

Harry Stevenson, President, Social Work Scotland

Annual Conference and Exhibition – 18 and 19 June 2014

It is a great privilege to give the address to conference as first president of Social Work Scotland and to lead the profession in such a significant year for Scotland.

When I was appointed to the Vice President role Sandy and I agreed we would see our terms in office as a two year plan. We are now half way through this plan and made significant progress in the 10 year vision and also in how the staff team are organised and supported.

I came to Social Work in 1975 from the shipyards on the lower Clyde. I need to say my parents were a bit concerned when they thought I was leaving a good trade as an electrician to work for the 'social security'! They did come to understand it was 'Social Work' and were very proud of me, as they were with all of my 6 brothers and sisters.

In my time as a trainee social worker, starting in 1975 to my role as an Executive Director of Social Work, I have enjoyed 39 years in Social Work and genuinely enjoyed them and felt I have been fortunate to have such a satisfying career.

I haven't forgotten the emotions of removing children from their families, or supporting people who were in the Courts, or those too vulnerable to remain living at home. All of these events exposed me and expose our staff to loss and concern about 'doing the right thing' and 'getting the balance right'. We witness what others could not imagine at its worst and maintain compassion and understanding, even when situations are difficult to understand, or are distressing.

We also work in a profession and services that are constantly changing. It has to. People's needs, expectations and lifestyles change and we need to adapt to this to support them to live the life they want and achieve what they would hope for.

I would now like to introduce you to John McCluskey. John is 86 and has helped us produce a film for an event held by the N.H.S. in Glasgow recently. Let's listen to his story. (DVD)

If Self Directed Support and Co-production are about anything it must be about people wishing to receive support in a way that suits them best. In my view it is reengaging with this first principle of social work and an approach that:-

- Promotes self determination
- Is personal to the individual needs
- Shifts power to the individual from professionals
- Listens and responds
- Manages risk with the person
- Supports positive outcomes

As you heard, John welcomes this approach which shows the commitment of staff and supports him with dignity.

As society changes, the policy and legislative context has to change to reflect this. We must embrace these changes and make them work, for the benefit of the people we support and our staff.

In March of this year, I was appointed as the Chief Officer for the South Lanarkshire Health and Care Partnership, which has already given me a new perspective on how we work with the Health Service. I have been clear. Partnership is not about a 'take over' by the Council or the N.H.S. The changes mean adjustment for all of us, elected members, non executive directors of NHS Boards; staff and partners.

I have from the start of discussions on integration taken the view that it offers an opportunity for social workers (at all levels) to influence in a positive way the reshaping of the delivery of Health and Social Care Services in Scotland.

In the past two years my view has not changed – in fact I remain more confident the role of social workers can play because we take:-

- an holistic view of people and community
- our training and learning programmes equip us to manage complex situations
- our focus on social justice
- our advocacy role in protecting the most vulnerable
- and at times of course, we also serve the role of protecting the public and have developed skills to work effectively in this capacity.

I recently met with someone who asked what social work would be like in ten or twenty years from now as a result of integration. My response was that the biggest threat to the profession, is the profession itself. I say this for a number of reasons, primarily in relation to the need for clear leadership; the confidence of the profession; and the need for clarity in the contribution of our profession.

The professions in the Health Service have worked alongside each other for decades, setting out their boundaries, arguing their corner and through this, they have found a way to work with each other. This is not to say there are no boundary issues, professional protection of role, or behaviours that are not always helpful. Individuals and personalities can always create difficulty, but this is not a reason to avoid these debates, being clear of the part we all play our individual professional roles will ultimately improve the experience of people who need support in our communities.

What I have seen over a number of years are examples of very good alignment of professionals working together. Through the Public Bodies Act, politicians and the public expect more than this. So should we! We need to be clear the Act, in itself, will not resolve pressures regarding delayed discharges; or the funding of social care and health into the future. However improvement can be achieved through a shared understanding and common objectives.

We can manage this process of change. Integrated working is not new. As a trainee social worker in the 1970's I worked closely with health visitors to support families and protect children. I accepted, as a manager, the assessments of community psychiatric nurses in the early 1990's to access services. Many of you will recognise this type of practice now and in the past.

Why have we not successfully built on this across Scotland?

In Scotland, we had a vision to close long stay hospitals for people with learning difficulties and mental health problems.

Again, why have we not successfully built on this in Scotland?

We have worked as partners in Child Protection for over 40 years.

Why have we not successfully built on this in Scotland?

I do not have an answer to the questions, but the clues might surround the complexity of tasks; cultures; behaviours and organisational issues we need to challenge and change for success. Professionals must respect each other and make the best use of the skills and knowledge each brings. Managers will need to be more adaptable, learn and respond to the needs of staff from different disciplines who expect and deserve support.

Yes there are different cultures, histories, media coverage and political interest in services. What I see, is front line staff recognising change is needed and wanting the freedom to push the boundaries. The balance will of course need to be struck between:

- Change and destabilising well established systems, processes and services where they do work well.
- With an ambition to improve.

The rewards for success are important for individuals. As a country we need a decent society which provides support to meet the needs of people and improve their quality of life and meet their aspirations. The public expect this and why shouldn't they? We Do!

Social Work Scotland will play its part with our partners.

Conference, I would now like to look forward with our 10 year vision for Social Work Scotland. These plans build from our priority of ensuring people, our communities and our frontline staff are at the heart of the planning and delivery of Social Work services in Scotland.

You will find in your delegate packs a document, which Sandy referred to, titled 'Our Foundations and Our Future' which sets out our priorities on how we will build on our legacy. That legacy is rich in influence, progressive thinking and demonstrates an organisation which has adapted to change and often led it! We still have this ambition today and we will need this in the future.

We hope those who follow Sandy and myself as President will consider this 10 year vision to be dynamic and crucially recognise that it holds at the heart of our work the importance of the voice of the social work profession.

Social Work Services are the very fabric of our life in Scotland. 'Changing Lives' published in 2006 was clear that social work 'doesn't have all the answers' and recognised the need for us to work closely with other universal providers in all sectors to find new ways to design and deliver services across the public sector.

It also confirmed:

'doing more of the same won't work, increasing demands, greater complexity and rising expectations mean the current situation is not sustainable'.

My approach Social Work Scotland's 10 year vision is to build on the ideas started by 'Changing Lives' and bring a fresh impetus to moving it forward in a very different context of integrated services and personalisation.

My immediate priorities for 'Our Future' has a focus on four key areas as set out in the document:

Policy and Development

- Continue to strengthen positive relationships with Government; COSLA; SOLACE; SSSC; Care Inspectorate; Voluntary and Private Sectors; Carers and people who seek advice or support.
- Influence the Justice Consultation to ensure the balance between national oversight and local accountability on the delivery and planning of services.
- Conduct research on the impact of integration on services for children.

Professional Sector Leadership

- Support the implementation and encourage the accreditation of Chief Social Work Officers.
- Increase membership in line with new criteria and categories.
- Promote the establishment of professional governance arrangements in Health and Care Partnerships and to move on from practitioner fora to strengthen the profession.
- With Government make use of Chief Social Work Officer reports to highlight issues.
- Promote the development of practice guidance in collaboration to support front line staff and managers. Good examples include our work on Self Directed Support and the Clinical and Care Governance Framework.

Workforce Issues

- Support continued leadership and workforce development with the Scottish Social Services Council.
- Support the network of Chief Officers of integrated bodies.
- Engage with Chief Executives and Chief Officers of Partnerships to support the role of Chief Social Work Officer
- Support Chief Social Work Officers in integrated arrangements.

Capacity and Resource Issues

- Undertake a review of Partners for Change and consider a business model to financially support Social Work Scotland.
- Secure longer term sponsorship
- Finalise our review by looking at current representation on the Executive Committee from geographical areas.
- Improve communication with our membership.

The impact of demographic growth is well known, financial constraints will continue and we must apply our creativity and energy to making the best use of resources. The solution does not lie somewhere else. We are the solution. We have a responsibility individually and collectively to commit ourselves to a future together in partnership!

There will never be a paradise with people like angels
Walking and singing through forests of music,
But let us have the decency of a society
That helps those who cannot help themselves.
It can be done; it must be done; so do it.

Brothers and Keepers
Edwin Morgan for A.D.S.W.

Thank you

Harry Stevenson, President, Social Work Scotland
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