Social Work & Social Care

- opportunities in Ireland, north and south
- useful contacts
- graduate profiles
- how to make the most of your work experience placement
Welcome

gradireland Social Work & Social Care

Written by Jill Barrett, Personal Development and Careers Adviser at Dublin Institute of Technology.

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Your career in the social care sector

Introducing your career in the social care sector

What is the social care sector?

Professions in the social care sector aim to improve the quality of life of individuals, children, young people, families and groups from all backgrounds who need extra help to cope with everyday living. This could be for a variety of reasons such as the impact of a personal crisis, disability, illness or ageing. A career in this area involves providing support, facilitating change and helping people to make informed decisions and take positive action to improve their lives.

The social care sector in the Republic of Ireland

In ROI, state provision of social care services falls within the remit of the Department of Health and Children (www.dohc.ie) and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (www.justice.ie). The Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW; www.iasw.ie) is the professional body for the industry. It provides a national leadership role in advancing and strengthening the social work professional in the Republic.

The National Social Work Qualifications Board (NSWQB; www.nswqb.ie) is the designated authority for professional social work qualifications in Ireland. Its role is to develop social work education and training and it grants the National Qualification in Social Work (NQSW) to people who have successfully completed recognised courses. The NQSW is the professional social work qualification required to practice as a social worker in the ROI and the NSWQB also validates social work qualifications gained outside of the Republic.

The Irish Association of Social Care Workers (IASCW; www.iascw.ie) and the Residential Managers Association (RMA; www.rma.ie) are the professional representative bodies for social care workers and managers. Their role is to establish and maintain principles of best practice to enable members to deliver the highest standard of care to service users. There is no one representative body for childcare workers in ROI but the sector is overseen by the Department of Health and Children.

The options

The range of career opportunities and job titles within social care is vast. As a graduate, the professions within this area your career could lead you to include social work, social care, early childhood care and education, rehabilitation, youth and community work or counselling. Clients of social services include ethnic groups, young and adult offenders, children, families, travellers, older people, people experiencing mental, physical and sensory illness and disability, the homeless, the unemployed, those with alcohol and drug-related problems, those with HIV and Aids or issues around sexual identity, asylum seekers and men and women experiencing domestic abuse.

Where support cannot be provided at home, graduates may work in a variety of settings including statutory, voluntary and community social services. In your career you will frequently work as part of a multi-disciplinary team of other professionals including doctors, nurses, therapists, solicitors and the police.
The social care sector in Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland the sector falls within the remit of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for Northern Ireland (DHSSPSNI; www.dhsspsni.gov.uk). The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC; www.niscc.info) is the regulatory body for the social care workforce. NISCC helps to raise standards in social care through registration of the social care workforce. It does this by promoting high standards of conduct, training and practice for all social care workers in NI. The NISCC is a partner in the Sector Skills Council: Skills for Care and Development (SfCD), which is responsible for and supports training and development in social care, child care and early years services across the UK and NI. As in the Republic, opportunities exist for graduates in the public sector and with non-governmental organisations such as community projects and charities.

Why a career in this sector is a good choice for graduates

A career in the social care sector offers graduates an opportunity to make a real difference in people’s lives and thus to enrich the community in which we live. Challenging economic circumstances exert huge pressures on individuals, couples and families resulting in financial and social or relationship difficulties. In times of recession the need for support services and resources increases. Where resources are available and/or there is a legal obligation to provide such services, career opportunities continually arise. In addition to permanent posts there are many opportunities for flexible working within this field. Huge numbers of employment opportunities also exist overseas.

Social work pay follows a nationally-agreed grade system. Salaries for social workers are significantly higher than for those delivering care services at the front line and salary levels tend to be higher in the Republic than in Northern Ireland.

DID YOU KNOW?

Social workers are professionally-qualified workers who assess the needs of their clients and plan and implement the individual packages of care best suited to them. This requires building relationships and supporting people to enable them to realise their potential, take control of their lives and live as independently and safely as possible. Typically, cases are referred by another professional such as a doctor, school principal, healthcare worker or by a member of the general public.

Social care workers are employed to help social workers implement care packages by providing the practical and emotional support recommended by the care plan. This can involve working in a person’s home, in a day-care centre, community centre or residential or nursing home. It can involve responsibilities from providing personal care such as washing, dressing, feeding and toileting to assisting with delivery of activity programmes in day-care centres or nursing homes, to managing a team of social care workers in any of these settings.
Getting a job

How to get started in the social care arena, and the skills you’ll need to be a success.

Routes in

Many entrants to the social care sector come from a range of other backgrounds and begin as mature students. Prior to their professional training, most graduates will have already gained some work experience and for entry to social work this is considered essential. In addition, the placements that you complete during your time in college will provide you with a network of contacts that can be invaluable in helping you to find work when you graduate.

If you cannot secure a full-time post, consider taking up a contract or part-time job, or a number of these. This type of work is commonly available, and indeed many working in the social care field may never have just one full-time post, but will instead enjoy a ‘portfolio’ career throughout their working life.
Key competences
Personal qualities essential for a career in this sector include patience, common sense, integrity, discretion, persistence, maturity, sensitivity, tolerance, a sense of humour, a high level of emotional intelligence and the ability to observe situations impartially and respect the client’s right of choice.

The skills you will need to be successful in social work include the ability to cope with stress, excellent interpersonal communication skills — including exceptional listening and negotiation skills — and the ability to present complex information in a clear and understandable way. Your ability to analyse situations and make sound judgements will also be crucial, along with an aptitude for planning, organising, report writing and time management, often with limited resources available to you.

A career in this area is especially suited to those who can remain calm under pressure. You will be expected to establish relationships with a wide range of people of all ages and backgrounds; engage people in solving their own problems and empower them to build on their own strengths; address problems by taking all factors into account to set and achieve goals; work as part of a multi-disciplinary team and with people from other professions; adapt to a variable and often unpredictable work environment; and be capable of imparting feelings of empathy towards clients of every age and background.

Where to find vacancies
Graduates from professions in the social care sector are employed in the statutory, voluntary and independent/private sectors. In ROI the Health Services Executive (HSE; www.hse.ie) is a major employer along with the probation service, voluntary/community organisations and private practices. In NI significant numbers of social and care workers are employed through the National Health Service (NHS; www.nhs.uk) by the Health and Social Care Trusts — the main statutory employers for social workers. There are also job opportunities available in criminal justice and the education sector in areas such as probation, youth justice and education welfare, as well as in specialist settings such as addiction, fostering and adoption services.

Public bodies are required to advertise in the national newspapers and on their websites when recruiting for full-time and some contract posts. In ROI, the HSE is one of the largest employers of social workers and advertises on www.hse.ie under ‘allied health and social care jobs’. Public body employers also work with agencies and advertise internally to source recruits for locum or part-time positions. To maximise your employment prospects you should register with reputable agencies that specialise in recruitment for the healthcare or social care work fields, either during college or when you finish your studies. Outside of the public sector, word of mouth, intra-organisation contacts, the internet and college contacts are the usual methods by which those working in the social care sector are recruited.

Voluntary and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also provide a consistent source of opportunity. As these may be privately or only partially publicly funded they may recruit through any medium they choose and they always welcome speculative applications. Senior positions are more likely to be advertised in the national press, but it is wise to search for vacancies regularly on the organisation’s website, with recruitment agencies and on relevant recruitment websites.

International opportunities are always available with aid agencies working overseas and may be fully paid, partially paid or voluntary (unpaid) with all your travel and subsistence needs met by the agency.

The current requirement for professional qualifications varies depending on your choice of career within the field of social care. However, in all cases, full-time and senior posts are only given to those who hold such qualifications.

The value of networking
The social work community within the Republic and Northern Ireland is small. Where multi-disciplinary teams work on individual cases, there is constant communication between all levels of staff across numerous organisations. As such, the value of networking and making a positive impression on everyone you meet cannot be underestimated. As well as making contacts through college, placements and paid work there are numerous no-cost or low-cost conferences and seminars that you can attend as a student or graduate. Such events provide excellent opportunities to get your name and reputation known.

How work and life experience can help
Participating in voluntary work signals to potential employers that you are interested in and committed to working in this area. Where paid work is unavailable, voluntary opportunities help build your skills and increase your network of contacts. Combined with your college placements these will serve as a valuable means of helping you to decide if it is the career for you.

Having personal experience of the type of issues that you will encounter in your career in social work can be of benefit to you in your applications. However this is only the case if you can demonstrate that you have tackled them successfully. It’s important that you objectively assess your motivation to work in the field. If you have not fully dealt with your own problems you may bring your own issues to bear on those of others, or even compound your own difficulties. Supervision by senior professionals is actively encouraged and indeed required for many social work professions. If it is not provided by your employer you should be proactive in arranging your own.
Areas of work

The social care sector is dedicated to improving the quality of life of vulnerable individuals across every section of society. It is not for the faint-hearted and involves a great deal of paperwork, but the rewards can be profound.

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Social work

Social workers are employed by both state and non-governmental organisations. Working in the public sector involves working in one of three broad areas:

- general/community and health
- local authorities
- probation services.

**General or community social worker**

General or community social workers are employed by state provided social services and by non-governmental services including charities and community organisations. Some social workers gain employment with private companies in a welfare capacity.

In social and community services you will work with individuals and families within a multi-disciplinary team to assess each case and design, implement and evaluate a care plan specific to the client’s need. Your responsibilities may include:

- employing a range of supports for clients as needed, eg counselling and primary healthcare
- intervening in crisis situations such as cases of abuse or neglect
- identifying clients’ entitlements to welfare and benefits and facilitating them in accessing these
- protecting and removing children deemed to be ‘at risk’
- assessing potential foster and adoptive parents and supervising children in care placements
- working with solicitors and attending court to act as a witness in clients’ cases
- training of, and presentations to, others in your own and related professions
- research and policy work, particularly in more senior roles.

In Northern Ireland social work assistants are sometimes recruited to help social workers. The role is open to those working towards a social work qualification and to those who have qualified in a related area such as social care.

**Medical and psychiatric social worker**

Medical and psychiatric social workers have similar responsibilities to general social workers but in a healthcare setting. Medical social workers work with patients and their families or carers in a hospital or specialised care unit. Casework might include working with a patient and their family during and after surgery to ensure proper rehabilitation and a supported return to their home. In palliative care the work could involve facilitating care and support for the client and family both at home and in hospital or care units during their illness, and to the family after their loved one has died. Psychiatric social workers are generally attached to mental health hospitals or to units supporting those with mental health issues living in the community.

A new role of research social worker is emerging as medical institutions begin to partner with academia to establish action research projects that examine and improve combined health and social care work practices.

**Housing and welfare**

Opportunities exist with local authorities and housing associations, voluntary organisations, housing trusts, private landlords and property companies. Work with local authorities tends to be in housing or welfare services. In welfare you will work with individuals, couples or families to assess their need for services and to facilitate them in securing the support they require. This could be in healthcare, education and employment.

In housing, your client groups may include those in rented accommodation who are on local authority housing lists, travellers who wish to become settled or those who are currently in state care awaiting the granting of an asylum request. You may also manage all aspects of the tenancy from the initial assessment to monitoring and recommending termination of the tenancy if necessary. Additionally you may act as a liaison between tenant groups and your employer.

From an entry-level housing or welfare officer position you can progress upwards into a senior or chief housing or welfare officer role.
Social care describes the range of services delivered to individuals or groups needing social support. Generally social care workers are concerned with the physical and personal care of clients, as well as providing social support. This care is usually provided in the client’s residence and in residential and/or day-care centres.

Social care workers may be employed either by state agencies, by non-governmental bodies and charities such as Barnardos or Women’s Aid, and by community-based organisations.

Probation
Probation services exist only in the public sector. They care for those from minor first-time offenders to serious violent or sexual offenders. Their main aim is to prevent re-offending by assessing offenders, challenging their attitudes and trying to change their behaviours, thereby protecting the public. Probation and welfare officers supervise criminal offenders before trial, during a prison or community sentence and after their release.

As a graduate officer you might be assigned probation and welfare duties in courts, hostels, workshops, prisons, places of detention or other centres. You may assist the court in its sentencing decisions by supplying reports on those who have committed offences. The reports outline the health, social, educational and vocational circumstances of the offender as well as his or her attitude to the crime. It must cite the likelihood of re-offending and/or the risk of serious harm. Probation officers may recommend attendance at counselling, an addiction support programme or an anger management course.

In addition you will work with voluntary organisations and statutory bodies to secure suitable placements for offenders on probation. You will also try to help those in custody to cope with their imprisonment and to rehabilitate and re-integrate into the community. You may also be required to provide liaison services with the families of offenders serving a custodial sentence.

Home care
Job title and responsibilities vary, but social care workers, home care workers, domiciliary care workers and care assistants provide care and support for people living in their own homes. Typically clients include older people and people experiencing serious physical or mental illness or other forms of disability.

As a home care worker you will provide the range of services that the social worker has recommended. This might include helping the individual with toileting, to wash and dress, to eat and drink, to take prescribed medication and to exercise. In addition you will assist the family in their role in providing care and liaise regularly with the social worker and other professionals.
Areas of work

Residential, day or project care
Care assistant, care worker, key worker, support worker and project worker are just some of the job titles that graduates assume in day, residential and supported care settings. Key workers are assigned specific responsibilities for an individual client in addition to other duties.

The majority of residential and supported care centres are provided for the elderly, the homeless, those experiencing domestic abuse and those of all ages who have intellectual or learning disabilities. Such centres either provide fully for all the needs of their clients in every aspect of their care, or support them in independent living units within a ‘group home’.

There are also numerous residential units for children or young people. These exist for those experiencing abandonment, neglect or abuse issues with their families or carers. Additionally there are units for those with behavioural difficulties, a history of offending, or who are too young for prison but must serve a custodial sentence.

Day-care centres provide shorter-term supports for those who remain living in their normal place of residence. These supports might include recreational services, skills development and personal development courses, as well as counselling services or other therapies.

Project care centres are similar to day-care centres in terms of the clients that are recommended to them and in the services they provide. What differentiates them is that their programmes run intensively for a fixed number of weeks with a small group. Care workers in this setting focus on building self-esteem, resilience and life skills. They work to socialise the group in a positive way so that they can build relationships, have fun and make healthy life choices. This work also involves organising day and residential trips.

Family support
Social care workers may also work as family support or family aid workers with parents and children in their own homes. Such families may be experiencing or have experienced some personal crisis such as a sudden death, long-term or chronic illness; alcohol or drugs problems or have a family member who is serving a custodial sentence. In these settings responsibilities can be as simple as providing a listening ear, developing the family members’ caring skills or practical advice on managing time and finances.

Social care work also involves a huge administrative workload. Report writing, attending meetings and constant communication with other professionals are core responsibilities.
Childcare and early years workers provide support, education and care for all types of children at various stages from birth to adulthood across a diverse range of employment settings.

The variation of career opportunities is wide. Centre-based childcare is provided in locations such as nurseries and crèches attached to community centres that cater for children from 2-3 months to school age. Pre-schools and playgroups provide sessional services for children aged 3-5 years, while Montessori and Naonraí (Irish language) pre-schools cater for 3-6 year olds. Early years education specialists may care for children in special needs facilities, for those in pre-school programmes and those in pre-schools for traveller children. An example would be the Republic’s ‘Early Start’ programme which caters for pre-school children in disadvantaged areas aged 3-4 years. Older children from diverse backgrounds needing care are educated through mainstream and special school educational programmes. Special schools cater for children with physical, sensory and/or learning disabilities.

Employment exists in different settings, including schools, community projects, hospitals, prisons, after-school centres, playgroups, crèches, Montessori, nursery and pre-schools, or in the child’s own home. Alternative career paths include development officer, school completion officer, policy adviser and training course co-ordinator.

**Childcare or early years worker**

Job titles include day or childcare worker, play worker, crèche, nursery and playschool or pre-school assistant. In care settings clients may come from a challenging home background or may be experiencing long-term illness or disability.

Responsibilities involve providing physical and social care and educational support for each child through:
- planning and implementing structured developmental programmes
- monitoring and recording children's behaviour and development
- preparing play and learning materials
- helping children with daily routines
- maintaining a safe, clean and stimulating learning environment.

As with all roles in social work you will work alongside a team of other professionals who share an interest in each child’s care, including teachers, social workers and health visitors. You will have regular contact with each child’s family, guardians or carers.

**REGULATION**

While childcare facilities are regulated in both Northern Ireland and the Republic, there is currently no registration for childcare and early years workers. However, all those working with children are subject to police or Garda vetting and are expected to be working towards a qualification in a relevant discipline.
Areas of work

Special needs assistant (SNA)
SNAs support children with a wide range of severe learning, physical or behavioural difficulties to help them achieve their learning goals. They may work in mainstream or special schools, or in a home education setting, either with an individual pupil or a small group of pupils.

SNAs also have a role in facilitating the social integration of fully able children. The role extends beyond the classroom into play and activity rooms, using recreational activities to enhance social skills and learning capability. Assistance may also need to be provided for pupils in clothing, feeding, toileting and general hygiene. SNAs may also be expected to give general assistance to the class teacher. Those working in this area are expected to have a formal special needs qualification.

Special educational needs teacher (SEN)
If you hold an honours degree in childcare or a related subject you may be eligible to pursue a postgraduate diploma in primary school teaching and progress to become an SEN. These teachers help young people to cope with and overcome problems that arise because of sensory impairments, limited physical mobility and behavioural, emotional or learning difficulties.

Job opportunities exist in special schools, youth custody centres and hospitals as well as mainstream primary or second-level schools.

Rehabilitation work

This career area encompasses roles for both social work and social care graduates. A client may need rehabilitation support due to physical or sensory impairment, injury, acquiring a disability or after a surgical procedure. Other rehabilitation work involves helping those with mental and emotional issues. Clients may be recovering from drugs or alcohol dependency, from eating disorders; be coping with HIV/AIDS, or rehabilitating after offending.

Medical rehabilitation
Graduates working in this role support clients who have become physically or sensory impaired. You will help them adapt to their new situation and assist them in getting practical support by identifying professionals to help them, securing funding and finding an appropriate care setting. Key responsibilities include listening to the client, assessing their situation and setting up a care plan involving their family and other professionals, such as occupational and speech and language therapists.

Drug and alcohol dependency
This area of service involves offering support to people who use drugs or alcohol problematically, or who have addiction-related needs. Issues service users face include loss of employment, marriage or family breakdown, poor health, social isolation, poor or insecure accommodation and crime.

A social worker’s role involves carrying out needs assessments following referrals in order to identify service users’ needs and to establish motivations for becoming abstinent from drugs or alcohol. The aim is to help the service user move on to treatment in residential rehabilitation. Individuals’ needs are reviewed throughout their treatment programmes and aftercare support is set up to help them in recovery.

HIV/AIDS work
In this area your role will be to provide emotional support, information and services to those affected by HIV/AIDS. The role mostly involves working with people who have recently been diagnosed and providing long-term support to those with more complex health and social concerns. Cases are referred from treatment centres, voluntary organisations or local genito-urinary infection clinics. Rehabilitation work helps the client to understand and come to terms with the illness from a physical and emotional perspective.
Social work and social care graduates may also pursue roles as youth or community workers. These roles can exist separately or be combined into one post. Job titles include community, youth, project or support worker and can be found in local authorities, voluntary organisations and in community-based day or residential centres established for a particular target group. Such groups may include the elderly, the homeless, asylum seekers, youths on probation or those with issues concerning sexual identity. Work with the homeless involves a lot of ‘street work’: befriending, doing food runs and providing temporary shelter.

Community work focuses on groups that are experiencing disadvantage or difficulty, helping them to make positive change to improve their lives. Typically the job involves establishing and running a range of services for the target group. For the community in general this may include providing advocacy to individuals and groups, writing reports, fundraising, managing budgets, recruiting and training staff, public relations, liaising with external bodies and organising or running group workshops on topics relevant to their needs.

Youth work focuses on encouraging the personal and social development of children and teenagers, helping them fulfil their potential both as individuals and as responsible members of the community. Youth workers provide advice and counselling, and promote personal development through planning and delivering social and recreational activities.

This is a popular career area for graduates and as a result competition is high. Social work and care graduates will benefit from the completion of postgraduate studies in community or youth work.
Other areas of work

Counselling
Many social workers and social care workers are practising counsellors. Employers include schools and colleges, healthcare facilities, community and care centres, prisons and private practices.

Counsellors work with individuals on a one-to-one basis or in a group, listening and supporting the client in dealing with challenging life circumstances. Client issues can include bereavement, depression, domestic violence, alcohol dependency, chronic illness or any combination of these. A range of counselling techniques is employed to facilitate the client in examining the situation objectively; exploring the emotions and behaviours connected with it; and developing a plan for personal change and growth.

Those graduating with a social work qualification are equipped to work in a therapeutic capacity in this field. Graduates of social and childcare programmes are likely to be required to undertake additional counselling training to enable them to practise as counsellors. Most counsellors enjoy part-time or portfolio careers and are usually self-employed.

Counselling training is open to mature applicants who have a significant interest in and experience of the emotional difficulties that people face. As with all careers related to social work, you should ensure that your motivation to work in this area is to help and support others and not to work through your own issues.

Psychology
Psychologists work as part of inter-disciplinary social services teams to provide support to those clients experiencing emotional and mental health difficulties. They may also operate in a consultancy, research or educational capacity for organisations providing social services. Types of psychology specialisms frequently employed in the social work arena include clinical, counselling, educational, forensic and health.

Guidance counselling
Guidance counsellors are employed by schools, centres of higher or further education and community schemes to support individuals in making decisions and taking action in their personal life and career. Counsellors work with clients on a one-to-one basis and in groups to help them make informed decisions and to identify the path that is best for them.

Responsibilities central to this role include collating and providing useful careers information resources; administering psychometric and other assessments such as career interest, personality indicators and aptitude tests; coaching clients in personal development; and other practical skills such as CV preparation, interview performance and effective job hunting.
Related therapies and specialisms

A range of therapists and specialists provide physical, mental and emotional support to those requiring social care. These include occupational, speech and language, play and creative arts therapists and health promotion workers.

**Occupational therapist (OT)**
A graduate career in occupational therapy involves working with people experiencing physical, psychological or social difficulties. They facilitate people in coming to terms with and overcoming illness, injury and disability and in achieving the things they want to do in their lives. OTs work with people of all ages and in a variety of workplaces such as a person’s home, hospitals, day centres or schools. They are principally employed by health services but also work in social services, private practice and voluntary organisations.

**Speech and language therapist**
In this role the therapist helps clients to overcome or manage difficulties with communication, speech and language, and eating, drinking and swallowing. Therapists may specialise in early years, childhood or adult disorders and work closely with other healthcare professionals to develop individualised care programmes. They may work with clients individually or in small groups and also assist parents, families and carers to care and support the individual in their place of residence. Work settings can include clinics, health centres, hospitals, day centres, schools, nurseries and homes.

**Play, drama, art, music or dance movement therapist**
Play therapists work with children, while all other arts therapists work with clients of all ages. Clients include those who are experiencing the consequences of learning or other disabilities, and mental health difficulties or personal crises. Pathologies include a range of learning disabilities, autism, behavioural problems, mental health problems and dementia. Using their specialism, such therapists help their clients to understand the issues that are preventing them from experiencing joy and support them in decreasing internal conflict and increase coping strategies.

**Health promotion**
Health promotion or health education specialists proactively help people to improve their health and increase their control over it. They may design and implement local policies and strategies to promote health and may work on a freelance basis or in specific settings such as community centres, schools, or prisons. They may also provide training and education programmes or seminars on general health or on specific issues such as sexual health, alcohol and drug dependency, healthy eating or mental health. A postgraduate qualification will improve your job prospects.

There are many other career roles related to the social care work arena that you may wish to investigate further. These include disability support adviser, equality officer, fundraiser, international aid worker, adult literacy worker, citizens advice worker, nurse and primary teacher.
My career in social work

Social work offers a broad range of interesting career opportunities. Four graduates share their experiences.

‘I SUPPORT VICTIMS OF ABUSE’

NAME: Sabrina Laverty
JOB: Peripatetic Support Worker
EMPLOYER: Causeway Women’s Aid
EDUCATION: BSc Social Work, University of Ulster (2010)

A passion for people
I chose this career as I have a passion for working with people. Being a support worker gives you a unique opportunity to work with individuals who are vulnerable and experiencing oppression in their lives.

I got my current job through a college internship I had done with Women’s Aid. Women’s Aid works to address domestic violence in society. It provides a quality-based holistic service to women and children affected by all forms of domestic violence.

Providing practical and emotional support
In my role I support those who have experienced abuse to lead an independent life, free from that abuse. My daily activities include meeting women in their homes or a place of their choosing to provide practical and emotional support. This could involve advice with budgeting, legal issues, safety planning, crisis intervention, advocacy and encouraging the development of self-esteem. Regular communication with the agencies and various professionals involved – such as the social services, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the Probation Service of Northern Ireland (PBNI) – is crucial.

The project I work on offers women group work programmes to help them build their self-esteem and overcome the effects of violence. It’s a great feeling to be able to offer help and support. It can be very difficult however to hear the circumstances in which some women and children are living on a daily basis.

Top tip
Make sure you make the most of your college placements. If you make a good impression and lots of contacts, you’ll find it much easier to find a job when you graduate.

‘NETWORKING IS THE KEY TO GETTING A JOB’

NAME: Eoghan McDonald
JOB: Occupational Therapist
EMPLOYER: Unilink Service, TCD
EDUCATION: BSc Occupational Therapy, Trinity College Dublin (2009)

I did some work shadowing with a qualified occupational therapist (OT) while I was studying; the experience confirmed my belief that this would be a great career choice for me. When I finished my degree I emailed my lecturers to tell them that I was job-hunting, and they told me about this post.

My current role
The Unilink service provides one-to-one occupational therapy to students experiencing disability or serious illness. One strand of the service supports those with mental health issues and a second supports those with physical and sensory disabilities. I work in the latter, helping clients with the practicalities of student life, for example attending lectures, getting assessments done, managing their workloads and completing exams.

Each student is encouraged to manage the effects of their illness or disability using a range of techniques, from relaxation techniques to pacing strategies, which help them to prioritise, plan and balance work and leisure effectively. A typical working day is spent responding to students’ texts and emails, meeting all the students with whom I’ve made appointments, and doing administrative work.

Making a difference
Being based in one location can be challenging and the work is very intensive, but the great thing about my job is seeing the difference you can make in students’ lives and watching their transformation during their time with us.

Top tips
Networking is the key to getting an OT job in Ireland. If you can’t secure a job immediately, be patient. While you’re searching, try and get experience in a complementary career, such as a social care assistant; this will enhance your skills even further.
**‘GET LOTS OF VOLUNTARY EXPERIENCE’**

**NAME**: Sarah Donnelly  
**JOB**: Research Social Worker  
**EMPLOYER**: Trinity College Dublin  
**EDUCATION**: National Qualification in Social Work, Bachelor of Social Sciences, Trinity College Dublin (1998); PhD Social Work, TCD (2011)

**Starting out**
My mother was a social worker, and so from a young age I had a valuable insight into what the job entailed. After my degree I started working as a Residential Social Worker and then as a Re-settlement Officer with the Simon Community. My next role was that of Medical Social Worker in the Adelaide & Meath National Children’s Hospital (AMNCH) firstly working in Trauma Orthopaedics and then in Neurology.

**Caring for the elderly**
At the moment I’m working on a joint project between Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and AMNCH called ‘Care & Connect’, which is a practice research partnership. Half my role is devoted to being a case worker to older patients and the other half to undertaking PhD research examining how the multidisciplinary team communicates with older people and their families in care planning meetings. My casework in the hospital includes meeting patients and families; psycho-social assessment; offering support and help and organising care packages. I also take on a team leader role in the hospital as required. This involves assessing duty referrals and delegating cases to an appropriate social worker.

The second half of my working week is spent in Trinity, analysing and interpreting the data from my field research. I also give guest lectures and supervise postgraduate theses. The outcome of my research will be the production of a training manual and implementation of an education programme to improve practices within care planning meetings in the hospital.

**Highs and lows**
Working within a large multi-disciplinary team is interesting and enjoyable, and working with families is also immensely satisfying. However the increasing level of bureaucracy and the time pressures involved in the work can be frustrating.

**Top tips**
Keep an open mind about every opportunity that comes your way. You never really know what a job involves or where it will lead you until you are in it. Get as much voluntary experience as you can – it will help you find the career area that is most satisfying to you.

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**‘BRINGING ABOUT POSITIVE CHANGE’**

**NAME**: Jana Wagner  
**JOB**: Project Worker  
**EMPLOYER**: Youth Support Programme, Dublin  
**EDUCATION**: BA Social Care, Dublin Institute of Technology, (2010)

I’d been involved in working with young people throughout my life so I thought I’m good at this; I should make a career out of it. I found my current job via contacts I made during a college placement I did with the Youth Support Programme. Having to do a placement in each year of college allows you to build up your knowledge of the sector and helps you decide what area to specialise in.

**Supporting at-risk young people**
The aim of the programme is to support young people at risk and to build their resilience. They are usually referred by a social worker and may have been involved in crime or come from a family where addictions are a problem. I work as part of a team which co-ordinates and runs a series of activities for each group. This includes group sessions on topics such as communication, relationships, alcohol and suicide; special interest sessions to build up skills; and fun activities including day- and residential trips within Ireland.

**Forging a bond**
Residential trips allow us to forge a real bond with group members and help them to bring positive change to their lives.

My role also involves working with the multi-disciplinary team managing each individual’s case, attending review meetings and constant report-writing. Good communication, time management and organisation skills are crucial to this job.

**Highs and lows**
It’s great to work in a job where you are constantly having fun and sharing very meaningful experiences with young people. It can be difficult when people drop out as you can get very emotionally attached to individuals and the group dynamic changes when new members replace them, but seeing a person’s self-esteem and trust in others grow is tremendously rewarding.

**Top tips**
Apply yourself fully during each placement and at all times in the workplace. The sector is small and making good contacts and a good impression is essential to career success. Completing the Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) course in managing challenging behaviours will make you more attractive to employers.
Training and career development

The social care arena offers multifaceted, richly rewarding professions, with plenty of career progression.

A career in the social care sector can be incredibly rewarding and is always interesting. Your work will make a significant and positive difference to the lives of individuals and to the community as a whole. Employment opportunities are continually in supply, no matter what the economic climate, although you should be prepared for a career in which you may not always be in one full-time job or hugely well paid. That said, the non-monetary rewards in terms of job satisfaction can be significant. State employment tends to provide the best salaries and benefits but may not always be widely available.

Working conditions vary greatly. You might be based in one place working 9.00 am–5.00 pm, or in multiple centres with irregular hours where shift and night work is common.

Be prepared to encounter difficult situations that you may find distressing, particularly with clients who are very ill or who have experienced abuse or neglect. Remember that self-care is hugely important. If you are not achieving a healthy work/life balance and getting the support that you need, you will not be in a position to effectively care for others.

Employment opportunities are continually in supply, no matter what the economic climate.

How your career might progress
Within pure social work, in structured work settings progression is generally to qualified, senior or specialist social work practitioner, team leader and principal or advanced social worker.

As a probation officer promotion is typically into the position of senior, assistant principal and principal probation officer. In social care and child care/early years, advancement is generally into team leader or management roles and upwards into local, regional or national co-ordinator of services. Further
study and training to top up your undergraduate qualification will benefit you in applying for senior posts across the sector.

**Professional qualifications**

The need for a professional qualification to enter a career in this area varies according to the post. In the Republic and Northern Ireland all those wishing to work as a social worker, probation officer and education welfare officer must have completed a relevant and recognised social work qualification. In ROI you must have completed an undergraduate or postgraduate degree which has awarded the National Qualification in Social Work (NQSW; ROI) or the degree in Social Work (NI/UK) or equivalent. Social workers in Northern Ireland must have at least 200 days experience in practice settings. All newly qualified social workers in NI must complete an Assessed Year in Employment (AYE) to comply with registration requirements. During this year you are supervised by a registered social worker.

Social care workers in the Republic are expected to have completed at least an undergraduate degree in the subject. This is not the case in Northern Ireland until you occupy a supervisory role or higher, but you must hold an NVQ or equivalent which is at the level required to practise in your chosen role.

Professional qualifications are not required for entry-level childcare positions in either jurisdiction and childcare workers are not yet a registered workforce. That said, applicants are expected to be working towards a qualification. In NI, childcare and early years childcare facilities are regulated by the local Health and Social Care Trusts (by their Early Years teams) or by the Department for Education. Senior care staff in childcare and education settings are expected to have a minimum of a two-year certificate in childcare. Heads of pre-schools are expected to have a primary school teaching qualification.

Registration of all those working in the social care professions is getting underway across the island of Ireland with the aim of professionalising the entire sector. As a graduate, remember that registration is not just about meeting a legal requirement. It shows that you’re qualified and committed to high standards, boosts your employability, increases service users’ confidence in you and raises your professional status. In the UK and Northern Ireland, the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB; www.crbb.homeoffice.gov.uk) Vetting and Barring Scheme (VBS) introduced in October 2009, will also ensure that every person working with vulnerable people is background checked. In the Republic, information on Statutory Registration can be found on www.coru.ie.

North and south of the border, social work, social care and childcare employers expect that you will engage in continuing professional development (CPD) throughout your career.
Postgraduate study

Fourth-level study in social work demonstrates commitment, ability and expertise.

In the Republic, entry to postgraduate programmes awarding a professional qualification in social work requires a three-year social science degree or equivalent and relevant work experience. Further information is available on postgradireland.com or from the following schools:

- University College Cork, School of Applied Social Studies www.ucc.ie/en/appsoc/
- University College Dublin, School of Applied Social Science www.ucd.ie/appsocs/
- National University Ireland, Galway: School of Political Science and Sociology www.nuigalway.ie/soc/
- Trinity College Dublin, The University of Dublin, School of Social Work and Social Policy www.socialwork-socialpolicy.tcd.ie

In Northern Ireland, the undergraduate degree in social work is the qualification which allows social workers to practise in NI. There are no postgraduate routes at qualifying level. The degree is available as a three-year full-time course, a two-year undergraduate accelerated Relevant Graduate Route (RGR), or via a five-year part-time route. Those with a relevant degree and experience can apply to undertake the RGR. It is offered by Queen’s University Belfast www.qub.ac.uk and the University of Ulster at Magee www.ulster.ac.uk/campus/magee/.

Many graduates have opted to top up their undergraduate degree or alter their career direction by pursuing educational programmes in the following fields:

- Counselling and Psychology – To work in this area you should have completed a course acknowledged for accreditation by the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (www.irish-counselling.ie).
- Occupational Therapy – Postgraduate programmes are available to those with an undergraduate degree in a relevant subject, preferably in health, psychology, sociology, anatomy or human biology. See postgradireland.com for more information.
- Speech and Language Therapy – Two-year postgraduate qualifications exist for those with relevant undergraduate degrees. Places are limited. See postgradireland.com for more details.
- Art, play, music, and drama therapy – The number of courses is limited and exist mostly at postgraduate level. All arts therapy practitioners in Northern Ireland must be registered and are regulated by the Health Professions Council (HPC). Music therapists must be skilled musicians. The Irish Association of Creative Art Therapists (www.iacat.ie) maintains a list of all approved training courses in Ireland.
- Career Guidance – Access to this career area in the Republic is via postgraduate study such as a masters or postgraduate diploma in Guidance. If you wish to work in a school you will be expected to have a second-level teaching qualification as well and be an accredited member of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (www.igc.ie).
- Northern Ireland has similar requirements and practitioners must attain the professional Qualification in Career Guidance (QCG) awarded by the Institute of Career Guidance (www.icg-uk.org).
- Primary School Teaching – In ROI, a full-time Graduate Diploma in Education (Primary Teaching) runs periodically when the demand for teachers exceeds supply. To be eligible to apply you must have a relevant degree and the required minimum grades in your secondary level qualification. See postgradireland.com.
- The Northern Ireland equivalent is the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). To become a Special Educational Needs Teacher (SEN) you are expected to have a teacher training qualification, a relevant postgraduate qualification and at least two years’ experience. See postgradireland.com.
- Other programmes – Many graduates pursue further study in Child, Family and Community Studies; Rehabilitation Studies; Peace Studies; Addiction Studies; Health Promotion; Gerontology; Gender; Development Studies; Bereavement Studies; Nursing and Learning Support. Those working with children in care are encouraged to undertake the Therapeutic Crisis Intervention Course (TCI).
Further information

Professional bodies
- Department of Health & Children, RoI
  www.dohc.ie
- Health Service Executive, ROI
  www.hse.ie
- Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, NI
  www.dhsspsni.gov.uk
- Northern Ireland Social Care Council
  www.niscc.info
- Social Care Skills Resource NI/UK
  www.skillsforcare.org.uk
- International Federation of Social Workers
  www.ifsw.org
- Irish Association of Social Workers
  www.iasw.ie
- National Social Work Qualifications Board
  www.nswqb.ie
- Irish Association of Social Care Workers
  www.iascw.ie
- Social Care Institute for Excellence
  www.scie.org.uk
- Resident Managers’ Association
  www.rma.ie
- Youth Federation of Ireland
  www.youthworkireland.ie
- National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education
  www.siolta.ie
- Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
  www.cecd.ie
- The National Children’s Nurseries Association
  www.ncna.ie
- Northern Childcare Partnership
  www.northernchildcare.com
- Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC)
  www.cwdcouncil.org.uk
- Irish Association of Counselling Practitioners
  www.irish-counselling.ie
- National Counselling and Psychotherapy Institute of Ireland
  www.ncpii.ie
- British Psychological Society
  www.bps.org.uk
- Psychological Society of Ireland
  www.psihq.ie
- Play Therapy Ireland
  www.playtherapy.ie
- British Association of Play Therapists
  www.batp.info
- Irish Association of Creative Arts Therapists
  www.iacat.ie
- British Association of Art Therapists
  www.baat.org
- Association of Professional Music Therapists
  www.apmt.org
- British Association of Drama Therapists
  www.badth.org.uk
- Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapists
  www.iasl.ie
- Association of Occupational Therapists of Ireland
  www.aoti.ie
- Community Organisations in Northern Ireland
  www.communityni.org
- Community Care UK
  www.communitycare.co.uk
- Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Associations
  www.nicva.org
- Comhairle/Citizens’ Information Board
  www.comhairle-ci.org
- Directory of voluntary and community organisations, agencies and bodies, UK
  www.ncvo-vol.org.uk
- National Council for Special Education
  www.ncse.ie
- Social justice, human rights and global development issues.
  www.comhamh.org

Recruitment resources
- Online network for the non-profit sector
  www.activelink.ie
- Volunteer Development Agency
  www.volunteering-ni.org