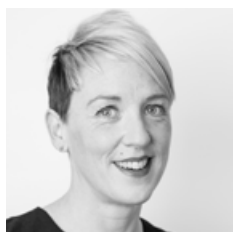


- > Leader comment: Jane Devine on the future of the social work profession p21
- > Guest opinion: Youth justice in Finland p22
- > Why we need better support for suicidal young people p24
- > Guest opinion: Concerns around Universal Credit p26

Older, wiser and getting ready for the future



@JaneDevine

As the Social Work (Scotland) Act turns 50, Jane Devine reflects on why the profession need to embrace the digital revolution and push for system change

This year is an anniversary year for lots of organisations. The NHS celebrates its 70th year; the Fifa World Cup turns 21 and Children in Scotland marks a quarter century, to name but a few. For Social Work Scotland it is a big year. It is the 50th anniversary of the Social Work (Scotland) Act and social work in general celebrates its centenary year, marking 100 years since the first social work courses were taught at the McGill School in Canada.

At the Social Work Scotland conference in June, we paid homage to the 50 years of this key legislation which, when launched, was designed to promote social welfare across Scotland and safeguard those who were vulnerable. To celebrate, we have commissioned experts Professor Brigid Daniel and Dr Jane Scott to look back at our foundations, but more importantly to look to our future. Covering all areas of social work - children and families; adults and older people; and justice services - the research will look at how our approach to supporting people has changed over time and what the future might hold for our profession. While Professor Daniel presented the highlights at our June conference, the full research as well as seven 'think piece' essays on detailed areas of social work, will be presented at a summit in the autumn.

"We need to work with people to leave our support and break the cycle"

As with anyone reaching the milestone of 50, there is bound to be a bit of

reflection. But far from asking 'what have I done?', 'what have I become?' or 'who am I?'; we're skipping the midlife crisis and preparing for our fabulous fifties. We know more, we've seen most things before, we've got good pals and we're in it for the long haul.

Working under the title of 'Confidence, collaboration, commitment', there are some key messages we want our delegates to leave with that will equip them for the next 50 years.

First up, we need to get to grips with the digital revolution. Why do so many of us leave our digital at the door? We are totally relaxed with online banking, Facebook, email, Whatsapp, but when we step into our offices we enter a space that is light years behind our personal relationship with technology. We will challenge people to think with a digital brain and to keep pace with tech developments and what it can offer our sector because, if we focus on relationships and underpin them with digital support, we can meet the future demand in a personalised way.

Secondly, sustainability is a real concern. How do we meet the rising need, demand and expectation of a population where people are ageing, living longer with disabilities and health conditions and where the safety of the vulnerable is paramount? When the going gets tough and the money gets scarce, it can be a real temptation to centralise control and micro-manage every penny.

But we need to counter that temptation and push decision-making back to the staff who know what will work for the people they support. Scottish charity Cornerstone is a good example of how this can be done in practice using their version of the Buurtzorg model of service delivery.

There's also lots of discussion about system change at the moment, and a recognition that if we are to make real and lasting change, it can't be through pilots or initiatives, it has to work everywhere, every day. English programmes such as the Rough Sleeping Initiative and the Troubled Families Programme, both of which gained high-profile government backing, evidence the strength of such interventions. But, in the wake of the Rotherham child sexual exploitation scandal it is evident how hard it can be to change the system.

Looking at adverse childhood experiences, we recognise that often we are looking after the same people, at different stages of their life. We need to work with them to help them leave our support and break the cycle.

“Social workers are agents of change. It's what we do”

We have a range of inputs, but the lesson we as a social work profession need to take home is that we are ready. It is easy to be worried for the future: integration does make us think about who we are and how we contribute; reducing resources makes us question how we do our jobs and support people. But social workers are agents of change. It's what we do.

So, as we progress into our 51st year we are older, wiser and more comfortable in our skin. We are not trying to rebrand or repackage ourselves into a slimmer sleeker version; we are not divorcing, taking up cycling, or writing a novel. We are looking to the future and seeing the opportunities in the challenges that face us.

Fifty is the new forty after all.

Jane Devine is Director of Social Work Scotland, and a Board Member of Children in Scotland

> Find out more about Social Work Scotland at socialworkscotland.org

> Read more about the Social Work (Scotland) Act legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1968/49/contents

> The Social Work Scotland Annual Conference 2018 was held on 13-14 June. Read about the key presentations from the day on their Twitter feed @socworkscot

The Finnish touch



@comjustscot

Laura Hoskins, a delegate on our study visit to Finland, reflects on her experience, and the lessons brought back to Scotland

It started with a tweet. Finland, land of socially progressive policies, saunas and Father Christmas, is often held up as a country Scotland should aspire to. We already share some features: a similar population and a challenging geography – and they also enjoy fried fish (albeit with healthier accompaniments). But there are significant differences too, particularly in how they administer justice. Community Justice Scotland is constantly looking for best practice, wherever it occurs, so when Children in Scotland announced a study trip to Finland on Twitter, we packed our cases and joined the team for a well-organised week of learning.

On day one, we were given an overview of the Finnish education system at the Ministry of Education and Culture. Highlights included paid maternity/paternity leave until a child is three years old; instruction in a child's mother tongue as well as in the three Finnish national languages; free access to early childhood education and care (0-5); pre-primary education (age six) and basic education (age 7-16 in the same school to avoid a difficult transition). At age 17 students have a choice of either general upper secondary or vocational education and training. The focus is on 'lifelong learning and no dead ends'. If we hadn't already been aware of Finland's excellent education system, it became glaringly apparent – all our meetings (as well as emails prior to our visit) were held in English.

We also got to witness the education system in action. Strikingly, despite potentially even worse weather than Scotland, a lot of time is given to outdoor play – including venturing into neighbouring forests. When conditions are really bad the 'Schools on the Move' programme promotes indoor activities, including using corridors for ball games. Risk certainly doesn't seem to feature as highly in their thinking as it does in ours. Some schools also had mini-zoos and large greenhouses to make education as hands-on as possible.

As for Finland's justice system, it is focused on mediation and community sanctions; innovative social welfare experiments like universal basic income (UBI); and a thriving third sector engaged in the delivery of frontline services. Finland also imprisons far fewer people than we do in Scotland, with less people coming into the justice system at all. The investment in early years, support for parents and families and holistic mediation services is obviously paying longer-term dividends.

“Finland imprisons far less people than we do. The investment in early years, support for parents and families and holistic mediation services is paying dividends”