

Jayne Hulbert, DipSW



Jayne Hulbert graduated from the University of Birmingham in 2003 with a Diploma in Social Work. Jayne is a qualified Social Worker with over 35 years social care experience in the statutory, voluntary and private sectors, she set up the SWEET Project (Social Work Education, Experience and Training) in March 2010 with colleague and Senior Family Support Worker, Jayne Creswell.

The SWEET Project is a Birmingham based learning and training organisation for student social workers at the University of Birmingham and a family support and child protection organisation. Jayne set up the project in direct response to Birmingham City Council's reorganisation of Family Support services, the project is motivated by the belief that support for the whole family is frequently the answer to problems and that with the right help and committed support, children and families can be supported to reach their full potential. The SWEET Project has been recognised for its work and has recently won the **Prime Minister's Big Society Award** (<http://www.bigsocietyawards.org/award-winners/the-sweet-project/>).

more about her time at Birmingham and what it is like to be a Social Worker.

As an alumna of the University, we met up with Jayne at her office to find out

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

The flexibility. My work isn't constrained by outcomes, targets, or paperwork. We have the power here to make an instant decision on a real life situation.

What did you enjoy most about your time at Birmingham?

I was part of the Selly Oak colleges, by the Orchid Library, and towards the end of my course it got taken on by the University of Birmingham, but what was really nice was that we were still a really small course of around 30 people so you got to know everyone really well. It was very insular but in a good way. I still have ties to a few people from my course that I studied with, it's important in the job that I do, having that network is invaluable; we can offer information to each other.

What advice would you give to students wanting to be a social worker?

It is a really hard job to do but it's the most rewarding one at the same time. I've been doing this job for nearly 40 years and I wouldn't do anything else. You get the opportunity to support service users, directly work with children that no one else is interested in helping; you get to find out what's going on in their world and to change their world for the better. There's no better job.

Jayne Creswell also offered her advice to those starting out in the profession:



"My advice would be having seen both sides of statutory and voluntary work in the industry, they are very different and students should have the opportunity to do both. We've had students here do that and they are now very clear in what they want to go on to do. So, go for work experience in both whilst you've got the option to do so as it then gives you the option!"

Why do you take students from the University of Birmingham?

I was a practice educator at Birmingham and the course leader gave Jayne and I the time to talk through our ideas for the SWEET Project and they were very supportive. We have a real open and honest relationship with the social work department and positive relationships with students themselves. The social work course itself is very good and equips students to deal with real day to day social work tasks – the anti-discrimination and anti-oppressive practices taught ensure students come equipped for their time at SWEET with those values.

What makes The SWEET Project placements stand out?

A lot of agencies take our students for placements. Students get the opportunity to spend a few days at organisations such as MIND, Cerebral Palsy Midlands and Mencap through us which gives them real hands on experience and they can explore what's out there, what it's really like. Students get to change their perception and some tell us they never thought they wanted to work with mental health service users but their placement has changed their minds. Through us and our links with substance misuse agencies students get the chance to go out with a mother and child worker and get to understand where agency work fits within social work.

How did studying at Birmingham live up to your expectations? Is it the same now?

I loved the campus, I'm very into art deco and art nouveau and I think it's very much in that style. It's a unique University and has grown from being quite contained into something huge and internationally known.

How do the placements the Sweet Project offer benefit our next generation of social workers?

They're making a difference in people's lives. We talk about social workers skills such as active listening and communication and here they have to do it. They meet actual service users and ones that haven't come from a text book, they're real. They're supported here and we believe it's about teaching them to achieve with our service users, not for them. At SWEET we work in partnership with them.



"Quote from service user, "The Sweet Project have given me a lot of support, with the 'parenting at first' help, as I've not been a mom before and I didn't know what to do. They were someone to speak to. They're helping me with my confidence and self-esteem."

Interested in supporting the work the Sweet Project and the work they do? Please visit their website www.sweetproject.co.uk (<http://www.sweetproject.co.uk/>).

