



Clodagh is a final year social work student on the three year Degree in Social Work at Ulster University Magee. She is currently undertaking her final placement in the Children's Disability team in the South West Acute Hospital, Enniskillen. Her previous placement learning opportunity (PLO) was at Women's Aid, Omagh as a Floating Support Worker.

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Have you always been interested in social work?

I have always been passionate about finding a job that involves helping people. I worked in a nursing home for almost two years where my role involved caring for older people with complex physical and mental health needs and challenging behaviour. I believe this employment paved the way for my entry into social work, as it illustrated to the university, my commitment to helping people. It also helped me to develop resilience and emotional intelligence, especially in difficult and challenging circumstances. I strongly feel that having some relevant voluntary experience or employment in social care helps when making an application to the Degree in Social Work.

Training to be a Social Worker

I have had a very positive experience so far in regards to my social work training. The teaching standard has exceeded my expectations of social work in general. Having the support of a university tutor for the duration of the course has been especially beneficial. It has provided me with professional support and assistance with regards to teaching and placement learning opportunity (PLO) progression. PLOs are an invaluable component of the social work training, and I firmly believe that this is where the main breadth of our learning is accomplished and achieved.

What have been the challenges?

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What has been rewarding?

It has been very rewarding to see the change that we can make to the lives of others through empowerment; to witness families progressing from being very dependant on social work and other services - to being able to manage with very little professional involvement from the team. It has also been very rewarding to undertake a course and make friends with a group of people, who share the same passion and commitment as I do for social work.

What are your expectations/hopes for when you graduate?

After I graduate, I would like to practise in a learning disability team. I am currently employed as a relief social worker with Positive Futures, which has instilled in me an intrinsic passion for person-centred care for people with a learning disability. Historically, people with learning disabilities have faced numerous prejudices, discrimination and stigmatisation, which has led to them being excluded and marginalised in regards to policy and progress.

Out of all the areas of practice that I have been placed in, this is where I feel that I am making the most difference to the lives of people. I have supported and assisted people to challenge their oppression and empowered them to lead more independent lives. My long term goal is to travel to Australia and work as a disability social worker, to further increase my development and learning on an international basis.

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

Social work is not an easy job; not only will you face personal challenges in your daily work; you are also likely to encounter adversity from people in society who view the profession negatively and don't recognise or acknowledge the positive changes that social workers do daily. While this can be challenging and difficult at times – the work is also extremely rewarding and a worthwhile experience. The main value I feel that potential social work students should have is unconditional positive regard; you will work with many families and people that may frustrate you or disrupt your value base and your role is not to judge, but to help and empower people to become better versions of themselves. I feel also that having some experience in the social care field will greatly benefit your professional development and you should attempt to engage in this before committing to the course. This can be either on a voluntary or paid basis - to improve your ability to work with service users.

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

Being a registered member of NISCC is an important aspect of continual professional accountability and development. The NISCC Standards of Conduct and Practice are a key component to ensure, that the quality of care provided to service users and carers, is of a high standard.

The Assessed Year in Employment (AYE) is a crucial component of establishing that all newly qualified social workers are fit and competent to be on the Social Work Register; ensuring that these social workers have made the transition from student to employee and have demonstrated sustained, continuous and effective competence in the workplace.

Notwithstanding this, the Professional in Practice Framework (PiP) requires social workers to develop and maintain their knowledge and skills to practice competently and safely. PiP offers a wide range of taught programmes to enhance social work professional practice and competence, including; those in relation to older people, family and childcare, mental health etc.

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

I wanted to become a Social Work Ambassador to promote the valuable work that social workers do in their daily practice with service users and their families. I wanted to ensure that those who are considering the Degree in Social Work are thoroughly aware of the challenges and what the course will encompass – while also illustrating the positive aspects. I also hope to gain more confidence with regard to my public speaking, and as a NISCC registrant I wanted to be a role model for student social workers and potential new student social workers.