

Members Story

Hard Work and Determination



HARD WORK AND DETERMINATION PAYS OFF

I recently completed a B.A. in Applied Social Studies (Social Care) in the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (ITB). I thoroughly enjoyed this experience and would recommend the course and ITB to anyone thinking about going to college.

I sat my Leaving Certificate in June 2005. During this year I visited many colleges with my parents to see which ones would be both suitable and accessible for me. There were some PLC and Diploma courses on offer in the area of social care. I applied for these as I did not think I would get enough points in the Leaving Cert to get straight into the college course I wanted. I intended using these as stepping stones for the degree. I also investigated NUI Maynooth and ITB as these colleges were close to home and offering courses in Social Studies/Care. Social Studies in Maynooth was my first choice on my CAO and ITB was my second choice.

When I visited ITB and went around the campus I instantly had a feeling I would love it there. A really nice lady introduced herself to us. She was very encouraging. Later I found out she was head of the Department of Humanities. She talked me through the course and the workload involved. I also met with one of the lecturers and she explained about the various modules in the course and the assessment structure. I discussed my concerns with her around what would happen if I became sick during one of my years at ITB. She assured me that we would deal with this if the need arose. She said that I could take the modules individually, if necessary, and take as many years to do the course as I needed. This put my mind at rest.

When I got the CAO offers I was delighted to have been offered a place in ITB. I was a bit disappointed at the time that I did not get my first choice in Maynooth, in retrospect ITB and the Social Care course was perfect for me as the campus in Blanchardstown was modern and accessible while Maynooth was a more sprawling campus which would have been very difficult for me to get around.

I was very nervous on my first day but very quickly settled into college life. I was approached straight away by the student services officer and she asked me what help I might need to make my time at ITB easier. As my parents were driving me to and from college every day we felt a practical help would be the provision of a taxi to and from college, even for one or two days a week. However, the student services officer managed to organise funding for every trip to and from college for the remainder of the four years of the course. This was a huge help to myself and my parents. I had the same taxi driver bring me to and from college every day and he was very reliable and obliging. The college was completely accessible to me and I was given a key which worked on all the lifts in every building of the campus. The staff and students were also very helpful to me if I needed anything; they were willing but not intrusive.

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As part of the course I had to do two placements, one in 2nd year and one in 3rd, each for a duration of three months. These placements were usually organised for the students by our year tutor but I was allowed to find my own. This meant I was able to pick one that matched my ability accurately. I thoroughly enjoyed both of these placements and felt this experience boosted my confidence about my abilities to work in this field.

Each module was assessed in two ways, by exam and by continuous assessment which was usually in the form of an essay and tutorial contribution. I was always very nervous about doing the exams but the lectures were very good for having us well prepared for these. They provided revision weeks and extra individual help on problem areas as requested. The student services officer also offered me any support I felt I might need, including the use of a scribe, a tape-recorder etc. I did not actually avail of these aids but it was great to know they were available every year if necessary. If I needed to use the bathroom during the exam I would be allowed an extra fifteen minutes for every hour of the exam.

All in all my college experience has been one of the best experiences of my life and I thoroughly enjoyed my time in ITB. I could not say enough about how good everyone was to me. I would highly recommend anyone with a disability to give college a go. Before I started I never imagined that I would get through it so easily but with the appropriate supports in place it can most definitely be achieved. I am now looking forward to my future where I will hopefully work in the social care field.

Most third-level institutions have Disability Liaison Officers. The Disability Liaison Officer may provide a number of services including assistance with applying for a reserved place, finding suitable accommodation and arranging any special access requirements and provisions for sitting exams. Some institutions reserve a number of student accommodation places for students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities are eligible for third-level grants on the same basis as other students. There are some grants specifically for people with disabilities. A special fund to help third-level students is administered by the Department of Education and Science. You should apply directly to the third level institution at the beginning of the academic year. Kildare Member