

Social Work Ambassador

Jenny Loye, SHSCT



Jenny is a mental health social worker and she is currently employed with the Specialist Community Dementia Team in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust (SHSCT); she has worked there since July 2015. Previous to this Jenny worked with Praxis Care, in a Mental Health Supported Living Scheme in Co. Down for four years. Jenny works as part of a specialist, holistic, multi-disciplinary team for people over 65 who experience memory difficulties

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Have you always worked in social work?

When I was 16 years old I volunteered in my local community centre and I completed some cross community projects with local youth clubs. I also volunteered in local nursing homes and day centres. Whilst studying my A-levels I gained a place on the school's annual relief aid mission to Romania and through various fundraising events I raised £2500, and travelled for a week visiting orphanages and hospitals. This was a very humbling and eye opening experience that really sparked my interest in social work.

I decided to apply to study Social Work at University and I researched where the degree was offered and what my options were. I was advised by a teacher not to consider a career in social work as it was; “too difficult of a job, it's way beyond your reach and you will never make a social worker”. Feeling a bit deflated I spoke to my mum and, as always, she gave me great support and encouragement...so I applied for the Social Work degree anyway! I studied extensively for the interview and also for my A-levels. One Thursday afternoon, I received notification that I had successfully gained a place on the Social Work Degree programme; it is a day that I will never forget.

From the very beginning my passion has been in the field of mental health – specifically adults and older people, and this is the sector that I have worked in since graduating from the Social Work Degree in June 2011.

Training to be a Social Worker

I studied double award health and social care for A-Levels and there is no doubt that this subject, combined with my life experience and volunteering experience, helped to prepare me for the Degree in Social Work.

I completed the three year Degree in Social Work via the University of Ulster at Magee campus. The Degree included two placement learning opportunities (PLOs); my first being with the Adult Learning Disability Team in the SHSCT and my second PLO was with the Children's Disability Team in the SHSCT.

Looking back I do feel the degree programme equipped me with the necessary knowledge, skills and values to begin my career in social work.

Professional development

I graduated in June 2011 with a BSc. Hons in Social Work and I was fortunate to gain immediate employment with Praxis Care, whilst there I completed my Assessed Year in Employment (A.Y.E.). I then moved on to the Professional in Practice (P.I.P) framework which offered me a wide range of Approved Programmes, some of which were offered by academic institutions. I obtained the consolidation P.I.P Award, and I also obtained an Academic Award via the University of Ulster; 'Post Graduate Certificate in Professional Development in Social Work'.

In 2013 I was nominated and short-listed for an outstanding practice award with Praxis Care.

I am now moving on to the next P.I.P award, known as the 'Specialist Award' which will support me to develop high levels of specialist knowledge, skills and expertise. I am keen to enroll on the NI Practice Teaching Programme and maybe the Approved Social Work Programme in the future. I have just entered training to become an on-site facilitator for student social workers who are on their placements with my team; this is the first step on the pathway to becoming a Practice Teacher.

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

I would encourage someone who is thinking about a career in social work to ask themselves the following question, "Why do I want to be a social worker?" , if their answer is along the lines of,

- I want to make a difference
- I am resilient
- I am empathetic
- or I am a good listener

Then they are on the right track.

I would highly recommend getting involved in some voluntary work as it would provide relevant experience and knowledge that would help prepare and equip for a future carer in social work.

I would say that being a social worker can be hard, but the work that is done is absolutely priceless. I am 6 and a half years qualified and what I have come to learn is that social work is anything but monotonous. I have faced many challenges and difficult times, but that is what makes my job interesting as I continue to learn and develop and build on my knowledge, skills and values on a daily basis.

What challenges do you face in your job?

As a social worker I strive to promote peoples well-being and enhance the quality of their lives; however this can be difficult as we are in a socio-political climate that is driven by economics. These restraints make my job harder as there is a growing demand for services and there are limited resources.

In what way is the social work profession rewarding?

I believe that a career in social work is fundamentally a vocation of true meaning. For me, the rewards of a being a social worker are not monetary or material, it is the sense of accomplishment by achieving good outcomes for the people I work with. It gives me great delight to say that I truly love my job as a social worker.

How do you see your career progressing?

My ultimate career goals are to;

- Further develop my on-site facilitator role by moving on the practice teaching programme
- Complete my Masters in Social Work
- Further develop my role as a Social Work Ambassador
- Become involved with the NI Degree in Social Work Partnership (NIDSWP) – specifically in helping to co-ordinate the regional selection for Degree in Social Work applicants

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

Being a part of a regulated profession and being registered with NISCC means that I, as a Social Worker, am accountable for my practice and I must adhere to a set of agreed standards for conduct and practice. The standards provide very clear guidance on what is expected from me as a professional practitioner and I believe the standards provide the opportunity for reflection, which contributes towards continuous professional development.

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

I believe that being a social worker is not a uniform that you simply put on and take off every day, it is who you are as a person - your ethics and values. I am proud of who I am as a person, and I am proud to be a social worker. I find it an absolute privilege to work closely with individuals and their families in helping them achieve positive outcomes in their lives.

I chose to become a social work ambassador because I wholeheartedly love my job, I am passionate about social work and the work that we do. I want to help navigate the right people into considering a career in social work.

Looking back on my own experiences, I nearly didn't begin my own career in social work because of one person's negative perception of social workers and what they do. I want to help change the public's perception of social workers and their roles; I want to positively promote social work, in particular to schools and regional colleges across Northern Ireland.

I'm a great believer in the power of words, and I would like to finish my social work ambassador profile with an aspirational quote;

*"Promise me you'll always remember;
You're braver than you believe,
Stronger than you seem,
And smarter than you think"*

– Winnie the Pooh by A.A.Milne