

Megha's journey into social care in Northern Ireland



"It's a privilege to care for people at the most vulnerable stages of their lives."

Megha Acharya, a 30-year-old social care practitioner based in Belfast, arrived in Northern Ireland from Eastern India back in 2021 to complete her Master's Degree in Public Health, having already completed a dentistry degree. She brought more than just academic aspirations with her to Belfast; what began as joining social care as an educational pursuit soon evolved into a deeper calling rooted in human connection, compassion, and community care.

Today, Megha works as a Care Coordinator in a small social care provider **Nazareth House Care Village** in Belfast, (Nazareth Care has one facility in Northern Ireland, but has other services in the Republic of Ireland), and she credits its person-centred setting with shaping her growth, values, and career outlook in ways she hadn't anticipated.

A journey sparked by curiosity

Megha's interest in health and wellbeing began early. Growing up in a culture where community and family played central roles, she developed a natural sensitivity to the needs of others. After completing her dentistry degree in India, Megha knew she wanted to expand her horizons and gain international experience.

That decision led her to Northern Ireland to complete her Master's in Public Health at Queen's University. "I came here to study, but I also wanted to understand how the public health systems operate in a completely different cultural and structural context," she explains.

Like many international students, Megha sought part-time work to support herself. A casual conversation with a

university friend who worked in social care introduced her to the sector and she has never looked back.

First steps into social care

Megha's first role was as a Care Assistant where she cared primarily for people with dementia, which was a great opportunity to put her transferable skills to use as well as learning more specific skills to care for residents who need specialist support. "It was a hands-on, deeply personal introduction to the realities of social care. I quickly learned that beyond the practical tasks including helping with meals, mobility, or medication, my presence offered companionship and stability to those I supported."

Megha's first experiences in the social care world sparked a passion that soon became a career path. Additionally, this also changed her perspective on what it meant to help others, not just through policy or research, but by showing up, day after day, in someone else's life.

The small provider difference

While some might aim to work with larger organisations for the perceived structure or that more opportunities for progression might exist, Megha found her home with a small, locally-run care provider, Nazareth House Care Village. For her, the size of the organisation has been one of its greatest strengths. "In a small care provider in Northern Ireland, you're not just a number, you are part of a team where your voice is heard," she says.

This intimacy has offered her both flexibility and opportunities for one-to-one mentorship. Working in the Nursing Care Unit there, managers have taken time to understand Megha's interests and have helped align her responsibilities with her career goals. Megha has always felt encouraged to speak up, ask questions, and try new things.

"There has always been room to grow, which I love, said Megha, "When challenges come up, whether personal or professional, I have always felt supported. That's something you don't always find in larger companies."

Megha's team has fostered a sense of shared purpose that translated directly to the people they care for. She describes a workplace culture where every staff member, from administrative staff to frontline carers, is involved in making decisions that matter.

"Working with a small care provider has allowed me create continuity, not just in how I deliver care to the residents, but in how I build relationships with clients. At Nazareth Care we know their stories, their preferences, and their routines which helps ensure we deliver the best care for each resident.

A career with meaning

Today, Megha balances administrative duties with her work supporting residents, ensuring that care plans reflect not only medical needs but personal goals and dignity for all the wonderful people and families she works with. Her academic background in

public health complements her practical experience, giving her a holistic understanding of care delivery.

But it's the people, the stories, the smiles and the small wins that keep her grounded. "Social care is about being present in someone's life, often at their most vulnerable. It's a huge responsibility and a privilege," Megha says.

For those exploring careers in social care, especially international students, Megha offers clear advice, "I would recommend starting small if you can. Smaller providers often give you the space to learn, ask questions, and find your feet. It's where you'll discover not just how to care for others, but also how to care for yourself as a professional."

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