ADSW
ASSOCIATION OF DIRECTORS OF SOCIAL WORK

ADSW Presidential Address 2010 – Michelle Miller

"No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it. We have to think things anew." Albert Einstein

Good afternoon colleagues and a very warm welcome to you all. I feel honoured to address you today as President of the Association for what promises to be a very challenging year. Looking back at presidential addresses over recent years, they all begin by recognising the range of challenges ahead, but this year feels as though it might be the beginning of something of a different order of challenge, and not just this year, but for at least the next 5, and probably more.

Before exploring these challenges and focusing on what I hope we can achieve over the next 12 months, I would like to pay tribute to the achievements of our immediate past President, Harriet Dempster. Harriet is a highly skilled leader at the top of her profession. Her boundless enthusiasm and ability to connect with people from all backgrounds and professions have served the Association extremely well, not just during her presidency, but throughout her career and her major contribution to social work and social care over the years.

I am delighted to announce that Andrew Lowe, Director with Scottish Borders Council will be Vice President this year, and I very much look forward to continuing to work closely with Andrew, with his eagerness to embrace new ideas and look to the horizon, whilst championing the role of social work in social justice and public protection.

I would like to thank ADSW's support team: Wendy Harrington, Yvonne Robson, Jane Devine, Sophie Mills and Karen Denoon for their immense contribution to the Association in taking forward a range of developments with colleagues from other agencies, with government and with frontline staff. And of course Linda Bruce and her team for their expertise – and what sometimes seem like magical abilities – in helping to organise the conference.
I want to recognise the effort of the standing committees and the executive members of ADSW; their effort is what gives ADSW the capacity to influence, to respond, to shape. Thank you too to Scottish Government colleagues and to COSLA for your support and engagement in the kind of dialogue we need to have: open and honest, sometimes challenging and difficult, but always responsive and constructive. And finally, to the City of Edinburgh Council for supporting me in taking on this role.

I said finally, but I couldn't leave it at that; I couldn't address you all here today, a month before she retires, without paying tribute to one of the most powerful, passionate, committed, resilient voices in social work over the past few decades. Tribute to Bernadette Docherty who is, I am sure, known to most of you here and to hundreds of colleagues throughout social work, and indeed throughout all of our partner professions. I couldn't begin here to describe the contribution Bernadette has made, but I do want to thank you personally Bernadette for the untiring support you have given me – professionally and personally – over the many years I have had the privilege of knowing you. It is difficult for me to imagine the social work world in Scotland without you. You will be sorely missed I am sure by so many, but I am also sure that you will be missed by me most of all. Thank you Bernadette.

So, what does the world look like at the moment? It is one of huge expectations on us – expectations imposed by ourselves, our partners, our communities, our politicians – expectations shaped by a media that doesn't always understand our role – expectations sustained in the context of unprecedented volumes of demand: demand from an expanding, ageing population, from a drug and alcohol misuse pandemic, from increasing numbers of children and young adults with learning disabilities who have the same rights to choice and independence as the rest of us. Prisons bursting at the seams. Demand from increasing numbers of children neglected and abused; from whole sections of our communities deprived, disadvantaged, disenfranchised. Expectations and demands that in my view we are quite simply never going to meet if we focus our energies on sustaining and protecting the models of delivery that we have used until now. "Working together – shaping the future" could be just another way of saying: "More of the same won't do". While the conference will explore ways of doing things differently, of doing new things, it will also show that in actual fact, more of the same of <u>some</u> things will do very well.

I do believe that we need bold, radical new ways of looking at things, of finding solutions, of challenging traditional organisational structures, service models, culture, history. But none of that should mean sweeping away the really positive services, developments and progress that social work and social care should be proud of. In a future that will undoubtedly need to look very different from the past, we should remind ourselves of those things that we need to protect and nurture into the future because they are indispensable: core values and principles, which we have a duty to uphold and promote. And those things we will have to let go of, to reject, to reshape if we are going to help create a world where our values and ambitions for the people we serve can flourish – a world that is a fairer, safer place.

We should reflect on the contribution of two of Scotland's great figures in social work – sadly lost to us in the past year: of Kay Carmichael and of John Murphy. Both embodying the passion and commitment for social justice that social work is founded on, and both striving for the change and innovation we need to continue to embrace. They are great role models for us.

Over the years, the Association has at regular intervals, considered its role and function – what kind of an organisation are we? What kind of an organisation do we want to be? Should we extend our membership, and if so, to whom? Should we have more of a business focus, like SOLACE or CIPFA? For me, the fundamental and primary role of the Association is one of leadership. We have a responsibility to think beyond the potential paralysis of the economic forecasts and their implications – to create the vision of where we want to get to; we have a responsibility to be open to challenge and change; to inspire the confidence in our staff, in the people who use our services, in politicians, in our partner organisations and in our communities. We have a responsibility to influence the debate about resource allocation. All the more critical when the financial landscape is a bleak, if not lunar one. Some of the success of this influence will come from our knowledge and our professionalism, from our integrity, from other people's awareness of our value base; but the success of this influence will increase exponentially with people's confidence that we deliver high quality, effective services that make a positive difference to people's lives.

So, one of my main aims for the Association over the coming year is to develop and enhance our leadership role. There is of course a great deal of excellent, creative work that goes on day and daily, unstinting commitment, often unsung, and we mustn't lose sight of that, but there is also a lot that needs to change. Part of the leadership role is to move from rehearsing the reasons for not changing, apportioning

blame for our incapacity and spending energy and resources on maintaining the status quo – to a collective drive to get us to a new place. If not us, and by "us" I don't just mean social work, I mean all of us in this room and the people and organisations we represent, if not us, then who will be the leaders we can depend upon to get us there?
I would like to give a few examples of some of the thorny issues, the complexities and the challenges we need to address collectively in each key service area, if we are going to have the kind of positive impact I believe we need to have.

We live in a world that articulates an avowed priority for the protection of children. We see it in government manifestos and in the vision statements of service plans. We see it in the strident, sometimes hysterical responses of the media to the deaths of children at the hands of those closest to them. We see it in some legislation and government guidance – "the welfare of the child is paramount". But we also live in a world that can be quite hostile to children, particularly when their rights to protection, fulfilment and well-being come into conflict with those of adults. We don't include "reasonable chastisement" as a defence for an adult who hits another adult…, do we? We live in a world of bewildering contradictions, ranging from demands that more children be removed from their parents, that drug using parents be sterilised – to the statement made last month by Lord Justice Wall, now president of the High Court's Family Division, who described as "shocking…[that social workers were] arrogant removers of children from their parents into an unsatisfactory care system – trampling on the rights of parents…in the process." These contradictions stem I think from a long-standing sense of dissatisfaction and unease with the system and the lack of informed public debate about what we want as a society, what we are prepared to contribute as a society and what standards in public services we can expect for that contribution. Do we even agree on what it is we want? If you track the media and public opinion responses to the deaths of children at the hands of their carers, you could argue that a successful system is one where children don't die in these awful circumstances. But we know that the number of children who die like this is tiny. And tragic though each one is, each one is swamped by all those other children living in very similar circumstances, who by accident of good fortune don't die, and who may therefore be overlooked, at least by the media and by public consciousness. Children living in abusive, hostile, emotionally barren environments who don't make the headlines. Children who may not trigger a "child protection" response because of the thresholds that services have created around themselves to deal with unmanageable demand. Is GIRFEC the answer? The theory, the principles of GIRFEC, maybe; the perfect implementation across the country of that theory and those principles, maybe. But how realistic is the "every" in Getting it Right for Every Child? If we are going to focus energy and resources commensurate with need on these most vulnerable children and their families, we almost certainly will have to rethink some of the universal provision that has been so welcome and popular in recent years, untargeted, un-evidence-able, available to all irrespective of need, and ultimately unaffordable alongside those services we need to develop for the minority if we are going to see the kind of long-term impact we can articulate so well in our vision statements for our children and young people.

We need to lead the debate, an open, honest, informed debate that includes the media and the public, the politicians, the professionals, the children and the parents. Not just: what is it that we want? But: what it is that we are prepared to pay for? In a climate where public funds can't pay for everything, what are we prepared to do without? Judging by some of the debates about closing schools where the rolls are falling or about waste collection or about the condition of roads, it would seem that there isn't much that we are prepared to do without, including a council tax freeze. All of which is the reality of democracy, we choose what we pay for. The difficulty is

that without an informed debate about the consequences of those choices, we will also expect somehow for public services to deliver on everything else as well. We need to lead that debate.

These same issues affect our criminal justice services and the whole spectrum of community care. In criminal justice, the policy shift away from prison as a sentence for less serious offences, for those lower risk groups who are currently disproportionately represented in the prison population, those with alcohol and drug problems, past experience of abuse, poor educational record, homelessness, care leavers. A welcome move in principle; but, dependent for its success on a number of indispensable factors. First, on adequate resources. The last five years have seen a steady and in some cases a sharp increase in volume of demand for almost all areas of criminal justice social work, with little or no increase in real terms in the financial resources to deliver on the work. Often additional money for new, short-term initiatives, but an under-resourcing of the bread and butter of the community based criminal justice service, a fundamental pre-requisite for an effective and safe reduction in the prison population. But it's not just the social work grant allocation on which success will depend. Offenders, whether avoiding prison or returning from it, are members of our communities, with the same rights to education, employment, housing, health care as all of us. Successful integration or re-integration into communities depends on equality of access to universal, non-discriminatory services that need to be resourced effectively. And second, on a shift in culture and attitude. Relatively easy in policy terms, in academic terms, in theory to accept that alternatives to prison, if properly resourced and delivered, will have a much better chance of preventing further offending than a revolving door of prison, but more difficult in practice when we are the one whose house has been burgled or whose car has been stolen not to want some form of retribution. The new order will be a "community payback order" reflecting the public mood for punishment, for payback. But we need to make the link during our debate between those children growing up in neglectful, emotionally barren, abusive environments that I referred to earlier and those young people and adults whose behaviour terrifies us. Not to excuse, not to justify, but to explain, to make the connections, to influence the debate about where we should focus our resources and why.

How we are going to deliver and fund community care services is arguably an even more challenging question. The simple arithmetic of demography, coupled with the economic realities and changing expectations make it so. A new 600 bed hospital every 3 years for 20 years; a new 50 bed care home every 20 weeks for 20 years would meet the demand. These figures are beginning to sound a bit clichéd, but they are a stark reflection of where we are, or at least where we are going to be. Two problems with it: 1) we can't afford it; we have neither the financial nor the human resources to run the model; and 2) it's not a model that many of us are going to want for ourselves. Personalisation is the word on everyone's lips; in all policy documents; the subject of pilots and initiatives and committee reports across the country. But we mustn't consign it to the 'last year's initiative' pile if we are going to change for the better the way the world of social work and social care looks in the future. We mustn't convince ourselves that personalisation is just good traditional social work practice and that as long as we deliver on that from within our existing service models, we will be doing enough. Whilst the agenda is underpinned by the very same values that we hold strongly, and whilst there are examples of excellent personalised practice across Scotland – it will, nonetheless, require a whole new vision and infrastructure for delivering social care as part of wider community and public sector planning. And whilst we hear many reasons why personalisation can't, or shouldn't happen – inadequate resources; lack of expertise; fragmentation of the professional approach; inequity of service provision…..so too would there have been

many reasons expressed in the past for not closing long stay hospitals or for not including children or adults in their case conferences. If personalisation is just good social work, why have organisations developed bureaucracies and structures to deliver non-personalised services for decades? Do our social work values get lost as we become managers? Do we forget them? Leadership includes the responsibility to change organisations from below and from within, but more importantly responsibility to change them from the top. Our position in organisations gives us the power to change them and re-establish our values. Choice and control is what we want for ourselves, but it is not what we always deliver. At a time of crisis – and we are on the verge of a resource crisis in public services, the temptation is often to batten down the hatches to protect what we have. We can see examples of that across the country now – bacon slicing existing services in an attempt to keep them all going in the form we are familiar with. That isn't going to be enough. It will leave too many gaps, higher and higher thresholds for access to services, too many vulnerabilities, too many risks. But the alternative is a tough one. It will require vision and risk taking. It will require letting go of some of the control. It will require confidence not to succumb to the headline in the Daily Mail that screeches about public funds being used by someone to go to the pub, rather than to day care. And it will almost certainly require asking the very difficult questions, the ones that so far have only really been whispered, the ones that suggest the emperor may in fact not have any clothes on, the "can we afford free personal care for everyone, irrespective of whether they need it to be free? The "can we afford a free bus pass for everyone, irrespective of whether they need it to be free?" We need to lead that debate.

We need to lead the debate about the role of the community in the support and protection of its citizens. The trend over the past few decades has been for that role to be defined by the payment of taxes in return for the state's support, care and protection of vulnerable individuals. For carers to be defined, as they often are, by the amount of money they are saving services by caring for their relatives perhaps reinforces the view that the state is responsible and that carers assume the role only in the face of failing services. The exchange – communities and citizens: good; public services: bad, is a sterile one. We see the world through a professional prism: non judgemental equality of opportunity, anti-discrimination. Communities see much of that as political correctness. We can't, and shouldn't submit, change our value base, abandon the principles on which our beliefs are built, but we do have to recognise the world in which we live, engage with it and work to change it. We don't send children up chimneys anymore. At one time, trying to change that would have seemed an impossible task. We don't smoke in public places anymore. How impossible did that seem only a few short years ago? How long before parents having the right to hit their children is just as incomprehensible to us? How long before successful rehabilitation of a violent offender is enough for us, because not offending again is a better outcome for all of us than short-term retribution for a few of us? We have a responsibility to lead these difficult debates.

We need to develop the confidence not to spend time and energy counting the things we don't need to count, collecting information and statistics we don't need, that no-one will ever use and that don't make any contribution to better outcomes for people. They reassure us – and others – that we are doing something, but they don't really provide any information about how effective we are. But to develop useful measures of how effective we are, we need first to agree what it is we are trying to do. We need to agree that in the context of what we want to spend, what we want to prioritise, what we are prepared to give up. We need to match our expectations to our budgets and then be held absolutely to account for delivering to those expectations. Because the accountability and responsibility for the quality of our services rest with us, supported by a proportionate scrutiny regime, not the other way

around. Implementation of Lord Crerar's recommendations has the potential to get us there; we need to influence that debate. We spend too much time defending ourselves and attacking others. Our responses to poor inspection reports inevitably focus on how and to what extent the report is inaccurate, rather than on what added intelligence the process might contribute to our improvement of our services. We are driven to defend ourselves rather than to focus openly on those things that we all aspire to improve. And if I spend too much time explaining how much better my service is than the way SWIA has described it, I inevitably run the risk of missing those things that I do need to improve.

Protecting ourselves and ultimately our services from the adverse reaction of our politicians, our chief executives, our public opinion – driven so often by a strident media becomes more important than delivering the services well. But we are not alone in being driven to this defensiveness. Inspectorates invariably respond defensively if a service failure occurs following a positive inspection report.

The expectation that services should always perform faultlessly, irrespective of context is matched by the assumption that inspection will always provide a completely accurate picture of every service – good or bad.
But inspection, however structured and managed can never hope to do that for vastly complicated and varied service delivery arrangements for tens of thousands of people who need and rely on care, support and protection everyday. It is unrealistic for us to expect inspection to do that.

It is undoubtedly true that effective external scrutiny can bring a much needed perspective to any service, and therefore complement and enhance my improvement activity. And it is also true that the quality and effectiveness of the scrutiny process itself could be improved by constructive feedback and honest dialogue. The world we need to live in is one where the identification of poor performance is an active goal of service providers, done with the support of inspectorates, with the contribution of people who use our services and with an understanding by our communities of the competing demands for public funding and the decisions made about resource allocation on their behalf. A world where the inspection process is just as open to challenge and change and improvement as we need to be.

I have outlined my perspective on some of the key issues affecting our main service areas, but before I conclude I would like to make a few observations relating to infrastructure that will also need our attention if we are to meet the challenges we face.

We need to get more out of our workforce. By that, I don't mean work them harder. I mean we need to develop and support them to achieve what they are capable of, what they can become, what we are going to need them to be. The registration of the workforce is a powerful tool in developing the skills, knowledge and standards; the confidence of our workforce and the confidence of others in them. The work of the residential child care initiative will support that for those of our staff who arguably have one of the most complex and critical jobs in child care and who need to be equipped to do that job in a way that makes residential accommodation a meaningful and positive experience in a child's journey to fulfilment. But, to get us there from where we are – and to do it not just for children, but for all those who need residential care or supported living – has very significant resource implications. We can't do it on the cheap – we need to make some difficult choices. We need to lead that debate.

The Changing Lives report recommended strengthening the role of social work and the leadership of social work. It described over-bureaucratic, risk averse organisations, stifling the professionalism of social workers. It envisaged a workforce of semi-autonomous professionals, confident and skilled, to be trusted with complex, difficult and often risky decisions about people's lives, their safety and the safety of others. The publication of guidance on the role of the Chief Social Work Officer, the role of the registered social worker, and soon a professional governance framework will all support our journey towards that vision. The re-invigoration of the Local Practitioner Forums, a partnership initiative between ADSW and the Scottish Government, is an important development on this journey. Front line staff represent a huge pool of often untapped talent, ideas, knowledge. Staff with day-to-day contact with people who use our services should be making a meaningful contribution to policy and service development. The government's funding of a part-time national chairperson from the Local Practitioner Forums supports this principle. It will allow that influence at a national level. From these staff will emerge the leaders of tomorrow's services. We have a responsibility to create the opportunity for them to become the leaders we need them to be. We need to engage them in the debate.

We need to inform the debate by looking beyond our borders, beyond what we know and are comfortable with. We are right to value what we do well and to be proud of that, but we need to be honest about the things we really don't do very well. It is unrealistic to think that the public funding deficit can be halved, whilst at the same time protecting our two biggest spenders: education and health. The inevitable impact of that on the rest of the sector, on social work and social care, on people, is unimaginable. It is not traditional delivery mechanisms that we need to protect, but the services that people need. Need doesn't conveniently express itself in accordance with the structures that we have created from which to deliver services. We need to engage in the kind of debate that leads for example, to people in hospital being assessed as ready for discharge only when all their needs: medical, social, physical have been provided for. Anything else parcels people up and tries to move them from one part of the system to another, moving blame and frustration around at the same time, wasting energy, wasting resources. We need to engage in the debate that recognises the joint ownership of responsibility among partners for the outcomes people want. And we need to see those outcomes expressed in our Single Outcome Agreements and reflected in each agency's performance indicators, set nationally, and on which their funding depends. We need to change the nature of our debate with the independent sector – to agree what we need to do differently to make that partnership a reality. To move from the sterile antagonism between commissioners and providers, each trying to protect their position, their funding, their traditions – to a creative and productive recognition that our success can only be based on our effective joint ownership and joint working. These are some of the areas where I think we could productively spend some of our energy over the coming year.

The conference has been designed to give you an opportunity to engage in these debates and to influence the direction of change. I very much hope that you will enjoy it. Thank you.