



Latest news from NIPSA Youth

November 2016

Homelessness Awareness Week

Introducing some of the Young People at Simon Community NI in Homelessness Awareness Week

Wednesday 30th November to Thursday 8th December 2016



This year, Homelessness Awareness Week falls at the beginning of Advent, as we countdown to Christmas. This is usually a time for celebration and families coming together, but unfortunately for too many young people in Northern Ireland, it is a time of loneliness, isolation and insecurity.

People experience homelessness for a whole range of reasons, but the breakdown of a family unit is an increasingly common factor that often affects young people. At Simon Community NI, 50% of the people they support are 25 years old and younger. They aim to not only offer safe and secure temporary accommodation for these individuals, but also develop their life and employability skills, to give them the best possible chance to succeed in independent living when they move on from their accommodation services. These are the experiences of some of those staying in one of their dedicated Young People Projects.

Caine has been with Simon Community NI for two years:

I became homeless as a result of unpleasant family issues which came to a head when I was 18. I didn't know a lot about the Simon Community, and I spent time on a friend's sofa before the Housing Executive referred me to Simon Community NI.

Compared to where I was coming from, Simon Community was fantastic, a very good place to be. It was the start of a very large learning curve; I have met people from all walks of life. There's never a dull moment and you meet people with all sorts of personalities.

In terms of support from Simon Community staff, there's nothing they won't help with – cooking, budgeting, support with interviews...with everything you need, they will find a way to support you through it, or refer you to someone who can help.

They have also give me lots of opportunities to get involved in activities including the Speak Up Project, Drug Awareness Residentials, and we're currently working with Apple to create video 'welcomes' for new people coming to stay.

I've definitely enjoyed my time here – I've developed new skills to use in the future and it's given me a sense of doing something worthwhile, rather than sitting around doing nothing. I would say that some of the young people who live here gain more skills than if they were still living at home. They get the push they need to start taking care of themselves.

I'm currently studying health and social care and hoping to become a social worker to work with young people who have been through what I have. I have back up plans too but that is my main aim.

I have made plenty of fond memories at SCNI so I will definitely look back positively at my time spent here when I leave.

Hannah has been with Simon Community NI for four months:

I was made homeless because of issues in the family home. It was really hard and it took a lot of getting used to. I went to the Housing Executive and told them my circumstances and they offered me emergency accommodation with Simon Community.

I was terrified when I first moved in and cried the first day I was here because I didn't want to be here, I wanted to be at home. Now I feel a lot more comfortable here and I'm used to the other young people here and the staff. I've become a lot more independent since moving in.

It can be hard at times being in this situation, I just take every day as it comes and it's good that the staff are here to support you if you need help. Plus you can speak to your friends in here too which is good. The staff are here every day and are always there for you. There are also counsellors who come in if you need extra support.

I'm working on the Build to Learn project at the minute and it's really good to be involved as we all have different roles within a committee to develop a common room here where we are living. Once completed, we each will get an OCN (Open College Network) qualification based on the skills we have used and developed so that is great too. It's helped with my communications skills and team building. It teaches you to get along with other people in a working environment.

I'm also studying for an Access to University qualification so I can move on and train to be a nurse. So when I'm financially ready, I want to move on into my own home. I will definitely leave Simon Community with positive memories as being here has helped me in so many ways to prepare for an independent future. I am really, really thankful to have been here.

How Can You Help?

This Homelessness Awareness Week, do whatever you can to support people in your community experiencing homelessness. You can volunteer, fundraise, donate, or simply educate those around you as to the reality of youth homelessness in Northern Ireland. If we work together, we can end homelessness. For more information, visit www.simoncommunity.org, email info@simoncommunity.org or call **028 9023 2882**.



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