

ADSW Conference President's Speech - 14 May 2008

This is a very proud moment for me. To have the opportunity to lead the Association means a great deal to me both personally and professionally. It is a role that I will give 100% to in supporting the aims of the organisation and in positively supporting Social Work over the next twelve months. It is however somewhat daunting to follow in the footsteps of the many excellent Presidents who have led ADSW before me.

However on being elected President I would firstly like to pay tribute to Bernadette who looks more relaxed than in anytime over the past twelve months. Bernadette has proven to be an excellent President. Her leadership, clarity of thought and straight talking have been used to excellent effect both within ADSW, with politicians and our stakeholders. Her commitment to the role as President has been there for all to see and she has genuinely tried to move Social Work forward in partnership with others. She does however enjoy the odd rant and boy once she starts.....!

Suffice to say I have been educated over the past year with my vocabulary considerably extended. North Ayrshire Social Work Senior Management Team must be an interesting place to be on occasion!

Bernadette, the Association thanks you for all you have done over the past year and as President I look forward to your support over the coming year. On behalf of ADSW I would like you to accept these tokens of our thanks and appreciation for a job well done.

Thanks also go to Irene Cavanagh and Les Hutchison for the considerable work undertaken as Convenors of the Standards, Research and Training and Resources Standing Committees and to Jim Dean for his support as Secretary of the Association for the past four years.

To Sandra Paterson and Rab Murphy who as Vice Convenors, I know have contributed a tremendous amount to the work of the Association in Children's Services and in Criminal Justice.

The Association appreciates the time and energy which all of you have put in for the Association.

I am delighted to welcome Harriet Dempster as Vice President. Harriet's wide experience over many years as Director and previous Convenor of the Children and Families Standing Committee will be an asset to ADSW. I also welcome David Burke as Convenor of the Organisational Development Standing Committee and Laura Friel as Convenor of Resources.

Both professionally and personally fulfilling the challenging role of President is greatly dependent on those around us. I am grateful for the support of my Convenor Bailie Helen Wright and Alex Stephen, Chief Executive of Dundee City Council. At home I have been equally well supported over many years and enjoyed the total support of my wife Rosaline and my daughter Lauren, both of whom are here today.

Some of my journey in Social Work is outlined in the conference programme. What it cannot convey is the pride I feel in being part of the Social Work profession. A profession which at times has not been well understood at times has appeared defensive and yet like every

other profession has made mistakes but every day in many different ways we provide high quality services to Scotland's most vulnerable children, adults and older people. This afternoon I want to pay tribute to all our staff - frontline workers, social workers, social care staff, staff working in residential care and the superb back up we receive from all of our support staff the length and breadth of Scotland. As Directors we are only as good as the staff around us who deliver services every day of the year. Many times each day staff go that extra mile in circumstances that are ever more challenging than when I worked in the Possilpark, Springburn and Blackhall areas of Glasgow during the 80's and early 90's. More than ever before our staff need our support and our leadership. Demands on our services have never been greater, the expectations of the public never higher and the bar raised in terms of range and qualities of services that we are expected to provide. Social Work will continue to be a challenging profession to work in.

Importantly performance inspection reports tell us that generally Social Work is performing well with outcomes good for those who depend on our services. The challenge for all of us no matter how good, bad or indifferent the aspects of our services are judged to be continuous improvement through self assessment must be the key.

Self assessment must become a tool that is simple, effective and of course less demanding on the time taken to prepare than we have seen to date but comprehensive. Every member of staff must own the type of service we all aspire to have. To achieve this our engagement is as important with our staff as it is with service users.

At some stage in our lives we, our partners and families will seek the support of social work. All of us and our staff need to ask:

What is the quality of service we would want for ourselves, children, parents and aunts and uncles? These are the standards we should aim for!

Like me a number of you have heard Alexis Jay summarise key aspects of the performance inspection reports published to date. You will be glad to hear I don't intend to add my perspective.....

Except there are a number of common threads appearing in the recommendations to date:

- The need for commissioning strategies.
- Improved support for carers.
- More work required in relation to both the assessment and management of risk.

I have some concerns that across many authorities we are beavering away, attempting to meet the requirements of our SWIA action plans. Is it not time to use the current political speak and have a 'national conversation' on those areas which are commonly taxing us. Surely this would help build some capacity at a time when we struggle to meet public demand and expectation.

The raising of standards and quality of provision of service applies not only to SWIA but also the Care Commission's introduction of a grading system. We will not know the outcome of the first inspections under the new system until July but three points are clear.

- Individuals and families will be able to make clearer choices.
- Self assessment will drive up standards.
- There will be considerably more media interest particularly where services are failing.

The new system highlights a further area where more consideration and work is required and that is our engagement with service users, carers and families at a much earlier stage. This represents a fundamental shift from consultation. At best the outcome from consultations did make a tangible difference to service quality but too often it merely paid lip service.

It is therefore appropriate that the theme of this year's conference "Engage, Change, Deliver" connects a number of key themes which will form the backbone of ADSW's work over the next 12 months and beyond.

Over the next two days through keynote speeches, debate and I hope lively discussion, you will hear about how greater engagement with service users, carers and families can positively influence outcomes. This will be supported by workshops particularly chosen to reflect where this involvement has positively contributed to improved outcomes. My only regret is that we had to limit the number of workshop opportunities.

On Friday we will hear from two speakers who have experienced Social Work Services about what needs to change in order that we deliver what service users need.

In between this afternoon and Friday we will broadly reflect on the changes we need to make both as elected members and as professionals to drive forward Social Work in the 21st Century, we will hear from the Cabinet Secretary, how we develop the Leadership of Social Work for the future and there will be an opportunity to put your questions to the Leaders of the five Changing Lives workstreams.

Changing Lives was and remains a critically important document for all of us in Social Work - but for many the gap between publication and tangible progress has been too great. I believe this conference will mark the beginning of the next stage in its implementation. Tomorrow I will outline ADSW's commitment to taking the professional lead for Changing Lives over the next 12 months the length and breadth of Scotland in partnership with OLM and I hope with the voluntary sector, academies, Care Commission, Scottish Social Services Council and SWIA.

We now must take the lead - a strong lead to progress Changing Lives at all levels of our organisations. However the responsibility to drive it forward must come from us, the most senior officers and elected members across councils, voluntary organisations and beyond. There needs to be reinvigoration of what Changing Lives is, its importance within Scottish society and what needs to change. Remember - "more of the same won't do!"

Over the past twelve months many new councillors have been elected. Can we put hand on heart and with confidence know they are all familiar with the importance of this policy? As officers it is our responsibility to keep our elected members up to speed with developments.

Fundamentally one of the things we must do is sell Social Work better both locally and nationally. We need to have a clearly thought out PR strategy about how we change the public perception. "I know we have tried that and it didn't work" say the more cynical. I said at the beginning of my speech at times we seem defensive and misunderstood. So what are we going to do about it? In Criminal Justice we have a national strategy - locally delivered. Perhaps it is time to embrace a national PR strategy for Social Work - locally delivered! We have some wonderful stories to tell, fantastic examples of that critical difference Social work had made. My invitation this afternoon is "What about doing something about it".

As a previous Standing Committee Chair and as Vice President during the past twelve months, one of the biggest challenges which faces ADSW Presidents and Office Bearers is juggling the Association's aims with our considerable responsibilities as Senior Officers within Councils. The demands on our services I referred to earlier are reflected in the demands made on members of the Association. Too often this has resulted in ADSW taking up a reactive position on key policy matters rather than something more upstream and proactive.

I am therefore delighted that the Association has appointed Romy Langeland, Wendy Harrington and Yvonne Robson as our Professional Development Managers for an initial period of two years. We are grateful to The Scottish Government for their financial support. Their appointments will create four important opportunities:

1. To take forward the Changing Lives agenda.
2. To allow ADSW to build capacity and become more proactive in its approach.
3. In Yvonne's case support the work of the National Training Strategy for Criminal Justice.
4. Allow our Policy and Parliamentary Officer - Shona Main to take the Social Work agenda to the Politicians.

Having officers dedicated to the work of the Association will I hope enhance our credibility and help fulfil the aims of the Association. I am also determined their appointments will enhance our work with other professional bodies and key stakeholders.

Changing Lives will play a significant part in the work ADSW undertakes over the next 12 months - however we are clear there are some aspects of the report we cannot take forward without Scottish Government's support.

However one of the key strands of Changing Lives is Leadership and whilst we will hear more on this tomorrow afternoon from Laurence Clarke and at Question Time, I want to assure you of the importance ADSW places on encouraging and supporting the future leaders of Social Work in Scotland. I am therefore delighted to welcome more than 50 delegates here for the first time and supported by their Directors. It is vital such conferences encourage a wider audience, future Directors and Presidents. I have therefore invited new delegates to a short informal reception following the close of the conference tonight and tomorrow. I do hope you will join me.

As we move into the second year of the Scottish Government's period of office, it is important to reflect on what the past twelve months has meant for Social Work. We have experienced a more accessible Government, with both Ministers and Civil Servants genuine in their desire to work in partnership and to listen to our views. However despite having the second largest budget in local authorities, Social Work has to continue working hard to have its voice heard as key elements of Social Work are spread across a number of portfolios both in Government and COSLA. Bernadette and I met with the Convenors of the key executive groups at COSLA last week and we are both grateful to Councillor Ronnie McColl and Councillor Isabel Hutton for their support. This is particularly critical given the important cross cutting policy matters currently being considered by Scottish Government and COSLA.

Early Years, Drugs, Alcohol, Vulnerable Adults legislation and of course Kinship Care where I hope we will later have some lively debate! All of these strategies represent important developments in Scotland with considerable implications for our workforce. Anyone who thought less legislation and a quieter life under an SNP Government has been given a shock! In many ways this style of government means greater involvement and increased consultation. We should not complain!

Much of this new style of consensus politics has been built around the Concordat and emerging local outcome agreements. It is so vital that Social Work Services feature prominently with local outcome agreements in order to ensure Social Work Services remain a priority in all of the councils. However I believe it will be one to two years before we can begin to analyse the impact of these new arrangements.

I would however like to return to three emerging policies.

The Early Years Strategy and the thinking behind it is an important step as part of a long term strategy which links health inequalities and attempts to break cycles of deprivation. This is to be applauded. The opportunity to improve the long term life chances of young

children and their parents must be supported. Social Work has a key role in working with colleagues in the universal services to break that cycle. But of course this cannot be done at the expense of services currently being provided to the increasing number of children neglected as a result of chaotic drug misuse. We have a serious problem in:

- More young children being placed on the Child Protection register.
- More young children being looked after and accommodated.
- More children simply not ever returning to the care of their birth parents with limited adoptive and long term fostering placements being available.
- Social workers working with family situations of increasing risk both to the children and to themselves.

Within Children's Services the demands are becoming even greater and therefore more importantly than ever we require the support of our colleagues in health and education. Their role in early intervention remains critical if our staff are to be effective.

The correlations between the early years and new policies on drug treatment and alcohol will be critical and highlights the crucial role of ADSW's Substance Misuse Task Group set up by Bernadette and chaired by Robert Peat.

Within community care, the Vulnerable Adult and Support Scotland Act reaches its Parliamentary conclusion later in the year and so focus is now turned on establishing the necessary infrastructures. Undoubtedly we will see significant increases in referral as a result of the increased public profile and awareness.

It is therefore vital that where community care staff are already under significant pressure that this piece of legislation is properly resourced. Additionally it will be important to build in a formal review of the impact of the legislation to quickly ascertain if resources are sufficient. We cannot afford to fail this vulnerable group!

Criminal Justice must remain an integral part of our Social Work Services. It is therefore in all of our interests to work hard to support the Community Justice Authorities. It is fair to say that they have not been without their teething problems. Hardly surprising given they were a compromise between the former arrangements and a National Single Agency. All parts of social work must continue to connect closely with each other. Criminal Justice is no exception. However if we are to protect criminal justice we must demonstrate their effectiveness through excellent collaborative working which will lead to a reduction in offending. Many of us here today have a very significant contribution to make.

Collaborative working is also the key to successful delivery of community penalties. The stronger our working relationship with key partners, the greater the ownership of community planning partnerships and the better the outcomes for communities themselves. I would suggest we need to demonstrate our effectiveness over the next twelve to twenty four months through real reductions in reoffending.

Preparing for the conference and in particular for this speech I have often reflected on my career to date, many highs, a few lows but as I said at the beginning a continuing pride in all that we do. It is so important to reflect both our own history in Social Work and that of the broader profession.

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This was Foresthall Home and Hospital in the Springburn area of Glasgow. It was a significant employer in the north east of Glasgow and familiar to a number of people here today. For me Foresthall was originally a summer job when I left school as I contemplated a future in Social Work. Foresthall was originally the Barnhill poorhouse and whilst I don't go back that far, I still recall the delousing procedure carried out on many of Glasgow's homeless population. Today Foresthall as an institution is long gone having been replaced with housing covering an extensive area. It is a powerful link to my early days in Social Work not only my history in Social Work but more importantly the history of our profession. I am delighted the Social Work Museum is here with us in Crieff situated in the Drawing Room along side 24 hours - a powerful Social Work Exhibition of service users and carers - an extremely effective reminder how much we depend on our carers and their need for support from us. This exhibition complements Florence Burke, Director of the Princess Royal Trust for Carers who will address us later this afternoon.

Social Work touches so much of our lives, both personally and professionally. Scotland needs a strong social work and social care service. As the leaders in Scotland we must all play our part to give social work a stronger voice to drive up standards and more and more develop services which reflect the needs, the views and the perspective of those who depend on us everyday. Over the next twelve months I look forward to working with many of you to help achieve these goals.

Enjoy the conference!