



## Rhonda Shiels

Team Leader,  
Sensory Support  
Team

### Introduce yourself. Where do you work? What is your job role?

My name is Rhonda Shiels, and I am the Team Leader for the Sensory Support Team based in the Bradbury Centre, Belfast.

### What does your job entail?

As a Team Leader, I have the privilege of leading a team of Social Workers, Rehabilitation Workers, and Rehabilitation Assistants, all of whom have specialist skills in working with individuals who have a hearing and/or sight loss. Our aim is to promote the independence of those living with a sight and/or hearing loss. My role involves tasks such as supervising staff, allocating referrals, chairing meetings, and liaising with voluntary services such as RNIB, BDA, Guide Dogs, RNID, Cedar Foundation, and many others.

### How did you get into this line of work?

When I was at university in England, I decided to learn Sign Language at a night class. I then worked to support students who had a hearing or sight loss. I continued studying sign language at night class, and when a job opportunity arose in a Sensory Team, I applied for it and was successful.

### Outline your career to date?

I started working in Family and Childcare for approximately two years. I then worked as a Social Worker in a Sensory Team, supporting both children and adults with sensory loss. As I wanted to further develop my sign language skills and thoroughly enjoyed working with Deaf adults, I transitioned to the BHSCT Deaf Support Team. Following a rewarding secondment opportunity in a Physical Health and Disability Team, I chose to work closer to home and transferred to a new position. Due to a restructure within the service, my role and base changed once again, and I began working with older people as well as younger individuals with physical disabilities. After a few years, I decided to apply for a Senior Social Worker position and, after four years in that role, I made the decision to return to working in Sensory Services where I am currently.

### Tell us about your qualifications and training?

I completed a Bachelor's degree in Applied Social Studies and obtained a Certificate in Qualified Social Work (CQSW). Additionally, I have achieved Level 2 in British Sign Language and have undertaken various other courses throughout my career. I have also completed my qualification in Practice Teaching, which enables me to regularly supervise and mentor student Social Workers during their placements.

### What qualities are required for your job – personal and professional?

I believe that the ability to deal effectively with stress is crucial in today's climate. As a Social Worker and manager, it is essential to be hardworking, organised, able to manage your time efficiently, and prioritise tasks effectively. Good communication skills, being a valuable team member, and maintaining a respectful attitude towards others are also essential qualities.

### What is the best advice you have ever received?

Don't be afraid to try something new.

### What do you like to do in your spare time?

My love is hiking - anywhere, but I really enjoy discovering the beautiful island we live in. I also enjoy spending time with friends and family, attending concerts, doing DIY projects, and reading.

### Tell us an interesting fact about yourself?

When I worked part-time as a Social Worker, I also taught aerobics in my spare time.

### Who has inspired you most in your life?

My RE teacher, Mr. Williams, was fun, a great teacher, communicator, and inspiration. Additionally, there was a friend of our family who demonstrated kindness, faithfulness, and gentleness in how she lived her life.

### What advice would you give your 16-year-old self?

Don't be afraid to try new things and believe in yourself! You are more than capable.