

**Name: Jeannine Brady**

**What did you do prior to applying for the course?**

I was in school doing my A-levels and I thought I wanted to do Primary School Teaching. So, I applied for St. Mary's Teacher Training College, but I didn't get the grades I needed to get in - everything happens for a reason. I then started thinking about my own community, my own youth work journey, and how I might build on those experiences. I was volunteering in New Lodge Arts, at the time, helping them out with their dance sessions and drama sessions. I was also involved with NBAP, doing the YWIC programme. I was doing all this, and I started to wonder if youth work was my real passion as I enjoyed working with young people and advocating for them.

**When did you do the course and what led you to apply?**

So after that, I applied for Community Youth Work at Ulster. I didn't get accepted for the degree and having applied a second time still didn't get accepted! I don't think I was ready for it, and I'm so glad when I look back as I applied for the Certificate in Youth Studies in YouthAction and I got in! I say to everybody that it really sets you up before you start your degree, and I couldn't recommend it enough! I don't think I could have made that step of going straight into the degree.

I was so determined to gain a place on the community youth work degree and my time on the certificate prepared me for it, so in 2016 I gained a place on the community youth work degree and graduated in 2019.

**Key milestones or memories from the programme.**

The three placements I had – they were literally three life lessons for me. Each of them taught me something different that I will always remember.

**Perseverance:** In the first placement, I was going through a hard time - I went to Uni one day and approached my tutors. I still remember Eliz going 'youth work style', grabbing some flipchart and we both wrote down some solutions! That taught me to stand up for myself; and taught me to persevere through when things get difficult... that there is going to be an end to this. I'm forever grateful for their advice!

**Independence:** The second year was in Australia and that was completely different! I was away from home for three months; learning to cook, learning to live by yourself, leaving my Mummy for that length of time; making sure to complete all your Uni work without your tutor over your shoulder – so it was organising plus trying to see the country, trying to just live and not get any spider bites!!

**A new mindset:** And then I was in Alternative Education in Newstart and I just really liked the thought of Alternative Education; it was a real eye-opener because some young people I had been working with didn't like mainstream education, school just didn't suit them or support them with their needs. So in Newstart, I saw the benefits of that, some young

people coming into my work that night and I would be able to have some real conversations about their anxieties of not enjoying school and knowing how to support them.

It's recognising that school isn't for everybody and if we can provide enough of the same opportunities for young people in an informal youth setting and through experiential learning opportunities - young people will thrive. This placement gave me a completely different mindset and outlook on youth work.

### **Where are you now and what lies ahead for youth work?**

I am now Leader in charge of Mountcollyer Youth Centre, and I only feel like I'm getting started here. I have so many things I want to do here. I want this to be a 'hub of the community' within Tiger's Bay; not just a Youth Centre - and we are on a positive road of embedding that here. If anything is happening, Mountcollyer YC will be there to support it.

When I got this post, some people were nervous for me because I am literally from the other side of the peace wall, but I have been welcomed into this community with open arms and I just love it. Centre-based youth work isn't for everybody, but it's for me! It's just amazing to see young peoples progression and be right by their side through some of the most amazing and also challenging times in their lives.

I am really interested in young men's work. We have a high number of young men within our centre, and I see myself reading and researching things to try better my practice and gain a better insight into their lives to support them.

They all say that I won't leave until I'm 70 - But I know someday I will leave. I am so passionate about the centre, I'm genuinely happy here and I know I am destined to do a lot, lot more here. I have massive plans!