

Social Work Ambassador

Maurice Mahon, WHSCT



Maurice Mahon is a social worker and co-ordinator for the Domestic Violence Prevention Programme (DAPP) with the Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHSCT). He has worked in this post for the past three years. This role involves working with domestically abusive males, conducting domestic abuse risk assessments and

offering specialist interventions on an individual basis. He has also designed and implemented a Domestic Abuse Prevention Programme (DAPP) that he facilitates each week with groups of domestically abusive males.

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Have you always worked in social work?

I began my career in youth work and progressed into work with addictions with the Northland Centre before moving to London, where I managed a residential alcohol treatment centre for 5 years. I applied for social work training to correspond with my return to Northern Ireland in the knowledge that a professional social work qualification would open doors, in terms of quality employment opportunities and provide a long-term career pathway.

Upon completion of my social work qualification in 1991, I was immediately employed by the Foyle Health and Social Care Trust (now the WHSCT) as a social worker with the first Leaving and After Care Team established in Northern Ireland. After 5 years I left the Family and Child Care Directorate and was employed as a social worker/drug therapist within the Mental Health Directorate in the Alcohol and Drug Service. The project I worked within was the first Drugs Arrest Referral Team (DART) in Northern Ireland and necessitated daily visits to local PSNI stations.

After 10 years I secured a PhD Fellowship Award from the Research and Development Office, Public Health Agency, and was seconded for three years to Queens University Belfast on a full-time basis. I have been employed as a social worker within the WHSCT Women and Children's Directorate since returning from Queens University and work within the first and only Domestic Violence Specific Team in Northern Ireland.

Training to be a Social Worker

I applied for the Diploma in Social Work and Higher Education at the University of Ulster in 1991. There were many applicants but the previous experience I had obtained working directly with service users helped me to get a place. In addition, I prepared extensively for the social work interview.

Professional development

I have completed the Post Qualifying Award in Social Work in 2006 having submitted my consolidation portfolio; completed the Certificate in Child Care at Queens University; and have completed the Practice Teaching Award.

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

A career in social work is very rewarding and fulfilling. The social worker's role really matters and, makes a meaningful difference to the lives of many people. Social workers help make society a better place for all citizens.

The most important value is a genuine respect and belief in people and their ability to change given the appropriate support. Social workers should possess a holistic understanding of human development and what happens to human beings when they are prevented from achieving their potential. Social workers need to understand the various impacts of poverty and disadvantage and how these factors impinge upon the ability of individuals and families to be “good enough.” Social workers need to develop excellent listening skills to be able to undertake the most important task in social work - which is engaging meaningfully with service users.

What challenges do you face in your job?

The main challenges come from the demands of service users and the finite resources available. The most liberating challenge is being creative and thinking beyond limitations to create services or interventions that are efficient and effective. The basis of efficient and effective interventions necessitates getting service users fully involved in the identification of problems, not just symptoms, the generation of solutions and the trial and error process - until the underlying problem has finally been solved.

In what way is the social work profession rewarding?

Seeing people change for the better and finding that all effort and work for the service users, was really worthwhile at the end. Being involved in the most intimate and private lives of clients is such a privilege. When service users show that they trust and believe in the genuineness of your involvement in their lives, it is a most wonderful experience.

How do you see your career progressing?

I lead the Domestic Abuse Prevention programme in the WHSCT and I would like to see the service develop throughout the WHSCT catchment area - with a team dedicated to working only with perpetrators. This would allow the team space and focus to develop the required skills and knowledge base, to be able to increase effectiveness of interventions and help perpetrators desist completely from the use of domestically abusive behaviours.

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

It means there is recognition that the job of social work is valued by government and the profession is becoming even more professional. The establishment of NISCC and social work regulation also highlights the fact, that social workers are public servants and employed to provide a valuable service to members of the public. NISCC registration is a constant reminder that service users should be afforded the highest quality of service delivered with respect, guided by legislation and informed by relevant theory.

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

I have been a qualified social worker for 23 years and worked in social care for 30 years plus. I believe the profession has so much to offer but needs to constantly adapt to meet the ever changing needs of service users and demographics. I would like to encourage people to consider social work as a profession and also to be able to influence the quality and direction of service delivery.