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Clare Halton, MA Social Work (2007)

Where are you working now and what are you doing?

I work as a Social Worker in Australia for an NGO - The Salvation Army in Melbourne as a programme coordinator for an education service provider for young people in residential care who are no longer attached to a mainstream education setting due to their behaviour.

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

It has really developed. I began working for Sandwell Council in a youth justice setting working as a case manager for nearly 2 years, then moved to Wolverhampton City Council in Duty and Assessment. i then moved to Australia in February 2011 to experience international social work. I began as a Social Worker in the team and received a promotion in 2 weeks to become a coordinator.

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

I really enjoy the feeling of getting up to go to work and being directly linked to young people who have a need for support and being able to actually make a difference in their lives. I enjoy the fact that social work is incredibly varied, the capacity to work with different organisations and client groups makes the role very rewarding and interesting. I believe the MA helped me secure the promotion in the role I currently undertake.

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

I think the course prepared me to some extent due to the placement element. However, what did help me was the fact I had worked in an area office and had experience of the social work setting prior to getting on the course, and the course helped me expand my knowledge base rather than the practical element so much.

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

The positives were the people on the course and the discussions which took place, and reflection on practice. I sometimes found it challenging to work (I know you're not supposed to!) whilst studying and completing a placement. I also found the challenges with management decisions at placement in conflict with what was sometimes taught or promoted on the course.

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

I think it's the best opportunity you get to critically analyse cases and this is so important to practice. I would encourage all students to really engage in this area as it's difficult to get the opportunity when you are out in the field. This is not to say you can't and don't critically reflect, but you get less time to do so when on the job.

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