



# Social Work Ambassador

## Caoimhe Harkin, Bryson Charitable Group



Caoimhe is the Practice Learning Centre Manager with Bryson Charitable Group. She is responsible for providing social work placements within the voluntary sector across the North West. She started this role in February 2017.

***“I look forward to developing the Practice Learning Centre and providing social work students with a great learning experience.”***

### **Have you always worked in social work?**

I trained to become a social worker directly after leaving school and a lot of my career has been spent working within Children and Families. After I qualified as a social worker, I worked for the Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHST) and gained a range of experience within family intervention and looked after teams. I have also spent 2 years working in Argyll and Bute Local Authority in Scotland where I was responsible for setting up the looked after team. This opportunity to work in another jurisdiction provided invaluable learning. I then moved back to Northern Ireland and commenced employment with Voice of Young People In Care (VOYPIC). I worked for VOYPIC for eight and a half years in an advocacy role ensuring that the voice of care experienced young people was heard in the decision making process.

I look forward to coming to work as every day is different. I also look forward to developing the Practice Learning Centre and providing social work students with a great learning experience.

### **Training to be a Social Worker**

I always had an interest in health and social care and the role of a social worker interested me. Prior to training to become a social worker, I completed a range of volunteer opportunities working with children with a learning disability in educational settings. I feel this helped my social work application as it evidenced that I was motivated to give up my own time to help other people and to provide support to them.

I completed a three year BSc Hons Degree in Social Work at Ulster University, Magee. I commenced my studies on the Degree in September 2001 and graduated in June 2004.

### **Professional development**

When I trained to become a social worker – there was no Assessed Year in Employment (AYE). However, in my role as a professional supervisor I have supervised many AYE candidates and it has been a positive experience to see their progression from student to competent social worker.

Since qualifying I have undertaken a number of Post Qualifying Awards as follows; NI Specialist Award in Social Work Education and Training and Practice Teaching Award (2011). In 2013 I did the Post Graduate Certificate in Professional Development in Social Work. This has provided me with an opportunity to develop my skills in providing supervision to AYE supervision candidates.

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

Do some kind of voluntary work in a social care setting to ensure that this profession is really for you. While it is a demanding profession, it is very rewarding. Do not listen to the negative stories in the media as you never hear all the positive stories regarding the work that social workers are doing on a daily basis.

You also need to be someone who is ready to support vulnerable people in our communities to improve their lives. You need to be empathetic, open and able to listen to people. You need to be willing to advocate on behalf of people and challenge the system where necessary.

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

My job can be challenging at times due to lack of resources and I need to be creative in my approach when working with both students and service users. Every day is different and the challenges help me to continue to develop my skills.

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

I like the diversity that the role of a social worker provides. There is great flexibility in work patterns and it is not just a 9-5 role. It is never boring as I am able to get out and about to meet new people, to network and to develop new working partnerships.

Social work is innovative, exciting and satisfying. It provides a real opportunity to empower people and to work with very unique people to improve their lives. In my previous role with VOYPIC, I supported a young person to gain access to services that she was entitled to but not receiving. Through our work together she was able to access support beyond her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday that allowed her to go to university.

My current role is also very rewarding as I have a great opportunity to be involved in the training of newly qualified social workers who will eventually lead the profession. My role enables me to share practice experience and teach students about the importance of developing relationships with the people they are working with.

### How do you see your career progressing?

I like my new role and want to develop the Bryson Practice Learning Centre to be a leading provider of high quality social work placements for students across the voluntary sector.

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

It makes sure I am accountable for my practice and provides standards for all social workers to adhere to. It also provides a framework for on-going learning and development.

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

I want to promote the invaluable support to individuals, families and communities that the profession provides. We need to continue to promote the positive work being undertaken by social workers. Too often we hear all the negative stories and failings of social work practice – what we don't hear are the positive stories. We need to **STAND UP FOR SOCIAL WORK.**