

## **The course that helped Mollie find her spark**

When Mollie signed up for the Youth Work qualification with Blaenau Gwent Youth Service, she had no idea it would change the direction of her life. She wasn't sure where she was heading, only that she wanted to work with young people. What she found instead was a new sense of confidence, community, and purpose, and a career she truly loves.

Before discovering the course, Mollie didn't realise how powerful youth work could be. "I never truly understood how powerful its practice was", she says. "I thought youth work was just weekly youth centres where young people go in their free time." That early perception changed quickly. Through her training, she came to see youth work as a vital space where young people can express themselves, feel safe, and be supported to grow.

Like many learners, Mollie's path wasn't a straight one. It was a family friend who worked at Blaenau Gwent Youth Service who first told Mollie about the qualification. She had tried to complete the course two years earlier but withdrew when the timing wasn't right. But this time around, she felt different. "It was the first time I really felt ready and confident enough in myself to take the leap," she says. "And I'm so glad I did, because the qualification has truly changed my life!"

At the time, Mollie was also finishing her university degree, which meant she was juggling both courses for several months. It was a challenge, but one she took on head on. "It was hard, but worth it," she explained. "I thought, what have I got to lose?"

Once she began, Mollie found herself looking at the world differently. "It's definitely allowed me to see the world differently," she reflects. "It's made me become much more critical and honest with myself and the world around me." The combination of theory and practice helped her understand what good youth work looks like, and why it matters.

"By learning the theory and then having the opportunity to practice it throughout different placements, I became a better youth worker for young people," she explains. "Now, I make sure everything we do with young people has a purpose and meaning to their lives."

The impact of the course was immediate. Just months after completing the qualification, Mollie moved into a paid position as a youth support worker, leaving behind the part-time job she'd held for four years. "The qualification opened the door for me," she says.

Mollie's placements also included school-based provisions, which she hopes to explore more in the future. "I'd definitely like to explore this in my future of youth work

practice.” These experiences helped her develop a clearer picture of what kind of practitioner she wants to be: thoughtful, consistent, and driven by purpose.

Through the qualification, Mollie also gained the confidence and practical tools to handle some of the most important aspects of youth work. “I’ve definitely become much more aware, knowledgeable and confident when interacting with young people,” she says. “The qualification has given me the resources and opportunities to become an effective youth worker, from how to approach safeguarding issues to dealing with challenging behaviour.”

For Mollie, youth work is much more than a job. It’s about creating spaces where young people feel seen and valued. “I feel that young people are often perceived in a way that doesn’t truly reflect them,” she says. “All young people should have the opportunity to access a safe place where they can express and be themselves.”

She often reminds herself that for some young people, those few hours at a youth centre might be the only time they feel completely safe. “Not everyone has a good or safe upbringing,” she says. “Which is why I make sure I give 100% when interacting with young people, because the short time we spend with a young person could mean everything to them.”

When she looks back now, Mollie says she’s proud of how far she’s come. “If I could give my past self any advice, it would be: Just do it! Trust the process.” She describes being a youth worker as a privilege, one that’s hard to put into words. “It’s a privilege to be part of something so important and powerful,” she says.

The Agored Cymru Level 3 Certificate in Youth Work Practice, delivered in partnership with Cardiff Metropolitan University, Monmouthshire County Council Youth Service and the Youth Work Training Academy (ETS Cymru, funded by Welsh Government), and hosted by Blaenau Gwent Youth Service, is a shining example of what collaboration can achieve. By blending academic understanding with hands-on practice, the partnership gives learners like Mollie the chance to grow, connect and make a lasting difference in their communities.

For Mollie, the qualification was more than a course. It gave her direction, confidence, and purpose, helping her find her spark, much like the work she does every day to help young people do the same.