives. There are many lows in social work practice, and it takes a long time to accept that sometimes you can’t help everyone. I always found ending involvement with all my service users very difficult- no matter the outcome - and this is something I’m still learning to adapt to.

My top tips if you are thinking about a career in social work are as follows

This will be the best decision you will ever make!

You will have serious highs, but you will also have serious lows - every day is a learning day

Self-care is absolute key

If you don’t look after yourself you can’t possibly provide support to other people. You cannot pour from an empty cup”.

**Final Year,
Social Work Student**



“Whether they want to see you or not- you will learn so much”

“I was working in a legal role where I came across some vulnerable individuals who had very disadvantaged backgrounds. I found that working with these individuals was natural, challenging and enjoyable. This made me rethink a career in law as I thought I would be more suited to working much closer with people in these situations. I started thinking about working in probation and when I contacted them, they advised that I should enrol for a social work degree. So here I am, in my final year of my studies.

Throughout my journey to becoming a social work student, I have found that the learning I obtained was invaluable. Every new challenge brings new learning which I can use and bring the best of me to that assessment or intervention. I know that each time I knock on a door and meet with a family for the first time, I should not have any expectations as to what will happen. I now know that I could be the first person that they have spoken to; I could be the person they are relying on to give them the support and help they have needed for a very long time. Or I could be the last person that they want to see, and they could make the experience very uncomfortable. Either way, I will use what I have learned and also take some learning away from it.

I have had some lows in the placement experiences so far. On one day I visited two separate families. In the first visit, the mummy had called asking for help as she was in a very bad place but

upon arrival, she wouldn't answer the door. We went back later on when she was accepting of help and wanted her children to go somewhere safe. On the same day, I went on a child protection visit. The parents became very hostile and difficult- asking questions but not letting us answer, backtracking on what they were saying, turning answers around, generally not making much sense, telling us how much they hated us and how we weren't welcome. When I got home, I reflected on the busy day and how much negativity was involved. When I started University I thought I would always be welcome, and everyone wanted a social worker. The next day, I still enjoyed the new learning and talking with colleagues I managed to turn it around, and I enjoyed doing my job again, despite all the negativity from the day before.

A rewarding experience I had was when I was involved with a mum who was very distressed about her teenage daughter running away. From what she told me, and my knowledge of other young people in similar situations, I was able to piece together a worrying picture. This- coupled



with meetings with the Police- led to the young girl being placed on the Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) register. This meant the Police could do spot checks on the property she was reported to be. I felt this was a small step towards this child being more protected, by us and the Police.

If you are thinking about studying social work, my three top tips would be:

Enjoy every minute, it goes by very quickly.

Try and get a summer job, in Family Support Intervention Team (FSIT) or Gateway- that's where you will learn everything. I did this, after completing second year, and it has given me so much learning, which I see the benefits of in third year.

Your perception of social work will have changed so much by the time you arrive in your third year. Not in a bad way, but when you think back on your view of social work in first year it will seem like a distant memory.

Finally, I just want to say that I love my job. I went out for dinner recently and my sister-in-law said that she doesn't know many people who ever said they love their job, but I could confidently pipe up and say, 'I do'. Currently I am working in a social work team as well as studying, and even though I'm not qualified yet, I can say I am loving social work. So, if you know, in your heart of hearts, this is what you want to do, then it's for you".

**Final Year,
Social Work Student**



“It’s a mix of Emotions but it’s Worth Every Second”

“As my kids got older I wondered what I would do. I’d had personal experience with children and teenagers who self-harmed and had suicidal thoughts. I also had experience supporting family members who were in controlling domestic relationships and others who had substance abuse issues. I felt I had a number of qualities that I could put to use in a professional capacity. All of this led me to embark on social work studies. I am now in my final year of my degree.

My first placement was working with children. By using current knowledge of what the kids like along with exploring their interests I was able to connect with them. The time we spent was positive, we would use art to express our feelings and during this time the children would talk about their life. It was a really positive experience that has stayed with me. Knowing that I made an impact on the children I worked with on my placement is one of the rewarding experiences. As for my studies, it has felt rewarding that the work I have put into my assignments and tests have paid off.

However, the placement was challenging, with children from various backgrounds and cultures along with their own specific needs and experiences there were times when a child might lash out. This could be physically or emotionally however with the help and support from other colleagues when the situation had calmed down it was valuable to reflect on what could have been done or said differently and what triggered the incident. I learned to watch what I say and where I say it as it could trigger someone.

Here are my top tips for you if you are thinking about studying social work

Read a lot - I wish I had read more. I do not find it easy to read but I would find things on YouTube that would explain things in a way that I would understand.

Be open minded - the course is tough in a way that you might hear things you wouldn’t normally be exposed to so be open minded to the possibility that things aren’t always as they seem.

Keep your own pace and being organised is key. It’s not always easy, so keep on top of what you need to do and when you need to do it by. Pace yourself, don’t worry about what everyone else is doing as we all work differently.

Enjoy your time on this course, it’s amazing and you will learn so much, it opens your eyes to the biggest problems in society and you get the feeling that you want to fix everyone and everything. It’s a mix of emotions but it’s worth every second”.

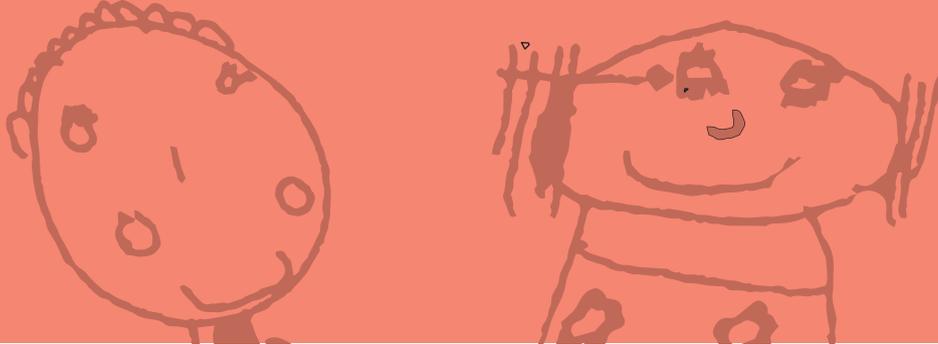
**Final Year,
Social Work Student**



support services



**A compilation of stories, advice and wisdom
from service users, carers, social workers,
and students about what makes a good
social worker.**



The following outlines only a few of the many organisations available if you have been affected by anything shared in this book and would like some support

For emergencies contact on 999 or 101 for PSNI non-emergencies

Samaritans

<https://www.samaritans.org/?nation=ireland>

24 hours a day, 365 days a year crisis line Free Call number **116 123**

Lifeline Crisis Line

<https://www.lifelinehelpline.info/> **0808 808 8000**

Deaf and hard of hearing Textphone users can call Lifeline on 18001 0808 808 8000

Children's Gateway Teams

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/gateway-service-teams-contact-details>

Regional Emergency Social Work Services (evenings, weekends and bank holidays)

028 9504 9999

Adult Protection Gateway Teams (adults at risk of harm and/or in need of protection)

<http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/niasp/niasp-contact2/>

Disability and Carers Service

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/disability-and-carers-service>

Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline 0808 802 1414

Men's Action Network

Supporting men's health and wellbeing **028 7137 7777**

Helpline for male victims of domestic, sexual and coercive behaviour **028 7122 6530**

<http://man-ni.org/>

Men's Advisory Project

Supporting male victims of domestic abuse <http://www.mapni.co.uk/>

Foyle **028 7116 0001** Belfast **028 9024 1929**

NAPAC (support for people abused in childhood) <https://napac.org.uk/>

Helpline **0808 801 0331**



NEXUS

Counselling support for victim/survivors of sexual trauma **028 9032 6803**

<https://nexusni.org/>

NSPCC

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/>

Helpline **0808 800 5000**

VOYPIC (Voices of Young People in Care)

<https://www.voypic.org/>

Service for children and young people with a lived experience of care in Northern Ireland

Local office branches available from <https://www.voypic.org/contact-us/>

Women's Aid Northern Ireland <https://www.womensaidni.org/>

Women's Aid Federation **028 9024 9041** (Local Women's Aid services contact details available on their website)





So, you think you want to be a social worker?

This book will provide you with insight into what social work is all about from a variety of perspectives- positive, negative and indifferent.

Service users and carers will tell you what it feels like to have social a worker knock on their door when they are facing highs and lows in their lives. They have generously shared their expertise on what qualities are important when working with people living through experiences such as disability, loss, grief, trauma, transitions, or physical and mental health crises.

These testimonials are complemented by the messages from social workers themselves; where you will hear what it's like to be a social worker, career highs and lows, as well as 'top tips' and practice wisdom if you are thinking about a career in social work.

Finally, you will hear from students, who will share their advice on both undertaking social work studies as well as placement experiences.

We hope that by reading this book it will help you decide on whether social work is for you. If you are reading this book as a qualified social worker, we trust it will affirm why you do what you do. If you are a service user, we hope it provides you a different perspective on why social workers choose this career path.

Our goal would for be for the messages in this book to ultimately strengthen and improve the experience of social work for us all.

An essential read for anyone thinking about a career in social work.