



Stuart is a Senior Worker with Include Youth on the “Give and Take” programme with the Ballymena office. Stuart works with care experienced young people, providing support, education and training. He is the designated safeguarding officer for Include Youth in the Northern Area and the on-site supervisor for social work students on placement at Include Youth. He also works as a bank residential social worker for a number of the Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCT) and is a Social Care Council “Fitness to Practice” Committee member.

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### Have you always worked in social work?

Previously I worked in a criminal justice role, but was attracted to social work to further understand the origins of criminal or negative behaviours. I have worked as a Residential Social Worker for the Western Health Social Care Trust (WHST) and was the designated safeguarding officer for Include Youth in the Western Area.

### Training to be a Social Worker

I trained at Queens University Belfast (QUB). I had family members who were social workers back in England so I had a good understanding of the demands of training. My Placement Learning Opportunities (PLO’s) were with the ‘Community Care Team for Older People’ and ‘Family Intervention Team and Early Years’. My previous experience within criminal justice provided first-hand experience working with crisis situations and complex risk cases i.e. domestic violence, which helped me when responding to real life situations and when learning legislation and criminal justice modules, but also how this is really applied in practice.

### Professional development

I am currently undertaking training via the Professional in Practice (PIP) Framework and have completed the first two requirements of the Consolidation Award. I have applied to become a practice teacher and I have undertaken a range of training as follows: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in conflict areas, safeguarding, self-harm, dual diagnosis and have become a Level 3 Drug and Alcohol training practitioner and a “Restorative Practitioner”. I have always been proactive with training considering it essential in keeping up to date with new techniques and practices.

### What would you say to someone considering a career in social work?

Firstly, if you don’t like people, don’t become a social worker, the clue is in the name “Social”. The training provides you with professional knowledge but you must also enjoy continued learning and development and be proactive in updating your knowledge through training as practice is always improving and changing. Also be realistic with your expectations. Social work is stressful and demanding as you work directly with some of the most complex needs in society. Many days can be

challenging, but there are days you can go home with a genuine smile, knowing you have made a difference to someone, even if short term. Not all jobs provide that.

There are concerns around employment and the increased use of temporary and agency contracts, however, don't be afraid as there will always be a need for social work. Furthermore as a qualified social worker, you have a gateway to working abroad and there are many opportunities in countries such as Australia and New Zealand. If you prefer staying in N.I, social work is also flexible and you can work part time or as and when, which may fit your lifestyle. The salary scale is competitive for N.I.

### **What challenges do you face in your job?**

Where a young person is in crisis, you are often the focal point of their frustration. Also there are long hours and sometimes you may feel all you have done is paper work. You also need to be aware of the transference of the service users stress and situation onto yourself – you must look after yourself otherwise you are no use to anyone.

### **In what way is the social work profession rewarding?**

Direct work with young people, watching them develop into adulthood and start their own journeys in life, or watching how they respond positively to a crisis, knowing you played a role in that is very rewarding. Sometimes, a simple “thanks” is enough to make a day.

### **How do you see your career progressing?**

I wish to gain a few more years in front line social work, possibly in a safeguarding role, and then to consider either a tutor or practice teacher role. I have experience of on-site supervising and enjoy the teaching aspect of my current role and would like to progress this further.

### **What does it mean to work in a regulated profession and be registered with NISCC?**

You must always be mindful of your approach to a situation. It is sometimes good practice to slow down before engaging with a crisis as there are both legal and professional demands on you. I see regulation as a positive which should promote proactive approaches to your own professional development. If your practice is honest and you as a person are open to challenge, then regulation is a support to you, which should be embraced. It should provide confidence in the standard of practice being offered and a framework to challenge when standards need improving.

### **Why did you choose to become a Social Work Ambassador and what do you hope to gain from this role?**

I really enjoy the role and find it rewarding to promote social work in the voluntary sector, as this is often overlooked. Everyone is aware of the statutory social worker role but there is considerable daily direct work happening within independent and voluntary organisations. The experience also aids my own development in presenting and widening my knowledge about other areas of social work.

