



Andrew is the manager of Lisgarel residential home in Larne. He has worked within day-care and as a residential home manager for 22 years.

Andrew is responsible for the management of a busy 40 bedded residential care facility which caters for service users who are placed for residential and intermediate care. He is also responsible for the management of 38 staff and ensuring their training is kept up to date and in line with NISCC registration when applicable.

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Have you always worked in social work?

After school I trained as a Mental Health nurse and staffed for a while. I guess I graduated into the social work profession after gaining experience in residential care for older people, especially with service users who had cognitive impairments. I was motivated by social work's strong value base and approach to anti oppressive practice. I did not need the social work qualification to do the job I am in now, but was drawn to complete the training, as I felt it would give me a very holistic edge to my practice.

Training to be a Social Worker

I was working within social care and was eligible to apply for secondment to the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW). I was successful and obtained a place on the employment based route (this route is no longer available) and qualified as a social worker in 2000.

Professional development

Once I qualified I was keen to keep going! I completed a Post Qualifying Award through a range of portfolios and assignments. As part of this award, I qualified as a practice teacher and have worked with students ever since. I also completed a post graduate Diploma in Managing Health Services in June 2010 and was awarded a Degree in Professional Development in Social Work in September 2010 and the Master's Degree in Public Administration in June 2011. Just last year I obtained the PIP Leadership and Management Award (2016). I still aspire to complete other parts of the PIP framework as professional development is something I feel very passionately about.

What would you say to someone considering a career in social work?

I would say go for it! The qualification is a gateway to working with so many diverse service user groups and different job roles from practitioner to manager. The training involves a range of topics combined with core social work practice. As a social work student you learn a lot about your own skills and abilities. To me, your value base is so important. When you work with people in an enabling way it is so important to be respectful and treat others the way you would expect to be treated.

What challenges do you face in your job?

Ensuring standards are maintained and budgetary targets are met can be a challenge at times. Providing a high quality, flexible 24 hour service has also its challenges, especially in ensuring that minimum staffing levels are met.

In what way is the social work profession rewarding?

You can make a real difference to someone's life. Seeing a service user recover from surgery and be able to go home is very rewarding. I also really enjoy the self-development that social work offers and making sure that my own staff within social care are maintaining their registration and post registration, training and learning requirements (PRTL). No two days are the same and having the professional qualification opens up so many different opportunities in terms of career pathway.

How do you see your career progressing?

I want to complete a PHD; this will be something I may have to pursue myself. Career wise I wish to progress up the management ladder so I can influence the shape of older peoples services in the future.

What does it mean to work in a regulated profession and be registered with NISCC?

Ultimately it means increased protection for the most vulnerable in our society. To work in a regulated profession means I am held to account for my training and development as well as the standards I work to.

Why did you choose to become a Social Work Ambassador and what do you hope to gain from this role?

So much is publicised when things go wrong within social work. As a social work ambassador, I get to speak positively about the profession to people who are at key points in their lives and deciding on possible career paths.