



Rona Hendry is employed as a Mental Health Social Worker and Approved Social worker with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT). She is also a Social Work Practice Teacher and supervises one Social Work student per year. She has worked in this position for nearly thirteen years. Rona provides therapeutic and practical support to adults who experience mental ill health so they can access Trust and community resources.

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Have you always worked in social work?

After leaving school I worked in an administrative role in the health service for 14 years. I was motivated and inspired to choose social work as a profession after many years of voluntary work. I grew up in a family where voluntary work was the norm. My first volunteer role was working with adults with a learning disability who attended the Gateway Club when I was 16. I also volunteered with Abbeyfield Society, the Beacon Centre in Newtownards (for nine years) and as a Neighbourly Carer with a Bryson House Scheme for the elderly. This work provided me real insight into the needs of individuals living in the community and inspired me to apply for the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW).

Training to be a Social Worker

I undertook a Diploma in Social Work and graduated from the University of Ulster in 1999. This was a two year course and included a range of academic and practice based teaching. As part of the Diploma I undertook two placements; the first was a joint placement at Lakewood Youth Justice Centre and East Side Project. This placement gave me the opportunity to work with individuals who have been involved in offending and were placed in youth justice accommodation. The work focused on rehabilitation and supporting young people to make positive life choices. My second placement was with Carlisle House - a rehabilitation unit that provides a nine week residential recovery programme for adults who have alcohol and/or drug addictions. In this placement I developed as a group co-facilitator, providing group work to individuals attending the residential nine week programme.

Professional development

After qualifying as a social worker in 1999, I completed a BSC (Hons) in Health and Social Care with the Open University and graduated in 2001. This provided me with a post graduate Diploma in Health Promotion. I have always been interested in health promotion and on my desk at work I have the saying *“Intellectuals solve problems, geniuses prevent them”* and this saying reflects the value of health promotion to social work practice and why I originally completed this course. I trained to be a Practice Teacher in 2004 as I was passionate about my profession. Working within a multidisciplinary team I wanted to develop my social work identity and completed the Approved Social Work Award in 2005 as I recognised the importance of human rights informed assessment under The Mental Health (N.I.) Order 1986.

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

I would say to anyone considering a career in social work, to consider their value base and understand their own values. It is also helpful to have reflected on their lives and how they have managed personal adversity. Are they resilient? Patience, humanity and the ability to put personal perspectives to one side to be present in another person's situation is important. Relevant experience and knowledge of social work or social care can help to prepare an individual to be better equipped for social work training and support the individual to develop resilience.

What challenges do you face in your job?

One challenge I face in my job every day is balancing the pressures of my job and managing risk while taking care of myself in the process. Ensuring reflective practice is woven through the fabric of each working day helps to create safe and meaningful practice in my work with others.

In what way is the social work profession rewarding?

The most rewarding element of my job is enabling an individual to find their recovery. I have observed the journey of recovery and in some cases, enabled and empowered others to find peace, a new home, a new job, a new career, to be a parent and empowered them importantly with the skills to care for themselves. It has also been very rewarding to work with social work students who come to placement knowing so little of the role of Mental Health social worker and in a short period of time learn so much and develop as practitioners.

How do you see your career progressing?

I wish to further develop my practice teaching role and my practice assessor role. I also want to develop my skills in public speaking and continue to promote social work as a career.

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

Being regulated and registered with NISCC is about being part of a professional career and about accountability in practice that has at the core social work standards and guidelines.

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

I became an Ambassador to promote Social Work as a professional career and to encourage and engage with young people and educational institutions to help them better understand the social work role. On a personal level I wanted to develop my public speaking skills and presentation skills.