

# Social Work Scotland Annual Conference June 2016 - Speech

**MUSIC: SISTERS ARE DOING IT FOR THEMSELVES, Eurythmics**

## THANKS AND INTRODUCTION

Dear Colleagues - a very warm welcome to our third conference as Social Work Scotland.

Musical references – Sally Magnusson's book emphasizes the importance of music for individuals and how this is an important reference point for people with dementia and therefore there is a musical theme to the conference over the next 2 days.

Thanks to Alistair and Harry (past president)

It is a great honour and privilege to be elected as the President of Social Work Scotland and to give the opening address for our conference this year. I have selected the theme of “ Together We Make the Difference” for the conference which will focus on championing and celebrating social work/ social care and give an opportunity to articulate and promote our role and impact on people’s lives.

Over the next 2 days there will be time to reflect on the important role social work and social care, in partnership with other sectors, makes to the lives of people with whom we work together with their carers as well as an opportunity to reflect on the contribution each of us makes as professionals.

## BEING A SOCIAL WORKER

My day job is working as CSWO in Scottish Borders Council and at a recent event in the Borders with practice teachers and newly qualified social workers each of us were asked to reflect on the reasons we went into this profession and it was fascinating to hear the very different personal journeys that led people into this area of work.

For me I was always going to be an English teacher but during my school exams my brother developed a mental illness- that was very worrying and had a significant impact on all our family. When he became ill he began to talk nonsense that we were not able to understand. He stayed up all night reading the Bible and was not able to

attend work. When my mother sought help for the GP she was told he was just lazy and needed to sort himself out. It was only many months later, following significant deterioration and stress, when she paid for a private psychiatrist that he was admitted to hospital.

However even then no one had time to explain to us as a family what to expect, how to help and support him and the experience of visiting him on a locked ward was one that not one of us ever forgot.

I continue to support him in a caring role today – again a role that many in this room will also have. That was my motivation to become a social worker – to provide much needed basic information and support to

individuals and families at a time in their life when they were experiencing crisis.

Each of us will have our own personal reasons often based on life experiences that are not of our making. These may be linked to health conditions, the area where we were born, our early experiences or life events such as parental ageing, divorce, unemployment or bereavement.

It is important that we do not forget that these are often the same experiences that people receiving support or using our services are trying to manage and make sure it enables us to proffer empathetic advice and support.

Research in Dundee University, amongst other universities, has emphasized the

irreplaceable contribution that emotional intelligence in workers makes in engaging with even the hardest to reach people. It is ironic that staff who dig the deepest into their own emotional and empathetic reserves to provide the best kind of help to others often need support themselves over time. For our staff and for our service users we must recognize and value the importance of empathy.

So, research has confirmed what we already know – that the quality of the relationship and the personal approach of the professional is what matters most, and makes most difference to people we work with. We all bring part of who we are into this job.

Time for reflection **MUSIC: LET IT BE, The Beatles**

## LEADERSHIP

I am incredibly proud to be representing the profession as female leader. Our profession in Scotland has over 200,000 employees of whom 85% are women and whilst the last 5 male presidents have led the profession really well this gives a very strong positive message to our workforce and for gender equality and leadership.

Social Work Scotland is the organization leading the profession in Scotland and now more than ever we need effective leadership. We need to build this organisation to influence and advice on policy and legislation and crucially to support the development of the profession. This will mean that we can practice social

work in a legislative framework that allows it to thrive.

Although we are a small organisation, recent work to raise agendas and to enable partners to appreciate the importance of social work is beginning to pay off.

We have relentlessly pushed the need for a review of home care – a service that is crucial to delivering on ambitions to support people to live well in the community regardless of the challenges they face. We interview for this post next week.

We have made the case again and again that we need more professional support on children and families in the Scottish Government. Our committees do a fantastic job, but it is on top of their other work and



we need to support them. We have agreed funding for a post for two years with the Scottish Government.

This and other work has built confidence in our ability to make a difference and has resulted in greater investment including an additional SDS post, a community justice post, and a prisons post. With people solely focused on these agendas and supporting our committees, we can live up to the name of a leadership body.

## LAST YEAR

Social Work Scotland under Alistair's leadership has had a very successful year. We have had a proactive media presence with key articles in the Scotsman, Holyrood Magazine, The Guardian, The Herald, as

well as in the professional press. Through these avenues we have raised the profile of social work and highlighted key themes such as mental health, poverty, the named person, workforce issues and child protection.

We have, over this year had a direct impact on policy development, most notably in respect of child protection and the focus on neglect, but also on community justice reform.

We have worked with partners to implement the action points in the vision and Strategy for Scottish Social Services, including leading on the promotion of the public understanding of the sector. We very much look forward to the research that Glasgow

Caledonian University and the University of Dundee are doing on this.

We have also had a look internally at what we do as an organisation and our focus this year will be to have the same impact on the profession as we have on policy and legislation. I think we are in a good place to do this.

## THE YEAR AHEAD

So, what does this year hold for us?

Social work and social care continues to be at a cross roads dealing with the challenges of integration, the impact of high profile cases, negative media coverage and ongoing budget reductions. Welfare changes also impact upon poverty, housing and employment resulting in increased

pressures on those less able to cope. At such a time it is even more important that social work has a strong voice and we are able to articulate the work of the profession and the difference we make to people's lives.

We continue to grow in strength and influence and are embedding our revised constitutional arrangements. Membership is now at an all time high; with members from a range of organizations including Local Authorities, the third and independent sectors, universities and centers for excellence.

And we have a fantastic team at Social Work Scotland:

- Kate Rocks as chair of our children and families committee
- David Formstone as chair of our community care committee
- Sean McKendrick as chair of our criminal justice committee
- Susan Taylor as chair of our organizational development hub
- Dave Berry as chair of our resources committee

Many of you will know Val De Souza as our Vice President and Alistair Gaw will remain part of our core team as past president.

I would also like to pay tribute to Mike Burns for his sterling work as the previous

children and families chair and to Harry Stevenson for his tenacity in supporting major change in our organisation.

So what are my priorities for Social Work Scotland this year?

### 1. Neglect and Child Protection

Firstly there is a need to promote a focus on the critical area of child neglect and child protection. The recent shocking case of Liam Fee highlights the dreadful consequences when parents go out of their way to manipulate and deceive services. This leaves children very much at risk.

By focusing resources on child neglect and early intervention we, along with other partners, can provide early support and intervention and support families.

More legislation is not the answer – we already have legislation that is fit for purpose. However, poverty and disadvantage remain key risk factors which prevent children from reaching their potential and we need to continue to work collectively (to address issues.).

We have the opportunity to come together as a nation – professionals and communities – to take greater ownership of the difficult task of keeping our children safe. This potential has been led from the top with the First Minister taking a balanced approach to the tragedy and emphasizing the importance of professionals learning rather than simply being blamed.

This was reinforced at the recent Child Protection summit by John Swinney, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, where it was announced that the Scottish Government has set up a Child Protection Improvement Programme.

A key focus for the review will be of the formal Child Protection system including Child Protection Committees, Significant Case Reviews and the Child Protection Register. Other themes include Children's Hearings, Leadership and Workforce Development, Inspections and Neglect and we in Social Work Scotland and indeed all Leaders, need to be fully involved in influencing this agenda.

We need to remember that what we do at the high end of child protection works. It



keeps children as safe as we ever can keep them, but the key to supporting children and families before difficulties escalate is in preventing neglect.

## 2. Mental Health

The Challenge of Mental Health has always been a personal interest. However, this year there are key areas that need to be progressed. The challenges that young people are facing have been well documented. For teenagers, managing the modern day to day pressures of exams, bullying and social media can impact on their resilience and has resulted in a growing number of cases of young people self-harming, becoming depressed and having low self-esteem. It is this group who often require specialist support but can end

up in secure accommodation as a last resort to keep them safe.

Effective CAHMS Services are key to effective treatment strategies but there is often a long wait for support and meanwhile Social Work and families are managing risky behavior. Programmes to build resilience in young people, early access to counselling and support and access to timely specialist help- including the outstanding work of our third sector colleagues in the Scottish Recovery Network who are driving forward new methods of support in local authorities - are all crucial.

### 3. Care at Home

One of the key challenges right across the country is access to Care at Home Services

which are fundamental to the success of Integration, reducing Delayed Discharges and supporting people at home. This year we have built on a successful collaboration with the third sector/Community Care Providers Scotland and Scottish Care, which has resulted in joint pressure on the Government to address challenges in Care at Home.

There has been a commitment to an increase in sector pay to £8.25 from October, however, this will not solve all the problems – we need to build on this. The appointment of a post, therefore, hosted in SWS is welcome, to focus on recruitment and retention, new models of care and career pathways to promote this sector as a positive career choice for our bright and

caring young people, as well as our mature and experienced population.

#### 4. Community Justice

We are reaching a critical stage in the transitional change to Community Justice and the draft guidance on the transitional plans has been issued. These need to be completed by April 2017 and Social Work Scotland will continue to lobby the Scottish Government on key issues such as funding and promoting a range of community solutions. The joint work being taken forward with the Scottish Prison Service will be valuable to inform this agenda.

#### 5. SDS/Personalisation

The important shift in practice to Self-Directed Support remains an ongoing priority and supports the fundamental

values and principles of Social Work of personalization, independence and enabling people to take control over their own lives. Whilst there has been much progress there remains much to do especially in relation to embedding this fully in practice, progressing the agenda for Children & Young people and promoting an understanding with Health of this approach.

SDS has an important role in social work practice and we will work to make sure that it is positive and not seen as another set of procedures.

## 6. Integration

Joint Boards are now fully established and all strategic plans are in place across Scotland. Work continues on working through and comprehending the

implications of this for Social Work as a whole. In the new arrangements, it is crucially important that we continue to raise the profile of Social Work, articulate the particular contribution we make and the positive impact we can make in people's lives. Standing alone, social work makes a unique contribution. But this isn't separatism. We know that together we make the difference.

## 7. Leadership of Profession

This is an important area that Social Work Scotland will continue to promote. The crucial role of the Chief Social Work Officer – one recognized in statute -has been recently reviewed and although the Chief Social Work Officer group has changed over the past year, they meet regularly and will continue to raise issues, direct and

challenge policy and promote a positive approach.

I am pleased that, of the current CSWO group, a high proportion (20 out of 31) are females, more reflecting the make-up of the profession which is 85% female - and this in itself signals a positive commitment to gender equality that is equally supported by our male CSWO colleagues. You may also notice that on our agenda we have a significant number of female speakers, again reflecting this theme.

Leadership is not about one person or an Executive Team. For it to be effective it needs to be demonstrated across all levels of the profession so I call on everyone here at the conference to embrace their role as a leader, whatever the level of your post,

whatever organization you work for or whatever contribution you make and promote the positive values of Social Work and the difference we make to people's lives.

A key leadership challenge for us all is to articulate the important role Social Workers and Social Care play in our society with other colleagues, the media and general society. Together with Health, Police and Third Sector colleagues we all work with the most disadvantaged groups, some of whom do not welcome our support or input. This can range from trying to protect children like Liam Fee or Brandon Muir, from parents or care givers who are manipulative and cover their tracks; to the work we do every day we work with high risk offenders, people with serious mental health



difficulties, balancing risks with the individuals rights to lead their own lives.

We cannot protect everybody all of the time. And we are devastated - collectively and individually - by such tragedies. But make no mistake, we make a massive positive difference to thousands of vulnerable people every day, continually striving for social justice, happiness and wellbeing for people who often cannot speak up for themselves. Our speaker from the Glasgow Girls group, who as a young person stood firm against the establishment and fought for the rights of refugees – has much to teach us on this topic.

## CONCLUSION

I hope you will enjoy the conference over the coming two days. There is a range of speakers and perspectives that I am sure will provide an interest for everyone here. I am looking forward to hearing Amy's views and reflections on her own personal journey and those of our looked after population whose voices have been captured by Scottish Through care and After Care Forum.

There will be an opportunity to reflect on Child Protection evidence from Eileen Munro and a focus on refugee experiences. We work to reduce disadvantage, poverty and inequity, promote independence yet have to intervene when the risks are too high – a complex role. I

n order to carry this out, training and development and good supervision is essential and we will hear from Dr Trish McCulloch and a newly qualified social worker on current training and support.

In order to lead the profession we need to engage leaders across all agencies and across all frontline staff and managers. We need to promote leadership at all levels of our organisations, we all have a key role to play.

So – we return to the theme of our conference – “Together we make the difference.”

We need to get the basics right, we need to support staff well, and we need to work in partnership with all other sectors, people who use our services and carers with whom we work. However if we want our partners and government to understand and respect our profession for the valuable contribution we make we need to explain it.

Finally to finish I would like to leave you with Van Morrison's "Bright Side of the Road" This is my long suffering husband's favourite artist and is a big thank you for my family who have supported me for many years in social work- holding the fort when the phone rings again in the evening to report another crisis or dealing with crisis telephone calls at weekends.

So - I would like to leave you with this:  
never forget who you are, why you are here  
and what you bring to make the difference.

**MUSIC: RIGHT SIDE OF THE ROAD, Van Morrison**