

# Social Work Ambassador

## Deborah Dalton, NHSCT



Deborah Dalton is the Senior Social Worker (SSW) in Antrim South Integrated Team (Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT)). She has worked there since February 2017. Prior to this Deborah was a SSW in Coleraine Integrated Team and she has also worked in the Newtownabbey Integrated Team as a Social Worker.

*“During my Assessed Year in Employer (AYE), I had a protected caseload and lots of support from my colleagues as well as regular supervision which gave me confidence to become an autonomous and confident practitioner.”*

Deborah is responsible for managing a team of six social workers and a community support worker. This includes ensuring that service users get a timely assessment, provision of services, updating of systems and processes, multi-disciplinary working, monitoring practice and personal development, supervision, chairing best interests meetings and complex case discussion, allocation of referrals amongst many other tasks!

### Have you always worked in social work?

I worked in social care (in care homes) and administration prior to becoming a social worker and decided that I wanted to work directly with people. I believed I had the drive and personality to motivate people to make positive changes to their lives either through change or by support. I got to my current senior position by firstly applying for a temporary senior post which allowed me to gain insight into the role and allowed me to decide if I wanted to progress to management level.

### Training to be a Social Worker

My life experience and work experience (working in nursing and residential homes) helped me to prepare for the Degree in Social Work interview. I was able to relate my experience to the knowledge, skills and values required to be a social worker. Treating others with respect, dignity and putting consent and choice at the heart of all my engagements with others was fundamental in preparing me for the Degree.

During the three year Degree I had two practice learning opportunities (PLOs) to prepare me for practice: a children’s residential home (8-12 years of age) and a day centre. Working with two different service user groups gave me valuable experience of working across the life cycle and allowing me to apply theory to practice. The PLO’s also allowed me to apply evidence based interventions to promote the best outcomes for service users. I was given lots of opportunities, support and regular supervision throughout my PLO’s to enable me to tune into service users’ needs and reflect upon my practice.

### Professional development

During my Assessed Year in Employer (AYE), I had a protected caseload and lots of support from my colleagues as well as regular supervision which gave me confidence to become an autonomous and confident practitioner. I have completed the consolidation and specialist awards as part of the post qualifying, ‘Professional in Practice’ (PiP) framework. Additional training in Joint Protocol and Achieving Best Evidence allowed me to carry out my role of

safeguarding adults with PSNI colleagues. I have found lots of support and encouragement for professional development in my social work career that has helped me to become a confident and competent practitioner.

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

I would advise anyone considering social work as a career to get some experience first as this will prove invaluable throughout your career. You will work with service users and carers who are facing challenging and traumatic events in their lives which might challenge your emotional resilience. As a social worker you need to develop skills in reflection on your practice, both formally and informally, to ensure that you learn from each experience to benefit future service users. Reflective practice helps you to face each situation without prejudice or judgement. Service users' life experience may impact on how they present to us and it is up to us to build a relationship with them to help effect change or support.

### **What challenges do you face in your job?**

There is daily time pressure to allow you to complete tasks. Prioritising workload is an essential skill and organisational demands for information are constant and can be frustrating.

### **In what way is the social work profession rewarding?**

Every day in social work is different and challenging. Boredom will never happen!

### **How do you see your career progressing?**

I have achieved the role of Senior Social Worker and am happy to stay with that role as I want to retain direct contact service users.

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

Being registered with NISCC allows me to practice as a social worker and ensure my practice is developed through the PiP framework.

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

I am enthusiastic about social work and feel it is important to counterbalance the negative portrayal of social work. I wanted to be part of the change in this area.