

Laura Cheese, BA Social Work (2010)



Where are you working now and what are you doing?

I am working for Birmingham Local Authority in the Children and Families Directorate. I am a Social Worker in a Safeguarding Team.

How has your career developed since graduating from the University of Birmingham?

I started applying for jobs towards the end of my third year at University. I received lots of invitations for interviews. The application process is very important and so you need to get this right. I did not get the first job I interviewed for which, in hindsight, I was glad of as I knew I would not have been happy in the role, so I prepared better for my interview with Birmingham Local Authority. I started my career as a Social Worker in November 2010. I was put straight on to the newly qualified social worker programme which I really enjoyed. I got to meet lots of other NQSWs, attended training and put together a portfolio. We also had 10 days study leave to take when we wanted. My caseload was protected and I was entitled to fortnightly supervision which was really important. Throughout my first year, my caseload has steadily increased. I completed the NQSW programme in August 2011 and I am now holding the same amount of cases as other workers.

What is the best thing about what you are doing now?

I enjoy the fast-paced nature of the job. Also, no two days are the same. I enjoy working with children and families and feeling a real sense of achievement when you can work effectively and make a real difference to people's lives. I enjoy court work and at the moment I am co-working adoption cases which is a new experience and something I find very interesting.

How far did your social work degree prepare you for practice?

I think the social work degree helped me with my writing. From when I first started to when I finished, I could really see the difference. There is a lot of writing to do in social work, much more than I anticipated. With a lot of the work, you are under pressure and have very strict timescales. In practice you have to analyse everything! From child protection conference reports and initial/core assessments to court statements.

What are the most positive and also the most challenging aspects of your social work degree?

The most challenging aspect was definitely my final year. With the dissertation, assignments, placement and portfolio, I found it all very stressful. However, I am so glad I hung in there and finished. The most positive aspect was my placements, which were really varied and interesting. I did not have a statutory placement and I thought this would affect my chances in getting a job in child protection but it didn't.

What advice would you give to current students studying on the social work degree?

Attend the lectures and get involved in as much as you can with your practice placements!