

Social Work Scotland Conference

15 & 16 June 2017

Susan Taylor, President

Good Morning Colleagues

Welcome to the Social Work Scotland Annual Conference 2017.....an opportunity to recognise and value our work together in leading the social work and social care profession.

I am delighted to be in the role of President this year, and I have genuinely been overwhelmed by your kind good wishes.....

.....in taking up the role, I would like to pay special tribute to my predecessor, Elaine Torrance.

I have always found Elaine to be calm and gentle, but with a determined leadership style.....we have benefitted from her professional experience and knowledge, but also from her humility and integrity.

Some of you will know that Elaine has decided to retire in September, but I am delighted that she will continue to support Social Work Scotland.

So, colleagues, on behalf of all of Social Work Scotland, would you join with me in showing your appreciation to Elaine Torrance.....

So.....turning to the title of our conference today.....

CHANGE IS GOOD.

I will leave you to reflect on your own reaction to the title..... while knowing that the programme is designed to stimulate our thinking.....to encourage us to question..... and to reflect together.

This morning, I propose that the best change is the one we create using our professional and personal strengths.

I will explore the power of positive influence and how we can maximise our unique professional role and contribution.....by creating system, organisational and social change.....to improve people's lives.

So let's considerthe Power of Positive Influence.

The most influential woman in my life was my mother.....she inspired me.

We had very different life experiences.

She had chronic ill health throughout adulthood, and I still recall as a child, how it felt to watch her in pain every day, and at times..... at points of despair.

Despite this, she remained optimistic.

Partly due to her ill-health, she was very well read. She was intelligent and was a natural teacher, but with no opportunity to access further education.

So, I learned about the impact of ill health and poverty of opportunity at a young age. Social justice was a way of life in our house – fairness, respecting and valuing people came first, along with recognising the importance of education.

Together with my father, she taught me to recognise that people can find ways to thrive through adversity.....through love and compassion.

The power of this positive influence was undoubtedly my route into social work.....

Given my experience, I still struggle to understand why appreciating the role of women and girls has still so far to go in Scotland.....we still have so many gender equality issues to tackle.....from the continuing extent of domestic violence in our communities to the gender pay gap tothe under representation of women in senior positions within Boards, politics and business across Scotland.

The evidence suggests that we perpetuate gender stereotypes and that girls internalise these cultural messages early in their development. I know the parents of girls at conference today will feel as strongly as I do about the recent research which highlights that..... by age 6..... girls have already limits on what they think they can do.

Not surprisingly, within our sector, women account for the majority of care at home staff, while men predominantly are employed in justice, residential childcare and school care accommodation. We clearly have work to do in attracting more men into the sector, and it is hoped that the new national health and social care workforce plan will provide an opportunity to address this.

But.....let's recognise our current strengths.....85% of the social services workforce is female....that's over 171,000 women. That is a huge pool of positive influence!

This year, Social Work Scotland, in conjunction with the SSSC, will take forward an empowering, story- telling initiative with women and girls. We plan to connect women across our workforce, encouraging them to reach out to the girls in their lives.....creating opportunities to think about these gender challenges and to consider how they positively influence.....and of course, boys will benefit too!!

BUT.....I can't conclude my comments on gender, without referencing the extent of disbelief across our profession about the so named Family Cap and Rape Clause. As social work professionals, we are committed to promoting values and tackling

inequality, and all of our efforts should contribute to a decent society.

Sowhy, in setting limits on child tax credits to the first two children, should a woman be placed in a position of having to evidence an exception for a child born as a result of non-consensual conception – otherwise known as rape.

The UK Government has announced a third party model, whereby social workers and other professionals are described as being available to verify that claimants qualify for this exception, thus preventing women having to share sensitive information with claim officials.

Social Work Scotland is clear that such an approach is not consistent with the promotion of a woman's rights, and while we will of course respect every woman's right to self-determination, we do not consider it appropriate for social workers to fulfil this role.

Turning now to.....thinking about other issues dominating our agenda.

We know that we are likely to see further public sector change, and we need to be mindful of the professional implications of these changes.

Over this next year, Social Work Scotland will work to influence and contribute professionally to a range of work, including:

- the implementation of the new Carers and Community Empowerment legislation;**
- the independent root and branch review of the care system;**
- the registration of the care at home workforce;**
- the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry;**
- the implementation of community justice arrangements;**
- the response to the awaited Audit Scotland report on Self Directed Supports;**
- the implementation of the Child Protection Improvement Programme; and**
- the introduction of the new Mental Health Strategy**

In addition, Social Work Scotland is developing our leadership programme for CSWOs, and plans are in progress to develop a Resilience Framework for Practitioners, as well as masterclasses and workshops on priority issues.

But..... Social Work Scotland members are also concerned about the challenges associated with a range of matters including..... integration; governance; professional identity and public sector funding.

So starting with governance.....this year, we are following up on the Children in Scotland & CELCIS research to examine what is happening within children's services following the integration of health and social care.

We know that the Audit Scotland report*Social Work in Scotland*..... published last year, outlined the demands and governance challenges for Chief Social Work Officers in fulfilling complex statutory and professional functions across a range of structures, while fulfilling both managerial and professional leadership roles.

Given the capacity challenges being created, it will be helpful to learn from NHS colleagues how they have addressed this, and I know that this is an issue which Iona Colvin, our new Chief Social Work Advisor has already recognised.....

On behalf of Social Work Scotland, Iona.....congratulations on your appointment, and we will look forward to working together with you on this and other issues facing the profession.....and of course in continuing to support the implementation of the Vision and Strategy for Social Services.

The overarching key message in the Social Work in Scotland report was that “current approaches to delivering social work services will not be sustainable in the long term”.

...so what does this really mean?

We know that the professional social work role is complex.....from managing risk and uncertainty..... toempowering people to take control of their lives..... to restricting liberty..... to providing care.....

But.....it seems that social work and social care is increasingly described in the context of the value of the public pound.

We all understand the challenges associated with the reductions in public funding and we are well aware of our shared responsibilities in managing this.

Equally, we are all committed to the principles set out in the Christie report, particularly in shifting to prevention and early intervention..... presented so graphically over the years by Sir Harry Burns, former Chief Medical Adviser.

But ifin doing so.....we are unable to respond to those in the greatest need.....what kind of society do we become?

The sustainability message is pretty difficult to hear if you are a social worker chapping on doors in communities where neglect is evident at scale.....trying to promote hope with people who feel disconnected due to a lifetime of disadvantage, adversity, poverty or trauma.....and more often than not, a combination of these.

To maximise the use of public funding, we need to work collaboratively to achieve whole system change to tackle inequalities, redesigning services based on people priorities, not

based on single service budget savings.....as this predominantly impacts negatively on people in poverty and those in greatest need.

Funding routed to multi-agency partnerships has the advantage of encouraging collaborative commissioning approachesacross sectors.....addressing the holistic needs of children and adults, as opposed to issue specific approaches.

In this context.....we need to have a very strong voice in an integrated structuralandcomplex governance environment.

BUTgoing back over a number of years now, I have heard past presidents state that the biggest issue for social work and social care professionals is not integrated structures..... it is how we maximise our contribution within them.

So why are we continuing to find this so challenging?

My husband and I listened to Brian Cox at The Hydro in Glasgow last month. He spoke of the common experience which all astronauts reflect upon on their return to earth.

He said that they are all in wonder when they first leave our planet, and connect strongly with images of their city, region, country and continent.....but as they journey further.....their perspective changes and they begin to see life in the context of the whole planet.

They start to see the world in more holistic terms, without boundaries and their thoughts shift to the possibilities of human compassion, love and peace being possible.

**So.....what do astronauts and social workers have in common?
Simple.....our holistic view of the world.....**

Our value base is the compass which directs us, and this means that we are focused on human experience and human capacity. We are well placed to contribute to integrated contexts through sharing our practice based evidence.....gained by learning from people with lived experience within our communities.

Sohow can we be loud and proud about our unique role.....and is professional identity really relevant?

The literature refers to a practitioner's identity being shaped by how he or she thinks of herself or himself in their role.....but as Professor Stephen Webb has pointed out it is strongly influenced by external factors, including the policy context, the workplace, the value placed on our contribution and the nature of inter-professional relationships with other professionals.

This points to a number of positives:

- Firstly, we have real opportunities in Scotland.....with much national policy being strongly aligned with social work values. We believe in empowering conversations which result in people directing their own support; we promote a shift to stronger community based justice and we all want to get it right for every child; and**
- Secondly, in the soon to be published research undertaken by Trish McCulloch and colleagues about public perceptions of social services, they highlight that the public has a better perception of social services than the workforce believes.**

In terms of inter-professional relationships, we know that partnership working is stronger than at any other time. Yet we also know there is work to do.....we often use similar words to describe our values and approaches, but practice can look very different. This is where the learning opportunities emerge.

Colleagues across the NHS have learned to create their professional space, and make it work. Other professions are clear about their professional learning and support requirements. We need to learn from them as we are equally committed to high practice standards. This is an area which Social Work Scotland will explore further this year.

So we need to see the opportunities for social work and social care, but not with an intention of creating new barriers.....but rather with a view to promoting holistic perspectives.....and high standards.

..... **IMPORTANTLY** promoting human compassion and human value in how we work together within systems, structures and cultureswhich are not always designed around people.

For me, this is the journey of integration.

Integration can only work where there is a focus on strong vision, leadership, culture and learning..... and ultimately be about positive outcomes for people. Building trust through relationships leads to professionals learning how to work together and wanting to find ways to improve.

This means that integration needs to become less focused on organisational and structural matters and more focused on valuing, motivating and mobilising practitioners to integrate practice to the benefit of families and communities.

As a social work and social care profession, we need to be the people who bring respectful challenge to conversations.....who enquire with compassion.....who question systems which are not responsive to people and who take collaborative action to improve.

I am often inspired by social work practitioners and their managers..... last night, the National Social Services Awards evidenced the difference we make in people's lives.

In being involved in the short listing process, I can tell you that the strongest applications were the ones which sang out from the page – people who had benefitted from creative and caring social work and social care practitioners, who clearly find joy in their practice.

We know that people need.....to

- have control of their lives;**
- be connected with others;**
- feel a sense of belonging;**
- feel safe;**
- have purpose and meaning;**
- feel loved and to be treated with compassion.**

This means....

- shifting from deficit to asset approaches;**
- reframing from service user to citizen;**
- switching from fixing people to developing potential;**

-moving from processes and programmes to recognising that people have the solutions.

Yet.....practitioners routinely tell us their creative professional thinking and practice can get lost in the context of IT systems, task cultures, procedures and performance reporting?

Is this a reflection of managerially dominated organisational systems and cultures,.....or a sign of our times?

There is certainly a craving out there for simplicity, possibly a reaction to increasing complexity and information overload, which appears to dominate our lives.

However this is not the isolated experience of social work.

So what is it that supports and enables practitioners to practice with creativity and confidence?

One of the phrases which our social work management team in East Ayrshire has embraced is” you have permission to”intended to encourage staff to bring their ideas and talents to work.....

Some practitioners are taking up the challenge – the social worker who turned a child’s review meeting into a picnic, the young person who presented his own plan in drawings to review the decision about remaining in secure care, the Senior Managers who have led staff in song at events to explore the use of evidence in improving practice.

Positive organisations are better at change and are more innovative, and their people grow because their strengths are recognised.....people are encouraged to take their best self to work..... their ideas are shared and they are encouraged to work with each other.....the results are evident and people then take their learning into their personal and community lives too.

As a profession, we know this.

In social work, we understand and work with change.

We describe ourselves as change agents, and we know we have created or contributed to significant social change over many decades.

So colleagueswe have an opportunity.....

.....how will we use our strengths as a profession to create change?

.....how will we positively influence..... by ensuring that human compassion and human value is at the core of our conversations, thinking and action in an integrated workplace?

Ultimately.....how will we create change in our communities which could reduce the need for our services?

Our leadership response must be a collaborative and positive one.....as professional leaders, we must inspire, energise and motivate each other and our workforce in taking this forward.....

.....so Social Work Scotland will host a national summit on 1 December to explore how we create, contribute and lead change in the current contextusing our knowledge and experience.

In concluding, I started today by talking about love, compassion and the power of positive influence.....I have ended by proposing that this is central to social work.....and to system, organisational and social change.

As outlined, this year Social Work Scotland will take forward a programme of work with a focus on the power of positive influence, including a gender awareness.... storytelling initiative with women across our workforce, and a national summit to explore our professional contribution to change in the current context.

In closing, I ask two things of you all.

I know that some people in the room know each other well, and some are here for the first time. I am particularly delighted to welcome front line practitioners to our conference.....among them, possibly future senior leaders and presidents.

My ask is that we are a connected and curious conference.

Connected through making time to introduce ourselves to new people.....and curious because we are a profession which needs to question, seek to understand and to positively influence.

Please take a moment to introduce yourself to new colleagues on the way for coffee and please ask questions throughout the conference.

Colleagues.....let's enjoy our time together.....thank you.