**Social Work Scotland Conference 2018 Presidential Address**

Welcome everyone it is so good to see so many people here today, and I do hope you enjoy the conference. As well as an exciting and packed programme with many great speakers – I know a valuable part of our annual conference is meeting up with colleagues and making new connections – so ENJOY!

In taking up the Presidency role within Social Work Scotland – it made me think back over my 30 years practicing in the social work profession – and how I arrived at this spot today! (As a newly qualified Social worker I would never have imagined I would be standing before so may able, ambitious and visionary professionals – which I have to say is a real honour)

I would love to say that I had a burning desire from a very young age to become a social worker – but the truth is at 5 I wanted to be a gardener! Clearly I have not fulfilled that ambition – but there is always time!!

The fact is –I had no idea growing up what a social worker was. This may in part be because I grew up (until the age of 11) in parts of the World that had no such professional infrastructure. However I did witness growing up in Kenya and the Solomon Islands (South Pacific) – intense deprivation, poverty and discrimination which did not rest easy with me even as a young child – it gave me a huge sense of how unfair society and circumstances can be.

So yes I was a child of an ex-pat family – and what I saw around me, was in stark contrast to how myself and my family were living – which as you can imagine threw up many ethical issues and questions for me.

My route to social work came much later – but was heavily influenced by my earlier sense of injustice. As a social worker my aim was always to “work alongside people” in partnership, be honest and treat people with dignity – taking the time to listen to their perspective and experiences and understand their issues and challenges – not judging people until you understood their story – in other words what brought them to the place they happened to be.

I had the fortune as a young social worker (in London) to work within a team of extraordinary people who were great role models – as they say “ every day is a school day” no matter how long in the tooth we get – we should always be open to learning from others and improving our understanding. I believe that a practitioner of any profession who cannot openly admit what they do not know – can lead to misguided intervention in the lives of people and communities who rely on us.

So I may not have become a gardener – BUT I know I am truly fortunate to find a profession that continues to inspire me and gives me a great deal of satisfaction in all the various components of the role.

It is a great honour to be taking up the President’s role within Social Work Scotland – and I have immensely enjoyed my year as the Vice President. I am also very much looking forward to working with our new Vice President Kathryn Lindsay, CSWO from Angus.

These roles offer the opportunity to hear from practitioners and managers across Scotland – of the work they undertake on a daily basis, the innovation within the workforce and the foresight of partnership working – all in the effort to improve outcomes for the people of Scotland and to assist them in their need to find solutions and become self-reliant.

**Purpose of SWS:**

It is probably a good juncture - before I go on to cover the content and aims of the conference - to spend a little time focusing on the role and purpose of the organisation that is Social Work Scotland.

Our decision to change our organisation was a logical one to make. At a time of health and social care integration, following the Joint Working (Sc) Act 2014, we were fast becoming out of step with the policy and service delivery landscape.

Had we stayed as Association of Directors of Social Work (ADSW), with our **membership rules** unchanged, Joanna Macdonald, as Director of Adult Social Care in Highland could not have joined, because she is employed by the NHS. She was quite unique then – and is still unique – but there are plenty more people in her position now: delivering social work services, but with an NHS employer.

Similarly in terms of the **voluntary** and **independe**nt sector who provide a significant proportion of services across Scotland and make a huge difference to the lives of people in our communities, they previously could not be members either. Over the last four years, that has not been the case. People like Mary Glasgow, Nicky Campbell, Nicola Dinnie, Jo Derrick and many many others have become very active members and have made a huge difference to our organisation and our culture -and we are the stronger for it.

We would have been misguided to have sustained barriers to greater integration, learning and sharing – and would not have gained this added experience, knowledge and significant contribution of our wider and growing membership.

But we’re not quite there – we have work to do to make our organisation and professional body more inclusive and relevant to all social workers across all sectors. And so I have a plea - Join us - Be part of this change: we were a local authority membership organisation for 45 years. We are not a local authority body any more- help us make that a reality.

**Theme of the Conference:**

And so to the conference -The theme of the conference this year is a celebration and examination of the 50th anniversary of the Social Work Scotland Act of 1968. We also wanted to focus on three key issues; Confidence, Commitment and Collaboration – but more about this later.

In respect of the 50th anniversary - we are delighted to be able to consider the research of Professor Brigid Daniel from Queen Margaret University and Jane Scott, Independent consultant and researcher. This research has been commissioned by Social Work Scotland.

With the 50th Anniversary of this landmark legislation it is important for us to:

* look back and remind ourselves what the Act set out to do.
* Ask ourselves how the journey has been for the last 50 years?
* Did it meet up with the intentions of the legislation **and**
* most importantly what does the future hold for us in social work practice and what are the key opportunities and challenges that we need to be prepared for in order to continue to be successful in our endeavours.

We will hear shortly from Brigid about the research, what it has revealed and also what the next stage will be in our development of the ‘think pieces’. These ‘think pieces’ have been **commissioned by Social Work Scotland** in partnership with the **Office of the chief Social Work Adviser** in the Scottish Government and will offer an opportunity to look into specific areas of practice in more detail. These will be developed over the next few months and will include:

* Adoption over 50 years
* Justice & Gender
* Personalisation and Self Directed Support
* Community Social work AND
* Section 12.

All of which will I am sure make the link between our past and our future, and give us a steer on how to continue developing and influencing policy direction and outcomes.

**Trauma and ACEs:**

One area of social work that has **risen to prominence in** recent years is the increasing focus on the impact of **Adverse Childhood Experiences** – therefore we were keen to ensure that there is a focus on ACE’s across the next 2 days – both from key speakers and in the content of some of the workshops. The aim is to encourage, our further development of trauma informed practice over the next 50 years.

We know that ACEs has a lasting impact on children and follows them into their early adulthood and beyond. However whilst we MAY THINK we know all about ACEs – we need to build on the body of evidence of WHERE and HOW this is informing our practice. There will be more of this tomorrow from Dr Suzanne Zeedyke.

**Austerity & Poverty:**

One of our key challenges going forward is undoubtedly austerity and the link this has to increased poverty within our communities.

We are A**LL** very aware that budgets are **significantly constrained** and that the bite of austerity is likely to get worse over the foreseeable future. But at times of reducing finances there can also be **opportunities for increased innovation** and a greater freedom to be imaginative in our thinking. With this comes the need for leaders to be brave and to some extent to take more risks than normally permitted under a buoyant economy.

As Churchill once said: “***Now that we have run out of the money – we have to think!”***

I need to let you know that my daughter Maya is very disapproving of my using a Winston Churchill quote – but as we know - our children are often our best and worst critics!

**BUT** In this vein of innovation it becomes even more important that as a nation we share our good practice and our results – even if some developments and approaches do not turn out as we had hoped – this should prevent us from reinventing the wheel several times over and ensure we move forward with collective success. The ingredients for sharing Good Practice are bountiful – we know where the good practice and innovation can be found and where it works.

It is clear however that this ***thinking*** will take more than just the social work profession if we are to combat the impact of poverty. Collaboration needs to also focus on and tackle – poverty in real terms and - poverty of ambition and aspiration – for both the profession and more importantly our communities.

**ESN EXAMPLE**I recently attended the European Social Network conference which was a great opportunity to consider how far we have come in Scotland and how we compare on the European and International field. It was thought provoking and the focus was on INVESTMENT, INNOVATON AND TRANSFORMATION. Europe is also looking at imaginative solutions – as like Scotland they too are facing rises in demand, complexity and reduced resources.

I was most impressed by a presentation by Dietmar Gutschmidt – Job Centre Director for the City of Essen in Germany.

He told us of the transformational change they were taking forward in Essen in – connecting employability to health with the central drive to support citizens and promote health and health improvement as the core function of the Job Centre.

They had employed significant numbers of staff to join their core team who were trained counsellors and their labour market policy was interlinked with health promotion.

They recognised that health promotion and this radical change in policy could only be successful when working with partners and they were clear about the connection between physical and mental health. Their key partners were; Health workers, Street and outreach workers and the Voluntary Sector.

The Job Centre was actively moving away from ‘regulation’ and addressing the stigma associated with welfare. They saw their ‘health offer’ as interlinked with employability -however they also understood that for some -isolated health needs can take several years of support to get to the point when they would be ready to join the job market

This approach was clearly an example of treating people with dignity and appreciating that with the right support everyone can make a contribution, no matter what their circumstances.

**Scotland**

Here in Scotland we face significant cultural and attitudinal challenges – and it seems impossible for such an example to bear fruit here anytime soon. Our culture is influenced by: economic disadvantage, expectations, and the attitude of society towards those with less opportunities and options than themselves. We still have to overcome the concept of the – deserving and undeserving poor.

But to move forward - we need **CONFIDENCE** – confidence in ourselves and credibility amongst our partners and our communities.

In terms of **‘confidence’** we are all too familiar with the history of national enquiries and reports which focus on ’missed opportunities’ in the lives of children and adults. Not only is the social work profession invariably singled out in the media coverage of these cases – it also proves very difficult to have a more positive dialogue with the press – to fully engage the understanding of the public in the difficult, challenging and sometimes impossible job that social workers do day in day out.

We do need to ensure therefore that we have a duty of care not only to the people with whom we provide an essential service but also a duty of care towards our staff and our partners.

Despite our assumptions however – of this less than positive view of Social Work – **The research funded by the Social Work Services Strategic Forum** – and undertaken by the University of Dundee, Glasgow Caledonian University and Iriss published in October 2017 – dispels some of these myths.

The research set out to better understand the public’s perception of social work services – exploring the level of knowledge, understanding and attitudes towards social services and the reasons for these views. This was undertaken by a national survey and focus groups.

The key findings:

* ***suggested there was a good level of support for social services in Scotland and a reasonable level of understanding of the role;***
* ***That the public had a more positive view than institutions or the profession perceived AND***
* ***Overall, people in Scotland are positive about social services’ impact on society and believe these services perform an important public role.***

The research also examined the role the media has to play in the view of social services and concluded– that personal experience of social work has been found to be a key influence on public opinion and that personal experience can negate media reporting.

**Commitment** –

We heard from both Chelsea Cameron and Louise Wallwein at last year’s conference about the ingredients that contributed positively to their experience. They emphasised the importance of:

* Relationships
* Commitment
* Consistency
* Being Listened to and
* Going that extra mile.

This speaks of the language of ‘commitment’. As a social worker and a manager I have always, in every area or service I have worked, been impressed by the level of commitment of our front line staff and managers. To observe this level of commitment and motivation from staff is often humbling and serves to remind me why I came into social work in the first place. It also inspires and energises me to strive to go further in our essential journey of improvement.

**Collaboration is an essential** ingredient to our success, as practitioners, leaders and visionaries. I have not mentioned ‘integration’ has yet – as in my view this has become an overly emotive debate which has in the past created unhelpful anti-bodies. We are in danger of this debate holding us back and - in effect - becoming a barrier to our continued success as a profession and as a nation. Debate or not, whatever your perspective is on this direction of travel – I believe strongly in the ethos of working together with our key partners positively and constructively.

It was in fact Integration that attracted me to apply for my current post in West Dunbartonshire - due to the long established integration arrangements and the commitment to further improve this.

I was not disappointed and have always been clear about the benefits that integration of health and social work can bring – when there is a genuine vision for addressing the needs of the community together.

No matter what partnership construct we work within- We should be proud - of the essential contribution we make to integration and the values, skill and experience we bring to partnerships.

With the elements of increasing; austerity, demands and complexity we need to ensure that we collaborate and make the most of what social work brings to the table in order to effectively move forward.

***There is no time to waste.***

**Research on the Impact of Integration on Children’s Services**

In considering some of the integrated structures we have across Scotland – and what impact integration of health and social care for older people’s services may have had on the delivery of Children’s Services we commissioned along with Healthcare Improvement Scotland some research on this issue.

This research was undertaken by Jackie Brock and Stella Everingham earlier this year. The title of the research is ***Integrated Children’s Services in Scotland: Practice and Leadership.*** Predominantly this looks at children’s services post integration to understand and consider any critical factors that need to be in place to support vulnerable children.

The conclusion the research is framed essentially as a template for self-evaluation and focuses on four critical factors for effective service delivery:

* ***Structures***
* ***Priorities***
* ***Relationships – including Leadership AND CLEARLY;***
* ***Improving outcomes for children , young people and their families***

In essence the message from the research was that the delivery of more effective children’s services is not about more structural change – and there was recognition that a period of stability was essential, regardless of the model of integration selected.

There was also a recognition that the importance of assessing an area’s organisational integration arrangements needs to be cognisant of the history of the local context.

***We are launching this research at the conference today –*** all of you will have copies in front of you on your tables – and extra copies can be picked up from the Social Work Scotland stand.

In my view the most important ingredients mentioned in the research is that of – ***Relationships***  ***AND Leadership*** –clearly this is referring specifically to professional relationships however it strikes relevant synergies to what we heard from Chelsea and Louise last year – about their experience of being in receipt of our services and having at least one key relationship which was trustworthy, consistent and reliable.

**Leadership**

These are all elements which are essential in being a good Leader - and clearly leadership is dependent on the ability to build positive relationships, no matter what the challenges.

In talking to a close colleague recently she observed that the social work profession brings together many of the essential skills, values and experience for effective and robust leadership.

* We have an essential value base, we are: open, honest, respectful and engaging.
* We work alongside people, listen and support them
* We are good at managing conflict and building positive relationships in order to find effective solutions.

As we know there is a distinct difference between – managers and – leaders. You don’t have to manage a service or team to be a great leader and not all managers make effective leaders.

In the research I have just spoken about – Leadership within professions was mentioned repeatedly as being a key factor in ensuring effective service delivery and outcomes - in times of enormous change and in supporting front line practitioners to undertake their role to the best of their ability.

I would note however that ‘change’ has become synonymous with ‘Improvement’ – and we know there is no ground for complacency in this respect.

AND finally before I hand back to David Lee to introduce our next guests - I would like to thank the Conference Planning team; Lillian Cringles, Jane Martin, Nicola Dinnie, Jane Devine and Andrew Gillies. I would also like to thank our past president – Susan Taylor, all of our Office Bearers and the Executive Committee. I also owe a great thank you to Jane Devine, Director of SWS and all the staff for their support in my year as Vice President.

I hope you enjoy the conference.

Jane will sadly be leaving SWS in the next few months to take up her new post as Chief Executive for the Four Square Homelessness Charity in Edinburgh…. I would like to congratulate Jane and wish her all the best in this exciting new venture – but I have to say she will most certainly be a huge loss to SWS!