

## Social Work Ambassador Karen Douglas, NHSCT



Karen Douglas is the Service Manager for The Rowan, Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) for Northern Ireland. She was employed by the Northern Health & Social Care Trust (NHSCT) in August 2012 to establish and manage the service. The Rowan is a specialist 24/7 regional service funded jointly by the Department of Health and the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

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### **Have you always worked in social work?**

Social Work is a passion for me rather than a career. It chose me rather than me choosing it! I have always wanted to work with people. I consider myself to be sensitive to the needs of others and a good listener.

I undertook the Diploma in Social Work and Master of Social Work at Queen’s University, Belfast, graduating in 1998. I commenced work as a Social Worker in 1998 working with children and families who needed support or protection. I specialised in the area of family and child care from this time until 2008. I then was promoted to Senior Social Worker in 2002 and Assistant Principal Social Worker in 2006.

I decided then to diversify and develop more specialist management skills and took up the post of re-profiling a number of sub-specialities within Children’s Services including managing contracts and commissioning services from local community and voluntary providers. Following this, an opportunity arose to manage two inter-professional Child and Adolescent Mental Health Teams (CAMHS) and act as the Social Work Lead. I left this post in 2012 only to establish a regional service for victims of sexual crime, which is my current post.

### **Training to be a Social Worker**

I applied to Queen’s University, Belfast in 1996 to undertake the postgraduate Masters in Social Work and professional Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) having taken time out to engage in voluntary work with the Samaritans, and paid work with adults who had learning difficulties, whilst I had my children. I previously studied and been awarded a BSc (Hons) in Social Sciences. The course was at postgraduate level and involved two years of study incorporating two work placements.

### **Professional development**

Continued professional development has been essential to reflecting and fine tuning the essential skills and knowledge required to engage with service-users and care-givers safely and effectively.

I have undertaken a number of formal post-qualifying awards including: the Post-Qualifying Award in Social Work; Child Care Award; Diploma in Child Care; BSc (Hons) Professional Development; ILM Certificate in First Line Management; Managing Effective Practice; MSc Inter-professional Health & Social Care

Management; Leadership & Strategic Award and Training for Trainers Award. I am currently undertaking the professional Doctorate in Childhood Studies at QUB.

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

To anyone who wants to make a difference to others and to give of themselves, I would say, make the application. It is a privilege to work with others in need and to be able to give back is so rewarding. It is not without its challenges, but these are alleviated by the positive outcomes that can be realised. Having a sound value base is essential to managing oneself and to being a successful social work practitioner or manager.

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

In my current role, as with all my work with children and families, the toughest part is hearing how some people have been treated in their lives. It is crucial as an individual practitioner to be self-aware and resilient and to draw on your team for support. I have had the pleasure of working with many great social workers and other professionals in my career who I have learned so much from and who have supported me, and vice versa.

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

Social Workers have the opportunity to make a positive and meaningful difference to other peoples' lives. I have enjoyed working with children and families for years; especially being able to reflect on their achievements and progress, helping them to realise their potential. As a social work manager, I have enjoyed being an advocate for service development and funding to deliver better and more effective service interventions.

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

My focus is now on co-producing some meaningful research with children and young people who have engaged with The Rowan service, to ensure we provide a service where children's rights are not just respected, but promoted.

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

It is important that Social Work is regulated. As a profession, we must assure those with whom we work, that we have a high standard of training and there are established standards of practice which we all are expected to adhere to. Being a registrant with NISCC promotes our professional base and I believe instils confidence in the profession.

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

I chose to become a Social Work Ambassador as I am passionate about our profession and want to share this with as many people as possible - not only to raise awareness about the incredible work we do, but also encourage others to consider social work as a positive career choice; where one can really make a difference every day.