



# LAY MAGISTRATES

## *COMMUNITY AT THE HEART OF JUSTICE*

### **Lay Magistrates' Testimonials**

Hello, my name is Sinead Burns. I've been a lay magistrate for around 20 years now, and I sit in the North eastern Division.

I'm Olga McGettigan, and I've been a Lay Magistrate since the first of April 2005, so it's just over 20 years.

My name is Ann McRoberts, and I'm a Lay Magistrate, and I sit in the division of Fermanagh and Tyrone.

There are three different parts of being a Lay Magistrate. When you sit in youth court, you're there to consider the rehabilitation and welfare of young people. We hear criminal cases involving young people up to the age of 17, and in the Family Proceedings Court. you are responsible for ensuring what's in the best interest of a child in terms of safety, stability, and safeguarding. We hear public law cases where trusts would be applying for orders, such as care orders, regarding young people and children, and private law cases that would involve parents generally seeking contact with their children or residence orders.

And in Signatory Duties, you're required to consider signing warrants out of hours where there's a need for urgency but also balancing the legal requirements.

A Lay Magistrate's role is to bring the community perspective into court proceedings. Definitely it requires an element of resilience. Some of them have had unthinkable and unimaginable experiences to date. It can be quite difficult to read about situations that some children are growing up in.

But what is important is once you make the decision, that's final - You do not go back and you do not reflect on it at all.

The thing that I enjoy most about being a Lay Magistrate is, I see it really as an opportunity to give back to society. I enjoy the opportunity to make a difference in a child's life. I might not be aware of the difference made, but it's the opportunity to make that difference. I enjoy the fact that I'm independent and also that I'm impartial. So I am using my lived experience to provide what I think is the best situation for a child to be living in at that particular time.

Be organised, believe in yourself, and believe you make a difference. I would advise that it's a very rewarding role, and it's important to prepare well in advance for any court that you're sitting in. Any new Lay Magistrate who's appointed, I would advise them to really throw themselves into the role, to not to be afraid to ask questions and in fact ask questions of everyone that they come in contact with.

If you are interested in civic duty and public service, I would highly recommend it. Making a difference in the lives of young people is the most satisfying part of the role.