

Nigel's Speech

I've been asked to do a wee speech. I'll try and keep this short and sweet because I've a drink waiting. Some of you know me as a participant others as your support worker, then the rest of you are wondering who is this clown. Well, my name is Nigel, I did the Youth and Community Programme in February 2007, with Josey and Stuart and they've mentally scarred me for life....

A bit about myself, I would describe myself as a hood all through my teens, I messed up my education, drank to much, did to much drugs and was a thieving little you know what. Which eventually got me a few holidays at her majesties prison Hydebank. Surrounded by you workers who hadn't a clue and the fact that I knew I could do the job better than they could was what got me into youth work.

So after wasting my youth in and out of institutions and prisons, I got off the drugs and started to learn about them, started hitting the books in the prison education centre, done a few courses on drugs and behaviour psychology in order to get ready for a career as a youth worker. When I got out I did my level 2 national certificate in counselling and started volunteering as a community support worker, I worked with my first youth group in July 06.

I heard about springboard and applied for South Africa, but I wasn't ready at the time so I got put on the backburner for another course further down the line. I am glad I never got that course, as I would not have met my sweetheart.

And then I met Josey Grogan, roughly about the same time I started seeing my psychiatrist. A gentleman, a scholar, a raving lunatic, but above all a man I'm proud to call a friend. He got me in for an interview and the rest as they say is history. He took a chance on me and I had the best six months of my life.

Qualifications, great work placements, a chance to travel and I met some of the maddest people. The social side of our programme was out of this world, never mind the funding by Del and FAS.

I'll take my springboard memories to the grave with me. I was humbled, the trips to Germany and especially Belgium meant a lot to my personal identity, my heritage and me. To be able to lay a wreath at the Ulster tower and be genuinely grateful was probably my greatest achievement in life so far.

Having worked for springboard on two programmes and seeing things from the other side, I can tell you the work is not easy, it can be physically and emotionally demanding and stressful at times. I will say that the managers, project managers, project leaders, administration staff are all dedicated and take pride in the work they do. Can I ask you to stand and give a round of applause for the staff for the work they've done for us and for arranging this wonderful night for us.

I want to leave use with a quote which I think benefits the whole ethos of the work springboard does.

"We are all inventors, each sailing on a voyage of discovery, guided by our own private chart, of which there is no duplicate. The world is all gates, all doors, all opportunities. (Ralph waldo emerson)