

Beth Seeley, BA Social Work (2008)



Where are you working now and what are you doing?

I am currently employed as a social worker for an adoption charity called **Adoption Focus** where I assess and approve adopters. I then help match children to my families from councils across the UK and support families through the placement.

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

After graduating, I began working in the social care sector whilst looking for a suitable job. At my first social work interview I was offered employment with a local authority children's long term team. From this experience I then chose to move to an independent fostering agency for several years before applying and subsequently moving to my current position. I now work for a charity which is very different but I use a range of transferable skills from my previous employers. I have enjoyed all the sectors I have worked within and have moved positions to pursue my own interests within social work. I have now reached my goal to work within adoption and look forward to expanding my skills around this in my current employment.

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

The best thing about my job is how rewarding it is to work with people to achieve their aims of becoming an adoptive parent. Also by gaining permanence for a child through an appropriate match and support. It does have its ups and downs and can

be very challenging due to the difficult starts to life children have experienced. I like to come to work and feel that I am making a difference. My degree definitely helped me secure my first job. I was confident and secure about my learning when I applied/interview thanks to all my experiences which the University provided me with. Getting my first social work job on my first interview is demonstration of that.

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

I did feel prepared to practice and confident to move to a new employment environment due to different student placements I had. However, I didn't feel as prepared to deal with the stress at times when you are carrying a large caseload, which as you gain experience evidently you gain more work. Due to the constantly changing lives of the people who you are working with, sometimes everything can all come at once. This was more prevalent in the local authority setting and I did get used to this. Being able to express how you feel is important; as long as you have a good relationship with colleagues and managers, you will be fine. Supportive friends and family also go a long way when you have to cancel on them occasionally!

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

The most challenging aspects of the course I found was the amount of written work which you are being assessed on; going to University does entail this aspect! I was much better in the practical sense, but I did feel supported by my tutor. The most positive aspects were the range of practical placements I was provided with from the University which meant I got to observe and get involved in many different areas. I had work experience for a charity supporting people affected by HIV; a child protection unit with the police and a children and families setting with a local authority. The University obviously has good contacts to get such placements arranged.

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

I would advise current students to keep committed to your employment aim, even if after you graduate this means practising in an environment which gets you just a step closer to your ideal job. These experiences could also cause you to change your focus of what your ideal job is and this is not a negative. I always wanted to work in adoption when training and would not have got to the area of work now without practising in a local authority and fostering service where I have been able to transfer skills.