

Springboard proves a life-changing experience for Portaferry man

Report by Kim Hamilton

A Portaferry man, who was persuaded by his girlfriend to participate in Springboard, a cross-community, cross-border organisation which aims to enhance young people's chances of employability, has said it was a life-changing experience and he is now back and ready to get his career underway.

Jason Berry, of Oakland Terrace, left school with GCSE's, an NVQ in IT and an HND in software engineering. However, while continuing his studies he left halfway through and in his own words 'went on a downward spiral'. It was at this point that Jason took on a temporary job as a barman in Dumigan's pub in Portaferry, but two years later he was still in the same job.

After doing a little research into Springboard Opportunities Ltd, which is based at Royal Avenue in Belfast, Jason put in an application.

Springboard is a unique organisation. Since 1992, it has been the only enduring vehicle through which both community organisations and Catholic and Protestant young people from

the deprivation, Protestant and Catholic areas in greater Belfast have suffered a dual assault, with the impact of the Troubles, for the past number of years.

Each year various programmes are set up to offer young people training and the opportunity to gain work experience abroad. These programmes have a three stage structure: Initial training is at home to build confidence and skills and develop relationships with other participants; the international phase gives the participants the chance to not only gain work experience, but to also experience independent living and cultural diversity; in the final phase at home, individuals complete training and prepare actions plans.

received a letter asking him to come for interview. He was subsequently accepted onto the course and carried out a creative technology course with 20 other students.

"It covered film, drama, sound and music. It was so strange 21 strangers being thrown together", enthused Jason.

He added, "We went on a residential course to the Giant's Causeway, where we had great fun and played silly games to learn everyone's names. It was a real bonding exercise. We also went to Barholm in Portaferry for another residential where we discussed global issues and talked about things we could change. We talked about how we felt and if there was anything niggling us. We also did transition training at St Anne's Cathedral in Belfast

