



Pictured at the recent NI Social Work Awards, hosted by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust in Armagh, Christine Smith, Director of the Office of Social Services, presents the Newly Qualified Social Work Award to Jonathan Dillon, Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Jonathan Dillon is a Residential Social Worker in an adolescent intensive support unit in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT). Jonathan's role involves working with looked after children to identify and meet their care needs. As part of a multi-disciplinary team he delivers therapeutic and

systemic family work with young people and their families. Jonathan works within a 24/7 shift rota.

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Jonathan is also a Social Work Award winner – winning the **Newly Qualified Social Worker (Individual Award)** at the 2016 social work Awards event.

### Have you always worked in social work?

When I left school, I initially wanted to pursue a career in law and was accepted on to a course but realised it was not for me. I took some time out to reconsider my options. I did some voluntary and paid social care work along with further research and thought about social work. The range of experience I had gained supported my professional training, and most importantly, it gave me the reassurance that I was pursuing the right career for me. I have also had the opportunity to work within a regional secure care centre for children and young people. Following qualification as a social worker, I worked for a brief period of time in a gateway team in family and childcare services, before moving to my current position. Along-side my current role I also work on a sessional basis as a supervisor for ChildLine NI.

### Training to be a Social Worker

I undertook the Degree in Social Work at Ulster University, Magee (UUM). This was a 3-year professional undergraduate program. Unlike most other degree applications, the undergraduate social work degree requires you to do a social work specific personal statement, followed by an interview to assess your suitability for the course. The degree program is an intense course of study that includes the following topics; law, psychology, service users groups, ethics, values and anti-oppressive practice. In relation to the practice learning opportunities, my first placement was in a children's home for young people with learning disabilities and my second placement was in adult services supporting adults with addiction, mental health and homeless needs.

### Professional development

After qualifying as a social worker, I undertook an Assessed Year of Employment (AYE) which is a mandatory assessed year of work. Following this I undertook my Professional in Practice (PiP) Consolidation Award by undertaking a postgraduate Certificate in Systemic Practice and Family Therapy at Queens University, Belfast. I am currently completing the PiP Specialist Award by undertaking the postgraduate Diploma in Systemic Practice and Family Therapy at QUB. I have also received

training in the model of residential practice for the NHSC and I am now a trainer in this practice.

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

Social work is a fantastic career. It is rewarding, demanding but most of all it is a privilege to support and advocate for the most vulnerable in our society. I would really encourage you to think of applying for a career in social work, if you are a caring, genuine, empathetic and resilient individual. It is always useful to have some experience working with people prior to applying to study the Degree in Social Work.

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

There are a range of challenges I face on a daily basis within my role. The biggest challenge I face is lack of resource. It can be difficult to prioritise available resources for a service user and their family. Other challenges in my role are seeing the impact of trauma or adverse life experiences have upon the young people I work with. This can be difficult, and therefore it is essential that you are a resilient individual with effective support systems around you.

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

Social work is a profession that affords you the opportunity to work with the most vulnerable in society to empower them, meet their unmet needs and support them to develop independence. The rewards in social work come from seeing the young people I have supported able to function and engage in ordinary daily activities, despite the adversity or trauma they have experienced. I enjoy the interactions with others in my role and the human aspect of the profession is the part of my job I value the most.

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

Going forward as I build on my experience I would hope to pursue a role in social work leadership. I would like to do this as a way to offer support, advice and guidance to new social workers coming into the profession and draw on my positive experiences as a social worker to offer hope for others.

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

Regulation gives social work the professional recognition it deserves. It ensures that a set of standards and principles are adhered to, to ensure safe, accountable and professional practice.

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

I choose to become a Social Work Ambassador, as I feel this is a great opportunity to promote the social work profession in a positive manner. I feel that this will help to educate others about what social work is, where social workers work, and how their work can be a great benefit to individuals within our society. I hope that I will be able to share my experiences of my social work career to inspire others to consider a career within the profession.