

President's Conference Speech 2007 Bernadette Docherty

Introduction

Colleagues welcome to this year's conference. I am very honoured to be given the task of leading the Association this year, which promises to be a challenging year for many different reasons.

It's certainly easier to stay cool in the face of this challenge when you are surrounded by people of ability, who are committed to taking forward the objectives of the Association and I feel very fortunate in having a strong team around me.

Allan Baird, Director of Social Work in Dundee City Council joins me as Vice President of the Association. We have continuity in our Standing Committee convenors – Sue Brace in Community Care; Michelle Miller, Children and Families; Les Hutchison, Resources and Irene Cavanagh in Research, Standards and Training.

Jackie Donnelly joins them as the Convenor of the Criminal Justice Standing Committee which has a major agenda in the forthcoming year. Jim Dean remains Secretary and Ronnie Paul is Treasurer and I would want to express my gratitude to all of them for the contribution they have made and the contribution I know they **will** make in the forthcoming year.

The Association is also supported very ably by Sophie Mills our Administrator and Shona Main our Policy and Parliamentary Officer. They have contributed in a major way to help the Association increase its profile and maximise the contribution it can make to debate on social care policy in Scotland. As some of you will know we are also in the process of recruiting to the post of Professional Development Manager to help progress the work of the Association, particularly in relation to implementing Changing Lives.

At this point I would want to pay particular tribute to our immediate Past President, David Crawford. Many of you will remember David struggling to get here last year with his broken shoulder. That was probably the first of many challenges David faced in his year as President but he faced them with good humour and commitment and the Association has grown in confidence and contribution as a result of his leadership. He has shown real

tenacity and also an ability to negotiate some stormy seas and we **have** benefited, and I know **will continue** to benefit, from his knowledge & expertise.

There are some changes to the conference format this year. As a result of feedback we decided not to have workshops. There was a view that these were too idiosyncratic, a great workshop over-subscribed or a poor workshop could mean a disappointing day. So we have instead a packed programme of speakers leading short discussions and we hope you will participate in these to gain maximum benefit from this format.

But I doubt if we would all be here without the efforts of Linda Bruce, COSLA's Events Manager, who for the past three years has relieved incoming Presidents of the majority of the work of conference organisation. We get a great service from Linda, which I have certainly appreciated. I also want to thank the other members of the conference planning group, Alan Baird and Joan Elliott for their help throughout the year

And finally, for this introductory phase at least, my thanks to North Ayrshire Council for their support in allowing me to take on this role, particularly at what will be a very challenging time for Councils facing new political arrangements. My thanks also to Karen Andrews and my three Heads of Service, Sandra Paterson, Sheena Gault and Lisbeth Raeside all of whom support me so ably.

At the beginning of this year I had the opportunity to become addicted to The West Wing when a kind friend delivered the first three series to me at home. This "Presidential Address" feels every bit as challenging as if I was doing President Bartlett's State of the Union address. Unfortunately I haven't had his able team of speechwriters at my behest.

However this is an important opportunity to reflect on the year just passed and to consider the Association's key priorities for the year ahead.

After our last conference I started collecting press headlines on social work to help inform this speech. We are **constantly** in the headlines, not just because of things that go wrong, in fact it's very seldom that things go wrong, but because of society's interest in what we do... and why is that? It is because **our** services are **so** fundamental to decent Scottish life.

So what has been in the headlines?

In relation to children's services we have swung from "police forces swamping Children's Panels" and concern about the quality of life for children of parents who misuse drugs to "Battle of the Binge" and "war on the Neds" headlines about teenagers. More recently, amidst an outbreak of pre-Election political posturing, we've seen calls for "naming, shaming and excluding," without any recognition that small children living disadvantaged lives grow up to be angry, disruptive, teenagers. When I came into social work in 1975, "Born to Fail" had just been published. What progress have we made in the intervening 32 years? Concerns are expressed about a rise in persistent youth offenders despite efforts to reduce this. But how meaningful are these figures? Nearly 1000 children were referred to the Reporter in 2005/06 for having been caught in possession of drugs. It is estimated that in Scotland between 40 & 60k children are affected by parents drug misuse and 80-100k children affected by parental alcohol misuse.

We have had a plethora of headlines on "The Drugs Epidemic" and the debate on the "to be or not to be" methadone programme? Concerns around drug misuse and drug dealing and the impact on our society feature highly in community surveys. A recent report by the Royal Society for the Arts, published to influence the drugs strategy review of the Westminster Government, called for an end to the criminal justice bias of drugs policy, whereby addicts are treated as criminals and as causes of crime, rather than ill people who need help. Others strongly refuted the report's suggestions, highlighting the damage done to children and society by drug abuse. There needs to be an opportunity for such matters to be openly debated.

More than half of Scotland's prisoners comes from 1/8 of Scotland's wards. The Custodial Sentences and Weapons (Scotland) Bill is intended to end automatic unconditional early release & replace it with a regime that Ministers believed would balance public protection with longer term intervention to address the causes of individuals' offending behaviour. However, it is estimated that the changes could add 1000 to our already huge prison population and add upwards of 3800 being supervised in the community. Policy makers need to pay attention to implementation capacity in local services.

Can we keep women out of prison? The number of women prisoners in Scotland has doubled in the past 10 years. In 1998 the Scottish office published "Women offenders-A safer way" a review of community disposals and the use of custody for women offenders. Then there were 170 women in Cornton Vale. Now there are nearer 370 and this has

happened during a period when concern has been expressed consistently about too many women in prison, and the impact this has on them and their children.

Could the Church of Scotland make a better fist of running prisons than SPS as suggested earlier in the year? A report written by an expert group of representatives of different denominations took a radical look at crime and punishment and wants to turn public opinion on its head. This is not easy, particularly, as we have seen in the run up to elections, when political parties feel the need to bid to be toughest on crime. Is it possible to change this mind set?

We've seen debates about what is free and what is not in community care services. Headlines have suggested "pensioners miss out as cash is diverted to children." The number of disabled children is predicted to nearly double by 2029, our Older People's population will be up 47% in that period for those over 65 and up 106% for those over 85. In the meantime our working age population will diminish. What will be the implications of this on our capacity to deliver services?

These headlines reflect the reality of Scottish life. Where does social work fit into this? What is it that **only** we can do? What is our **unique** contribution?

I think public life has benefited from the enhanced awareness of social work that was brought about by the 21st Century Review and its report, "Changing Lives". The report of the Role of the Social Worker sub group described Social work's task as "to work alongside people to help them build resilience, maintain hope and optimism and develop their strengths and abilities. It is also to confront and challenge behaviour and manage situations of danger and uncertainty."

It is the task of social work to be alongside families and children who live in adverse social and economic circumstances. We work with children whose parents are mentally ill, abusing drugs and alcohol, are engaged in offending behaviour and are in violent relationships, seeking to help parents change their behaviour.

We work skilfully and directly with children who are abused, making complex assessments about level of risk, likely damage and careful professional judgements about preferred options to safeguard their futures.

We work imaginatively with adults to help maximise the opportunities in their lives, to ensure their full participation in society. We help offenders change their behaviour, constantly managing the twin roles of care & control, using appropriate risk management approaches and we **should** be helping older people facing life changing events, supporting them to continued independent living & emotional satisfaction.

This is what we do in social work and we should **proudly** represent it and **embrace** our position at the heart of Scottish society.

These are the **issues** that inform our daily working lives in social work, these are the issues which informed “Changing Lives”. One of the main messages and challenges of Changing Lives was that doing more of the same won’t work. Social Work faces increased volume and complexity of demand, rising expectations, increased costs and increased responsibilities from the Scottish Parliament. We are **committed** to carrying out these responsibilities but **expect** national leadership and support to do this. In 1982 in the Barclay Report, Peter Barclay said, “too much is expected of social workers. We load upon them unrealistic expectations and then complain when they do not live up to them”. The Barclay report proposed a model of social work practice that would bring together the social work methods of community work, social work & group work and endeavour to find solutions to problems from within communities. We have moved a long way from that approach in the intervening years. Changing Lives called on social work services to build individual, family and community capacity to meet need.

The theme of this conference is to look at how we can support the development of a new approach to Citizen Leadership, maximising the contribution of families and communities, working in partnership. I hope you will participate fully in this thinking as we explore the contribution social work services can make to help communities of interest, faith and geography maximise their impact on local need.

So what of the year **ahead** for **ADSW**?

The objectives of the Association are the promotion of social welfare, social care & social inclusion; the promotion of the interests of service users, carers and vulnerable people and the promotion of employment practices that will support and develop staff.

In furtherance of these objectives we produced a “manifesto” to seek to influence political parties in the run up to the election .So within this context what do I see as the priorities for ADSW?

We do believe there needs to be a comprehensive review of social work funding for all client groups. The positive move from large scale institutions to homely community based care, coupled with changing demography and increasing expectations, results in a situation where our staff are too often at the frontline of rationing resources to ensure support for as many

vulnerable people as possible. While we would all support an ever improving education service, Scotland's overall children's population is diminishing while the numbers of older people and adults with disabilities continue to rise. Also, sadly, for a wealthy country, there is good evidence that the children in **need** population is rising too. There are significant pressures in the funding of children's services, the long-term affordability of free personal care is regularly questioned and criminal justice social work services will be seriously stretched to meet the demands of new legislation. What society wants from its social work services it must pay for.

In terms of forthcoming legislation The Association supports the reinvigorating of community disposals as an alternative to prison where appropriate. However, the current range of community sentences has become too large and too confusing and we call for a rationalisation of community disposals to create a simple and more easily understood range of sentences. Working effectively with partners in the Community Justice Authority to reduce reoffending is key to what we must do, as is finding more "upstream" solutions which address the disadvantage and despair which contributes to offending behaviour.

The significant rise in the number of children with substance misusing parents is one of the most worrying developments Scottish society faces today. This has put increased pressure on children's social work services and shows no sign of abating. In addition, there is controversy over the effectiveness of methadone-based treatment and alternative approaches to the treatment of substance misuse. ADSW has called for a Royal Commission on the impact of substance misuse to create an opportunity for Scotland to find the right way to help affected children and adults. We note the manifesto commitment of the SNP to "establish a national Drugs Commission to develop and agree a long term national strategy backed up by a more robust evidence base" and hope that this is at least one manifesto commitment that will attract cross party support.

Support for robust and effective mechanisms for regulation and inspection is also firmly on our agenda. Our view was that the lack of these reflected a lack of political interest in our service and led to failure to have an objective view of how well these services performed. The performance inspection regime brought in by SWIA means that two thirds of the way through their first 3-year program a properly informed picture of the quality of service performance is emerging and this is to be welcomed. Similarly the Care Commission now provides useful information on standards achieved within care services. However! As director of a middle -sized authority I have seen the impact on my service of coping with this new demand. Within the last 6 months we have had a multi-agency inspection of our

learning disability services, a SWIA inspection of our criminal justice social work services and currently we are in the middle of our performance inspection. We will have a joint inspection of child protection services before the end of the calendar year. In addition the Care Commission has inspected all our residential and day care services. We've also recently had our Fostering and Adoption services inspected, supporting people services, and routine attention from the Mental welfare Commission. Regulation and Inspection must add value to the service user's experience if it is to be worth this effort. It must not divert management and staff attention away from service users needs.

We are of course also subject to huge demands in relation to performance measurement from other sources. Even as we struggle together nationally to focus on "outcomes" and allowing innovative practice to flourish we, in local government, are subjected to a torrent of targets and monitoring arrangements – a JPIAF return that requires 32 pages of guidance! (I have to confess that if something requires 32 pages of guidance, by **definition** I think it is suspect!) Outcome measures for community care that requires 46 pages of guidance, CLAS returns, SPI returns and so on. We **want** to have an outcomes focus to our performance management but the evidence is, nationally, we're finding this very difficult to reach. I **know** what people want from my home care service. Service users value services which are flexible, reliable, consistent, delivered by competent, knowledgeable and respectful staff who have **time** to help them sort things out. How does our current approach to performance management allow me as a director to be satisfied that my authority is delivering that? ADSW will actively contribute to current efforts to ensure that we end up with a rationalised inspection & regulation regime, which acknowledges the opportunity costs which arise from our current arrangements, within the context of hard pressed services. We **do** want to ensure that this is a regime, that capitalises on the benefits of rigorous inspection, which allows us to have confidence in services, but which is proportionate to the benefit it brings to service users.

A year ago the Executive's Implementation Plan for Changing Lives was published. Five workstreams were established to take forward the recommendations of the report and to achieve the step change in social work practice that was envisaged. Progress is being made on each of these but, predictably with such an ambitious program, there will be concerns that milestones will begin to slip and concern that we will not deliver on the ambitious vision created. There is a great deal of activity going on but we all need to work hard to bring these together into a coherent conclusion for social work. ADSW must, and will, play a full part in helping progress this agenda and we welcome the Executive's contribution to creating capacity within the Association to deliver on this. We call on the new first minister and his

ministerial team to commit to working with the profession to find long term, sustainable solutions to the most pressing problems, to use research for an evidence led policy agenda and to stand alongside social work staff in the highly demanding job that they do.

One Changing Lives recommendation to which I am personally very committed is in relation to the role of the social worker. From a starting position of some debate and disagreements the review group formed a consensus about the critical importance of the contribution of the social worker and the ways in which that role required to be supported. Among other things the Review Group concluded that there are certain functions that should only be carried out **by**, or under the supervision of, registered social workers and that these should be set in regulations.

You know bringing up teenage boys can be quite scary, my constant, though fortunately unfounded, anxiety was that one day I would find us referred to the Reporter. In those circumstances I believe that I have a right to know that the worker who could recommend that my child be removed from my care is qualified to make that recommendation. If I was appearing in front of a Sheriff I would want to know that the worker making recommendations which might result in my loss of freedom was properly qualified to do so. And if, like my Dad, I face life changing events at 80 that the worker charged with helping me through those difficult decisions is properly qualified to do so.

This is not about protecting social workers' territory!

I believe that members of the public who require certain services, which can critically impact on their lives and liberty have a right to know that the person making recommendations in respect of them is qualified so to do by virtue of their knowledge, skills and values and is part of a regulated workforce.

It should be stressed that these would not be the **only** functions that may be carried out by registered social workers. Of course they may also fulfil many other roles across a variety of settings but it was proposed, and agreed, that specific functions should require to be undertaken by a suitably qualified registered social worker.

In addition I believe it is only once we are clear which functions may **only** be carried out by registered social workers that we can **then** move on to look at the skills mix necessary in teams to augment that. And logically, leadership within local government for social workers undertaking reserved functions should be exercised by the Chief Social Work Officer, thus helping define the roles and responsibilities of that post.

Similarly if we are clear what the role of social work **is** then it can logically follow what organisational and management arrangements are needed to safely deliver this. The paper

produced by Jim Gallagher for the David Hume Institute “Rethinking Central /Local Government Relations in Scotland “ raised challenging issues which ADSW does need to grapple with. We have been in a position where the Executive calls the tune but frequently didn’t adequately pay the piper. There are implications of this for local government – denigration of our services in the media, loss of public confidence, frustration and poor morale for staff as aspirations for service delivery can’t always be met. We need to positively engage with the public sector reform agenda, being open to challenging ideas, seeking the best solution, while ensuring the debate is fully informed by our professional knowledge and experience (not vested self interest but professional knowledge and experience) and our clear focus on the needs of service users, carers and our workforce.

Remembering those headlines and the issues at stake for Scottish society I want to turn finally to what our workforce requires in order to rise to the increasing and complex demands made on them. If we want our staff to help “Change Lives” then they need to operate within an environment that supports them to do so. The Review Group stressed that employing organisations must recognise the importance of the social worker’s role and ensure they are properly equipped and supported to operate effectively. The Changing Lives workstreams on workforce development and Leadership and Management are taking much of this forward, building on the work already done by the SSSC and the Institute for Excellence.

In preparing for today I spent some time, with some amazement, and gratitude, reflecting on how I came to be here and from my experience I think there are lessons that as senior managers we need to remember if we want to support and grow the next generation. We need opportunities for young people to experience working in social work and social care to entice them into this great occupation. We need to inspire staff to reach their potential and maximise their contribution. We need good induction processes and ongoing opportunities for learning and support for our staff to encourage them to keep developing. Leaders must be role models of professionalism and integrity, of challenge but also of support. We need social work staff to be warm and compassionate, to treat people with respect, honesty and openness and as leaders we must evidence this behaviour also. We must spot talent and nurture it. ADSW must continue, as it currently does, to welcome contributions from staff outside the Association. And managers, I ask **you** to support this contribution both to provide staff with networks of peer support and friendship, but also to ensure that nationally the voice of local authority, social work services, and those we serve, gets heard by politicians and policy makers.

The Role of the Social Worker Sub Group concluded that leadership at all levels is necessary, at the frontline and politically – both locally and nationally. The Scottish Executive

should support and ensure this particularly at this time of new political management arrangements.

And politicians and Chief Executives I call on you to ensure that under your leadership, no matter what organisational arrangements are in place, social work and social care flourishes. Very many vulnerable people depend on it and its growth and stability and quality. Its capacity to do the job properly is in **all** our hands.

Ladies and Gentlemen I hope you thoroughly enjoy the conference and the opportunity to renew old friendships and start new ones. Thank you.