

PROFESSIONAL Social Work

March/April 2023

Vacancies

**Cost of
living**

Workload

**Public
perception**

The state of social work

BASW's annual survey tells it like it is

BASW
The professional association for
social work and social workers



The professional association for
social work and social workers

BE PART OF LEADING BASW VACANCIES ON COUNCIL

BASW COUNCIL, THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE ASSOCIATION,
IS CURRENTLY SEEKING NOMINATIONS FOR THE FOLLOWING ROLES:

BASW HONORARY TREASURER ELECTED DIRECTORS X 3

Equalities and Diversity: We encourage members from all communities, identities and backgrounds and stage of career – from students to longstanding members of the profession – to consider these roles. We particularly encourage members from previously less well represented in BASW's leadership. BASW Council is committed to being more diverse and representative of our membership, sector and society.

BASW will provide personalised support and induction to ensure these roles are accessible to eligible candidates. All Council members can claim reasonable expenses incurred on BASW business in addition to varying other payments associated with the different roles.

The closing date for receipt of nominations for all vacancies is 5pm on 14th April 2023.

Candidates should submit their completed nomination form, together with an election statement of no more than 300 words and a passport size head and shoulders colour photograph electronically to governance@basw.co.uk

All roles start immediately after the Annual General Meeting (AGM) on **14th June 2023** for an initial term of 2 years.

BASW HONORARY TREASURER

The Treasurer is an elected Honorary Officer together with the Chair and Vice Chair of Council. In addition to their duties as a Director, the Treasurer chairs the Finance & Organisational Development (FOD) Committee which meets up to 4 times per year and is responsible for ensuring that the Association properly exercises its financial and staffing responsibilities.

BASW Council meets up to 4 times per year and the Treasurer role is remunerated at a rate of £12,000 per annum for 1 day a week on Association business. The term of office for this role commences at the conclusion of the BASW AGM in **June 2023** and is for an initial 2-year term. (Office holders may stand again for another consecutive term of 2 years).

Criteria for candidates applying for nomination as Treasurer

Candidates for election as Treasurer must be nominated by five full voting members (other than the candidate themselves) or by a branch committee or a National Standing Committee and candidates must have been full voting members for at least 2 continuous years prior to nomination.

All candidates must meet the criteria set out in the relevant role description.

See website for Treasurer role description and nomination form. Alternatively, email governance@basw.co.uk and request copies.

ELECTED DIRECTORS

Elected Directors play a key part in setting BASW's direction and overseeing its mission, as part of Council. They can take on other responsibilities and activities relevant to their interests and expertise and may represent BASW externally. We are looking for people committed to social work, who can represent members, and offer insight and accountability.

The time commitment includes attendance at up to four Council meetings and two away days per year and occasional additional days on BASW business. Attendance at Council is remunerated. The successful candidate would take up office from the conclusion of the **June 2023** AGM for a 2-year term of office and can reapply for one more 2-year term.

Criteria for candidates applying for nomination

Candidates for Elected Director must be nominated by two full voting members (other than the candidate themselves) or by a Branch Committee or a National Standing Committee and candidates must have been full voting members for at least 1 year continuously prior to nomination.

All candidates must meet the criteria set out in the relevant role description.

See website for Elected Director role description and nomination form. Alternatively, email governance@basw.co.uk and request copies.

Please ensure when applying for these vacancies that you take an early look at the website to check the criteria for nominations

www.basw.co.uk/council-elections

An early discussion on any of these roles can be arranged by emailing governance@basw.co.uk.

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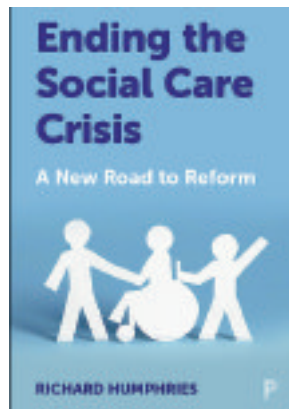
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From the
Editor
**SHAHID
NAQVI**



Time ministers took social work crisis seriously

One thing is clear: social work is in crisis across the four nations of the UK. That's not to say the profession itself is in crisis – those in it have a clear understanding of their role and what they should be doing.

It's just the systems they work in are dysfunctional, inadequately resourced and under-funded to such an extent that people are leaving the profession in droves and posts remain unfilled.

BASW's annual survey, highlighted on page five and 16, lays bare the issues, which in some cases have got worse since the previous year. At the same time, the pressure on people due to the cost of living catastrophe has increased.

And yet, we keep getting a sense that Westminster doesn't take this area of its responsibility seriously enough. Its strategies for reforming children's social care and SEND provision in England were not transformational and characterised by hesitant pilots. As if the problems and solutions haven't been discussed enough! This winter has also highlighted again the huge cracks in adult social care.

Many of the pressures on the system are reflected in this edition. It may not make cheerful reading but until Westminster listens, they need to be highlighted and heard.

As World Social Work Day approaches on 21 March let's demand that they are.

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BASW
The professional association for
social work and social workers

If you have a view on any of our
editorial content or ideas for future
articles contact editor@basw.co.uk

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Sometimes we need a little help navigating life's problems. Seafarer Support provides a free confidential telephone and unique online referral service for serving and retired UK seafarers and their families. Our website will guide you to the services available from a range of UK charities and organisations. For those who prefer to speak to someone in person, please call our trained staff during office hours. We are waiting to connect you to the right people during times of need.



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ANTI-RACIST NETWORK

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FREE DAY CONFERENCE

25 April 2023

Senate House, University of London, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU



Aimed at Strategic Leaders and Managers
committed to ANTI-RACIST SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

FURTHER INFORMATION

SWEARN Chair Professor Kish Bhatti-Sinclair:
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In collaboration with:

- The British Association of Social Workers
- What Works for Children's Social Care
- Royal Holloway, University of London



The Advanced Social Worker Role in Integrated Adult Social Care with Devon County Council

"The role gives me the opportunity to think creatively and work towards solutions with the workers I support. I have felt a real sense of achievement and progression within the role" – **Katie, Advanced Social Worker**

Always putting people at the forefront of what we do, we take a proactive approach to continuously shaping and delivering innovative professional practice. An exciting opportunity has arisen to join us as an Advanced Social Worker. This new post is based in North Devon and is key to driving best practice to support our teams in delivering positive outcomes.

At the heart of this exciting position, there is a strong focus around professional practice. You will have real opportunities to develop specialisms whilst being fully supported by our dedicated Practice Leads, Workforce Development Team, Principal Occupational Therapist and Principal Social Worker.

The Advanced Social Worker role is key in keeping the team connected and encouraging the learning and development of workers, including those who are training to become a Social Worker. Devon has a very successful and well respected ASyE scheme, an innovative new Social Work Apprenticeship scheme and exciting transformation work being undertaken to refresh our CPD and supervision offers.

Our people, our passion

"I want an inclusive and diverse workforce, where people from any background feel they can work and develop" – **Tandra Forster, Director of Integrated Adult Social Care**

We are dedicated to building a workplace community that promotes inclusion and diversity and welcomes professionals from a wide variety of backgrounds.

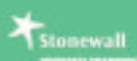
We have a strong anti-racism working group where allies and staff with lived experience of racism work collaboratively to influence change following a recent audit. We recognise that there is still work to do to ensure that we are proactive in developing a culture of curiosity and empathy. We stand together to actively challenge racism and discrimination, never missing an opportunity to seek out improvements to enhance the working lives of our people. We do this, not just because it's the right thing to do, but because it makes our organisation stronger.

The Advanced Social Worker role is critical in this work to ensure that staff are supported in practice to uphold social work values, to be a champion/conduit for change, improving continuity and quality of practice, comfortable with on-going change and challenge.

To apply, please visit www.devonjobs.gov.uk/ and search for reference **3123**.



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NEWS



Social workers say they are seeing the impact of the cost of living crisis in the people they work with

Workers supporting with own resources as poverty deepens

Three quarters of social workers say the cost of living crisis has driven the people they work with into deeper poverty, a major BASW survey has revealed.

Almost half of respondents (49.8 per cent) felt the number of people in poverty in their casework has increased due to the crisis, and a third (33 per cent) of social workers are supporting people with their own resources.

Almost four-fifths of respondents report that the crisis is causing the people they work with additional problems.

The BASW annual survey provides insights into the views and feelings of social workers across areas including workload, career development, challenges, workplace issues and external pressures.

There was a new section on the use of agency teams, a factor reported to be eating into local authority budgets. It found 26 per cent of agency worker respondents had been deployed as part of a team, either on a specific project or to deliver social work services.

Asked to state the three biggest challenges for the profession, a failure to adequately fund social care came top (68 per cent), followed by recruitment and retention (54 per cent) – a sharp increase on last year when a third highlighted this – and cuts to local services (42 per cent).

Asked to list the three biggest workplace challenges, workload was chosen by most (45 per cent), followed by demands of admin (41 per cent) and lack of staff (34.8 per cent).

Almost 75 per cent felt of respondents are unable to complete their work during contracted hours, up from 72 per cent the previous year.

Of these, nearly a quarter reported working ten or more additional hours per week, and 90 per cent said they were not paid for overtime.

Despite the challenges, almost three fifths (59 per cent) were happy in the social work profession. A similar proportion (61 per cent) were happy in their current role. Asked to list the three things that have the most positive impact at work, more than half (57 per cent) say peer support, an increase from fewer than half last year.

The survey authors state: “This may reflect a move back towards office or hybrid ways of working with colleagues now able to work in the same physical space more frequently.”

Other positive factors include management and supervision at an appropriate level (32 per cent of respondents), effective partnership working (30 per cent) and training opportunities (22 per cent).

But 49.5 per cent reported having been verbally abused during work, with 24 per cent threatened with physical violence. And two fifths (38 per cent) had experienced or been aware of someone experiencing bullying, harassment or discrimination.

Respondents’ views on the public perception of social workers worsened slightly. Social workers were asked: “On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is ‘poor’ and ‘10’ is excellent, how would you rate the public’s current perception of social workers?” The average score was 3.3, lower than the 2021 score of 3.6.

The survey was answered by 1,602 social workers. It was conducted across the four nations between 8 December 2022 and 9 January 2023 and was open to members and non-members. Most worked in England, and qualified more than ten years ago.

Boycott age assessment agency - BASW

BASW is urging social workers not to work for a new government agency set up to carry out age assessments on young asylum seekers.

The National Age Assessment Board (NAAB) is part of a tougher approach to immigration in wake of the Nationality and Borders Act 2022.

It shifts responsibility for age assessments from local authorities to the NAAB, part of the Home Office and accountable to secretary of state Suella Braverman.

BASW said: “Given the rhetoric by the current Home Secretary, and her immediate predecessor, the risk is that political priorities risk compromising independent professional judgement.

“BASW is therefore discouraging our members, as well as other social workers, from applying for, or accepting these roles.”

Let’s hear the good news on our profession

Nominations are now open for the UK’s first award scheme to recognise high quality journalism featuring social work.

The BASW Social Work Journalism Awards was launched on 1 March. Journalists, BASW members and social workers throughout the UK are being urged to nominate examples of reporting that shows sensitivity and outstanding understanding of the profession.

See BASW’s website details.

NEWS

'Exhausted' workers suffering PTSD, warns the Kings Fund

PTSD and burnout are having a devastating impact on the social care workforce and the impact will be felt for nearly a decade, a leading think tank has warned.

The Covid pandemic has added to pressures on front line workers, claimed the King's Fund.

Speaking at its Health and Care Explained 2023 conference, Jo Vigor, assistant director of leadership and organisational development, said: "Some professions are reporting an increase in PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] among their colleagues. PTSD can have a seven-year tail, so we're not out of the woods yet at all.

"Plus, a recent inquiry into workforce burnout and resilience in the NHS and social care concluded that burnout was commonplace, even before the pandemic, and that clinical burnout was on the rise globally, bringing with it significant risks around the care and safety of patients, as well as having a devastating effect on the lives of individual staff members.

"Staff in the health and social care system [in the UK] are really, really exhausted. The focus on staff health and wellbeing has massively increased during the pandemic. That is not going to go away."

Vigor pointed to the 165,000 vacancies in social care and 133,000 in the NHS.

On social care, Vigor said: "We are losing the workforce, especially care assistants, to competing industries. Supermarkets are setting up close to care organisations and then paying a better hourly wage, and that is sucking the skills and experience out of the system.

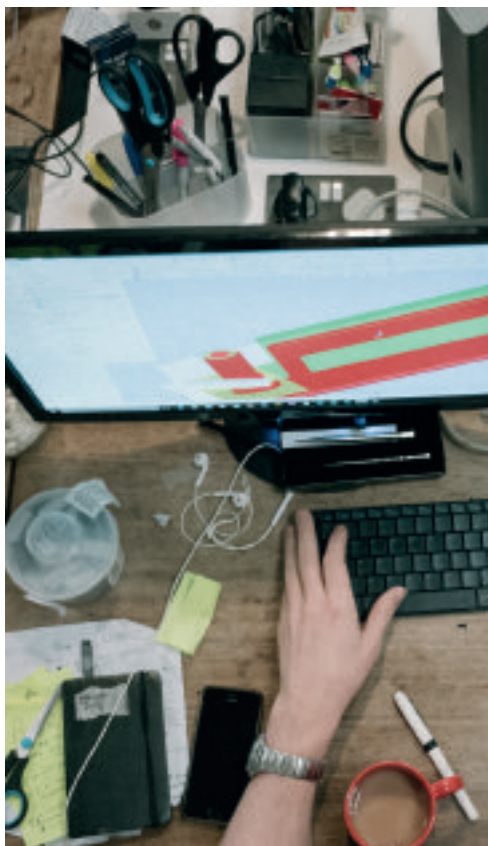
"We are also seeing a lack of younger people entering the social care profession.

"Demand keeps going up and up, but the workforce isn't increasing at the same pace. And this is largely a failure to do with workforce planning."

Institutional racism was also cited as a factor affecting the current workforce crisis.

Vigor added: "There's serious institutional racism throughout the health and care system that needs tackling. Our research has shown how far there is to go despite commitments nationally and locally to really work to address workforce race inequalities.

"The pandemic just sharpened our focus on the injustice caused by decades of bias. And we



An inquiry found clinical burnout is on the rise

know that ethnic minority staff are more likely than their white colleagues to report experiencing discrimination, bullying and harassment and abuse at work. They feel much more uncomfortable in challenging management decisions and speaking up when they have concerns around a patient or staff safety."

Everyone has a part to play in addressing the wider workforce crisis, Vigor said, with clear goals and teamwork required.

Vigor added: "We need to create cultures that support staff to flourish, promoting support for all and encouraging people to bring their whole selves to work.

"We have also been calling for a fully funded national workforce plan, the first for 20 years. We're hoping that a plan setting out how the workforce gap can be addressed will be published this year."

Reform needed to take stress out of DCS role

A lack of coherent government policy and a "blame culture" were cited as reasons for directors of children's services being one of the hardest senior officer roles to fill and retain.

The report *Leading for Longer* by the Staff College said increasing workloads and an "overload" of external inspections were also contributing to an average tenure of three years in the role.

It called on the government to act by enhancing its focus on children, reduce silo working between departments, create more coherent policies around children, reduce the blame culture from negative reporting of inspections and make the inspection regime "more proportionate".

Local authorities also have a part to play by creating more supportive cultures and tackling discrimination, including racism and misogyny, to widen the pool of talent.

Call to scrap 'incoherent' benefit cap

The benefit cap is pushing people into deeper poverty because it penalises parents who are caring for very young children, a charity claims.

The cap on universal credit (UC) aims to incentivise people into work by putting a limit on entitlements.

However, research by the Child Poverty Action Group found a third of people on UC are not required to work due to caring for children aged under three. It called for the "incoherent" policy to be scrapped.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

'Until we accept the social work crisis in terms of recruitment, retention, the demonisation of social work staff within our media, until we can really work to tackle that to support local authorities, this is endemic.'

Amy Bainton, policy and public affairs lead for Barnardos' Cymru addressing the Senedd

NEWS



Research shows 13,784 children had been referred to social services in Scotland before turning five

Fear fuelling one in four under-fives being referred to services

One in four of all children in Scotland are referred to children's social care before their fifth birthday, new research by the University of Central Lancashire has found.

The study suggests high profile cases of child protection failures mean social workers and other professionals are fearful they may miss warning signs, leading to high referrals.

Researchers Prof Andy Bilson and Marion Macleod collected data via Freedom of Information requests from all the 32 local authorities in Scotland. They asked for information about how many children born in the year ending 31 July 2013 had reached various stages of the child protection process before their fifth birthday.

The data published in the *British Journal of Social Work* showed that 13,784 children had been referred to social services before their fifth birthday because of concerns about their welfare, a rate of 26.5 per cent of all children born in 2012 in the 27 local authorities that responded.

One in every 17 children, a rate of six per cent, had been subject of a child protection investigation.

And one in 26, a rate of 3.8 per cent of all children, had been placed on the child protection register before their fifth birthday.

Prof Bilson said: "Local authorities have been put in a position of fear of missing a child being harmed to the extent that resources are so focused on investigation and children in care, leaving increasingly little left to support families and prevent harm."

The numbers of investigations varied between

local authorities. Almost one in five children were investigated for child protection in Clackmannanshire, compared with one in 50 in Aberdeenshire.

The rate of investigations had little relationship to levels of deprivation. The six most deprived areas (Glasgow City, Inverclyde, North Ayrshire, West Dunbartonshire, Dundee City and North Lanarkshire) had fewer than half the rate of investigations of Clackmannanshire.

The four other authorities with the highest rates of investigation (Dumfries & Galloway, Falkirk, Midlothian and South Ayrshire) were all in the least deprived half of local authorities.

Prof Bilson said: "It shows that a family's chance of being investigated for abuse depends very much on where you live. This matters because a wide range of research and Scotland's own Care Review shows how families and children are harmed by being investigated unnecessarily."

The Scottish government has announced £500 million funding for early intervention and prevention to transform how family support is delivered.

But SASW chair Jude Currie said: "We've got a crisis of recruitment and retention, and higher caseloads than we would like to see. It hampers our capacity to build relationships."

"It's important not to stigmatise what we do so families are more afraid of us. When tragedies happen, we are criticised for not investigating enough but when reports like this come out there is a risk that we are seeing to investigate too much."

Study shows care stigma is still strong

Children in care feel stigmatised as "bad kids", setting them up for criminality, new research has found.

A team at the University of Salford looked at the views children involved in the justice system have of being in care.

The results, published in the *Journal of Children's Services*, found that care-experienced children feel residential care has "undermined their sense of how they see themselves" and that they feel labelled as a "looked-after child" and a "bad kid".

Researchers hope the findings will influence policymakers to reduce stigma. Ministers have rejected a recommendation in England's children's social care review to make care experience a protected characteristic, claiming such a move would add to stigmatisation.

Check poverty in your area - online tool

A new online tool allows social workers to instantly view poverty statistics for their area.

Created by charity Action for Children, it shows how children are affected by poverty in any constituency or council in England, Scotland and Wales by entering a postcode.

The tool gives the number and percentage of children living in poverty and the proportion in poverty in an average class size.

It shows if child poverty has gone up or down and those eligible for free school meals.

Extra information outlines the effect poverty has on life chances, such as educational attainment and mental health.

See www.tinyurl.com/3m82nexc

ENGLAND NEWS



Government figures show a record 5,400 children's social workers in England left in 2021-22

A third leave children's services role after less than two years

More social workers left children's services than joined in 2022, new figures for England published by the Department for Education show.

The number of children and families workers fell for the first time since records began, down 2.7 per cent in the past year to 31,634.

A record 5,422 left in 2021-22, a nine per cent rise on 2021, and 4,825 joined. Of those leaving, a third had been at their local authority for less than two years and 70 per cent less than five years.

The department estimates more than half of those leaving stop working in children's social care.

Vacancies stood at a record high of 7,900, up 21 per cent. Agency workers went up 13 per cent to 6,800 – the highest rise since the data series began in 2017.

Sickness absence was also up, currently at 3.5 per cent, again the highest figure since 2017.

The average caseload was 16.6, up 0.3 per cent.

BASW England said the new data was an indictment on the sector: "Over the past five years we have been warning government that working conditions have been deteriorating.

"The reasons our members have given has remained consistent: unmanageable caseloads, not enough staff support and a lack of resources.

"Without urgent action we are risking highly motivated and experienced social workers leaving the profession, as well as the loss of newly qualified social workers early in their careers as they are not being supported enough."

Of the total number of workers now in children's services, 47 per cent – 14,910 – are case holders, and

9,359 had less than two years in their current post and 8,797 between two and five years.

Leaver numbers were highest in London (1,053) followed by the south east (853) and north west (718). There were fewest leavers in the north east (282) despite the region suffering some of the worst child poverty statistics and cost of living pressures in England.

The highest number of leavers by authority were Kent (120), Birmingham (110) Hampshire (108) and Surrey (104).

Local authority leaders were asked in a government survey of children's services held between January and March 2022 to set out their views on key policy areas.

Seven out of ten leaders were not confident they would have enough permanent child and family social workers to meet needs this year.

The top three priorities to improve children's social care were recruiting staff (80 per cent), retaining staff (62 per cent) and enough funds (60 per cent).

Nearly three quarters felt they were least likely to have sufficient care placements for 14 to 15-year-olds.

The government recently published a plan to overhaul children's social care, but BASW has criticised the level of spending committed. The government is also consulting on capping the amount local authorities can pay agency workers and making it mandatory to have at least five years local authority experience before joining an agency.

But BASW England said this did not address the reasons why people choose locum work, which are "varied and complex and not simply related to rates of pay".

Plan aims to end postcode SEND lottery

The government said its long-awaited SEND reforms will ensure children with educational needs and disabilities get "high-quality" support "wherever they are in the country".

Under the plan announced last month, new national standards will set out the support families should receive and who will provide and pay for it.

Assessing the needs of children through Education Health and Care Plans will be sped up and simplified, with up to 5,000 early years special education needs coordinators created and 400 educational psychologist.

A further 33 special schools will be built, on top of 49 already earmarked as part of a £2.6 billion two-year investment to increase capacity.

A further £30 million will go on funding short breaks and respite for families.

Parents of children with disabilities and special educational needs have long complained of feeling pitched against local authorities in a battle for resources.

An Ofsted report in 2021 found the last ten years had done "little to ease the need for 'warrior parents'".

The Local Government Association said the reforms "do not go far enough in addressing the fundamental cost and demand issues".

The Association of Directors of Children's Services warned "there is still not enough money in the system to meet the level of need being seen".

Adoption UK said the plan was "underwhelming in its

SCOTLAND NEWS



How can we find the time to co-design a new care system?

Social workers will struggle to find the time to be involved in the co-designing of a National Care Service for Scotland, MSPs were warned.

Speaking at a Cross-Party Group on Social Work, Kate Ramsden of Unison Scotland pointed to the practicalities of social workers being able to contribute, saying: “It’s very difficult for social workers to lift their heads and engage in how social work develops.

“Co-design as a process takes much longer and if you are going to do it properly it will take time, and how will social workers find the time?”

“We need to bring social work values back into the discussion when we are developing new services. And we need the Scottish government to understand the unique role that social workers do.”

Jennifer Rezendes, head of policy and workforce at Social Work Scotland (SWS), said focusing on policy can “drag us away from relational work”.

She added: “Caseloads are going through the roof and the changeable priorities coming through from policy are all pressure points affecting how people actually carry forward their ability to work in a values-based and relational way.”

Students at the session raised issues of burnout. One said: “There’s minimal support while undertaking placements.” Another added: “The amount of pressure social work students are under is unbelievable.”

Convener of the meeting Fulton MacGregor MSP said: “There is definitely an appreciation from

government of the work social workers do – our group needs to remind people of the pivotal role social workers play in society.”

MSPs were due to vote on the National Care Service (NCS) bill this month. However, following Nicola Sturgeon’s resignation announcement, all candidates in the SNP leadership race have agreed this should be paused until June.

UNISON Scotland welcomed the move. And chief social worker Iona Colvin said: “It’s a wide-reaching piece of legislation, and not universally popular. We are working with SASW and SWS to see what we need to put in place for social work in Scotland.”

A review is currently looking at whether children’s services should be part of the NCS. Colvin said: “The work on children’s services is looking at the best way to deliver The Promise [a pledge to care experienced children and young people made in 2021], the best way to deliver the services that children and families need.”

How justice services are delivered is also a key area of exploration within the NCS proposals.

Alison Bavidge, national director of SASW, said: “Social workers want to be involved, they want to influence the future, they have important things they want government to know about.

“However, we know that social workers have high caseloads and very limited capacity. The profession is facing a crisis of recruitment and retention. This is resulting in significant barriers to meaningful engagement.”

Call to pause debt payback for families

A Group of 50 organisations including SASW have called for a six-month halt on public debt repayments for families in Scotland struggling in the cost of living crisis.

More than half of families on universal credit are having ten per cent taken off in debt repayments for things like council tax arrears and other local authority charges.

Three quarters of those in arrears say they have not put the heating on this winter, and half have cut down on meals, according to the Robertson Trust.

“Many simply cannot absorb more costs as they fall deeper into debt trying to make ends meet,” the letter states.

Service users’ ‘digital door’ to access files

Service users in Scotland are to be given increased powers to access their own social care and health data.

Launching a five-year data strategy, the Scottish government said clients of social care will get a “digital door” to their files.

“This will make it easier for people to view information held about them and to exercise their right to update this when information held is incorrect,” a spokesperson said.

The digital door can also be used to share health and social care data with other services, such as social security or prisons.

The aim is to “empower citizens and staff”.



Social Workers' Benevolent Trust

Many social workers are facing hardship from the rising cost of living, alongside many of those they seek to support. They may face debts from increased heating costs, through disability to themselves or their children or because of coercive or controlling relationships.

The Trust is the only charity dedicated to offering grants to qualified social workers and their dependants. We try to support our professional colleagues in their financial difficulties, family crises or sudden emergencies.

We consider applications bi-monthly and make small grants, sometimes with advice about other sources of support. Applicants need to complete a form available online at www.swbt.org

Our funds are limited and we would greatly appreciate any donations, however small, so we can help more of our fellow professionals. Details of how to do this are given below.

HOW TO MAKE DONATIONS:

JUSTGIVING

Donations can be made at:
www.justgiving.com/socialworkers-benevolent-trust

PAYPAL

Donate to: Social Workers' Benevolent Trust

LEAVE A LEGACY

www.swbt.org/how-to-donate/how-to-leave-a-legacy

BANK TRANSFER

Account Name: Social Workers Benevolent Trust
Sort Code: 08-90-01
Account No: 50358304

STANDING ORDER

Download the form SWBT-Gift Aid and send to:

The Treasurer,
SWBT c/o BASW,
Wellesley House,
37 Waterloo Street,
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More details are available on the website:

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WALES NEWS



Sir Andrew McFarlane says he has 'great professional sympathy' with social workers suffering stress

Family court head highlights stress facing social workers

The head of the family court for England and Wales spoke of the pressure on social workers at an inquiry held in the Senedd.

Sir Andrew McFarlane, president of the family division, was addressing an evidence session into the Welsh government's pledge to radically reform children's social care.

Asked to comment on the frequent changes in social workers experienced by children and families, he said: "I think it's really tough being a social worker in the current world. There are pressures, because of just the number of cases in the system, and people leave one authority maybe to go to work for another, or maybe because they are suffering from stress and they simply want to walk away from social work or are ill, and one has great professional sympathy with those people in that position."

Sir Andrew said this was not just a problem particular to Wales but "happens everywhere".

A change of social worker in the middle of an assessment could mean having to start again, or spend time forming new relationships that "draws the process out", he said.

During the Children, Young People and Education Committee inquiry, Sir Andrew also spoke of the growing pressure on families, resulting in increased

demand on social services. He said a quarter of cases heard in the family court were "not top-end, awful child abuse cases; they're cases of people simply failing to cope adequately or safely with their children."

"Often that comes as part of a cocktail with domestic abuse, with drugs and alcohol abuse, unstable family set-ups, people changing partners – all of these things, which we're familiar with."

Such cases of "long, chronic failure to meet the child's needs" are harder for social services and the court to cope with, said Sir Andrew, and welfare decisions are "not so clear cut".

Also giving evidence in the session was family division liaison judge for Wales Sir Nicholas Francis. Speaking of the impact of poverty on families, he said: "I know from talking to people involved at the coalface that they're dealing with more cases than they can handle and as poverty is increasing with the cost of living crisis at the moment, they are expecting more people to fall into the care system. So, it is a vicious circle."

Sir Nicholas added that the "collapse in the standard of living, combined with the issues like drugs and alcohol" mentioned by Sir Andrew "make a pretty noxious cocktail".

Young parents face care status discrimination

Care-experienced young people in Wales face "structural discrimination" when they become parents, a charity is warning.

Project Unity, which works

across Wales, said as soon as a young person who has been in care becomes pregnant their child is "perceived to be at risk".

A survey by the charity found more than half were told their

child had to be put on the child protection register because of things that happened to them in their childhood. It said work was needed with young parents before they became pregnant.

Stats reveal disability Covid deaths

A census analysis shows the devastating impact of Covid on disabled people in Wales.

Figures from the Office for National Statistics indicate a sharp fall in people severely affected by their conditions between 2011 and 2021 because many died during the pandemic.

The number of women 'limited a lot' fell from 12.2 per cent in 2011 to 10.4 per cent in 2021. The number of men in the same category fell from 12.2 per cent to 9.5 per cent.

The number of disabled females (all categories) aged 10-19 almost doubled between the two censuses, rising from 7.1 per cent to 13.3 per cent.

Among 40 to 44-year-olds, 25 per cent of people were disabled in the most deprived areas in 2021, compared with 11 per cent in the least deprived areas.

Women more likely to get disorder label

The mental health system discriminates against girls and women, giving them diagnoses that prevent them accessing support, according to two prominent Welsh psychologists.

Women are 75 per cent more likely than men to receive a 'personality disorder' diagnosis, according to Dr Jen Daffin and Dr Carly Jackson, co-chairs of Psychologists for Social Change Cymru.

The diagnosis can impact on how wider health services engage with patients, leading to stigma and complex traumas being missed.

BASW

The professional association for
social work and social workers

International Development Fund

Funding Opportunity to attend IFSW (Europe) Regional Conference

Prague – 21st-24th May 2023



'Against All Odds: A Social Europe is Possible Where No One is Left Behind'

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) is the global body representing social work and social workers. BASW is a member of IFSW.

Every two years IFSW Europe holds its regional conference. In 2023 it is being held in Prague.

These conferences provide an excellent opportunity for social workers in the UK to meet with and learn from social workers from across Europe through talks, workshops, discussions and social events.

To encourage the participation of social work students, NQSW and ASYE, frontline social workers, Practice Managers/Team Managers, the International Development Fund is giving away 15 grants, each worth up to £1,000*

To find out how to apply for a grant and to see the full terms and conditions, please go to the BASW website using this link:

www.basw.co.uk/international-development-fund-funding-opportunity

The deadline for applications is 31st March 2023

Any questions please email policyadmin@basw.co.uk

** Please note: Terms and conditions apply.*



Registered Charity Number 313789

Social Workers' Educational Trust Grants and Scholarships

**Are you looking to improve your social
work skills? Need funds?
We might be able to help you there!**

The Social Workers' Educational Trust (SWET) was established as an independent charity in 1972 on the initiative of the British Association of Social Workers. It is registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales (Registered Charity number 313789) and operates throughout England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. It remains independent of BASW, with its own Trustees.

SWET aims to assist qualified social workers to develop their knowledge and skills, encourage research into social work practice and education, and educate the public in the nature of social work.

Subject to criteria*, registered social workers who have completed at least two years post-qualifying practice and who are working or intending to work in the UK, can apply for funding from the Trust.

SWET provides grants of up to **£500** to individuals and up to **£1000** to assist team learning. SWET also awards three annual scholarships of **£3,000** each (usually in June). Applicants need to complete a simple application form if they wish to be considered for a grant or scholarship*

The Trustees consider grant applications at three meetings each year (usually February, June and October).

The next meeting to consider applications will be on 15th June 2023, with the deadline for submissions being 12 noon on Wednesday 7th June 2023.

* Full criteria, FAQs, guidance, and application forms
can be found here:

<https://socialworkerseducationaltrust.org.uk>



Social workers in Northern Ireland cite lack of time, caseload size and high vacancy rates

Bureaucracy makes firefighting and crisis management the focus

Three quarters of social workers in Northern Ireland feel excessive admin is hindering them in their work.

And 83 per cent said they spent most of their time on statutory processes and meetings.

Social workers were giving their views to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services in Northern Ireland.

A survey by BASW NI and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) received 461 responses – 80 per cent from social workers currently in children's services, and 20 per cent previously worked in the area.

One respondent said: "We don't have time to address much of the work that is needed. Our focus is on firefighting and crisis management."

Other factors stopping social workers carrying out their duties were lack of time (71 per cent), caseload size (68 per cent), vacancies (62 per cent) and lack of community resources (55 per cent).

Nearly half (49 per cent) of those surveyed feel that admin could be undertaken by non-social workers.

"There should be a full audit of the amount of bureaucracy within social work roles to demonstrate time spent away from assessment and intervention..." a respondent said.

The majority (75 per cent) felt that recruiting more family support workers would be of most use to children and families social workers, followed by social work assistants (73 per cent) and behavioural support workers (68 per cent).

Housing problems could also be undertaken by non-social work staff, according to 76 per cent of respondents, along with facilitating family contact (70 per cent) and accessing services in the community (60

per cent). Two thirds of respondents wanted to spend more time working on trauma with children and young people (64 per cent), supporting them generally (60 per cent) and with mental health problems in particular (53 per cent).

Professor Ray Jones, who is currently leading a review into children's social care in Northern Ireland, wants to see a greater "skills mix" within the sector to allow social workers to focus on their "core professional competencies".

The survey found most workers (80 per cent) felt they made a positive difference to those they support.

The main focus of roles was child protection (59 per cent), intervention (59 per cent) and assessing need (58 per cent).

Concerns were expressed by respondents about the national shortage of foster carers, with fears children could be exploited in other care settings.

One worker observed: "Part of my current role is to identify emergency foster placements and deal with disrupting foster placements. The lack of foster carers regionally... makes this job impossible."

"Efforts need to be directed at adequately recruiting, resourcing and retaining skilled foster carers to prevent young people being exploited in residential care."

Responding to the findings, a spokesperson for BASW NI said: "These findings reinforce our view that social workers value relationship-based practice, but the results paint a frustrating picture, outlining a service which continues to be heavily bureaucratised."

"To effectively meet the needs of children and families, social workers must be properly resourced and working in environments in which their skills and knowledge are valued and promoted."

Enhanced car mileage rate extended

A temporary increase in the mileage rate for social workers in Northern Ireland is to apply for a further six months until the end of September.

The enhanced rate for health trust staff raises the rate above 3,500 miles from 20p to 30p per mile.

It was originally introduced in December to run until the end of March to help health and social care staff cope with the increased cost of living.

The mileage rate for the first 3,500 miles remains at 56p per mile.

BASW NI national director Carolyn Ewart welcomed the extension but said: "We highlighted that although all social workers are affected by the increased cost of fuel, not all social workers will drive enough in a year to benefit from the increase in the lower rate."

All-island membership is launched

An associate membership scheme between social workers in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland has been launched.

It aims to forge a greater sense of an "all-island social work profession", with enhanced benefits through the sharing of resources.

BASW NI chair Orlaith McGibbon said: "It will contribute to the development of a strong collective voice for social work, ensuring both associations are representative of our diverse workforces and enhance the identity and confidence of our profession."

LETTERS

SPEAKING OUT

PSW's sounding board for members' opinions, views and updates

The Jewish Social Workers' Group: a response to rising antisemitism

"Jews' fate", according to Jonathan Freedland, "is to be seen through a lens clouded by centuries of myth and imagining".

Repeated tropes, irrational thoughts and Holocaust denial, partly informed through social media, have underpinned the significant rise in antisemitism.

The impact of populism everywhere, Corbynism, the far left's preoccupations, the far right's vituperation, have led to an increase in antisemitism and its passive acquiescence, if not collaboration, by rote.

This has come as a shock to most Jews within our profession, whether secular or religious in attitude.

We now know of clients and colleagues who have expressed antisemitism and abuse towards BASW members due to ignorance and/or racist attitudes.

This has been a wake-up call, not least highlighted by statements emanating from the Social Workers Union Executive and an attempt by some BASW members to promote an AGM motion seeking to review the internationally recognised definition of antisemitism. Both actions were conducted without any consultation or collaboration with the Jewish community, within or outwith the association.

Jews within BASW have been made to feel vulnerable, oppressed, insulted and abused. Frankly, the emerging feeling is of isolation.

The UK Jewish Social Workers' Group (JSWG) has been established as a BASW special interest group (SIG) as a result of these concerns. The JSWG consists of an inclusive range of professional views of members who identify as Jewish.

Membership is limited to social workers or

those working in organisations whose main purpose is social care.

Membership is by invitation from current members. The chair of the group is Paul Shuttleworth.

The fact is, there is a sense of isolation amongst members who are Jewish as a result of the failure of BASW's leadership to take real action on this issue and, indeed, by the profession as a whole. Jews, historically, have ultimately been alone and this is a rallying cry to the association.

In Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, the victimised Isabella pleads: "To whom should I complain... Who would believe me?"

The group is working to have BASW recognise that, as part of any anti-racist strategy, staff must be educated to understand antisemitism.

Equality monitoring must include reporting in the notification process and never again must motions or resolutions appear either before BASW, or all four nation associations, or SWU that in any way are deemed not only to be racist but also antisemitic.

It would also be useful if formal complaints concerning these matters should be investigated by someone who is truly independent.

We cannot allow our association to be tainted by recent happenings within academia, the National Union of Students, the Labour Party and elsewhere. Jewish members have defended and promoted the rights of others since BASW's inception and now demand the same for ourselves.

If you are interested in joining or would like more information about the Jewish Social Workers' Group please email: jewishsocialwork@gmail.com

Serge Paul

A reply from BASW chair Julia Ross

We welcome Serge Paul's challenging letter.

Antisemitism is centuries old and persistent, and there is evidence of increased incidents in the UK. BASW published its first statement on tackling UK antisemitism in February 2022 in consultation with Jewish members and staff. We remain committed to tangible actions to tackle antisemitism. We may get some things wrong along the way, but we will make progress.

Responding specifically to the letter: we are overhauling and equality-assuring our procedures for the AGM so that all aspects – including motion content – support inclusivity and a sense of equal value for all. We welcome the development of the Jewish Social Workers Special Interest Group, and hope to help it flourish. We are working with an external Jewish antisemitism and hate crime organisation on staff training and complaints handling.

Through these actions we hope all our Jewish members will experience BASW as increasingly inclusive and responsive. BASW serves a diverse membership. There is no room in social work for partiality or pecking orders in the application of human rights and equalities. We must challenge ourselves to live up to our code of ethics and what this means to all of us.

HAVE YOUR SAY

Email: editor@basw.co.uk or write to:

Editor, PSW, Wellesley House, 37 Waterloo Street, Birmingham B2 5PP

Please note that while PSW reserves the right to edit letters for length we will always make every effort to not alter the intrinsic content of any correspondence

LETTERS

It's not social work that is ageist, but the systems we work in are

I read with interest David Hearnden's article entitled 'Is social work in the UK ageist?' [PSW online]. I think he's missed the point.

We need to distinguish between social work and social services. Our political leaders who hold the purse strings for local to central governments across the UK are the ones who make it difficult for a proper social work service, as described in David's online article, to be made available.

We are expected to function in a quasi-capitalist market where most older people try to meet their own needs. Yet the holders of (limited) budgets keep the costs artificially low, thus driving service providers out of the market. The elderly or their relatives are then forced to beg, borrow or steal care and support.

Two points here. One: many people cannot get a foot inside the door of social services departments, whether they need a service or are even entitled to at least an assessment of need.

This has a knock-on effect on the next generation down, often older people themselves who end up with health and mental health issues, and who then cannot meet the needs of their parents or relatives.

Social services departments do not know the shape or size of unmet need amongst the older population and, cynically, I would suggest are not keen to know as they would have no way of meeting it. The focus on the individual without seeing that person as a part of a larger family is unacceptable.

Point two: social workers need to become far more political and shout about this myopic approach to social work with older people. We need to mount campaigns that help and encourage younger people to interrogate potential political candidates, and to see that they are fighting for their own futures.

It's not social work in the UK that's ageist. It's society and the structural systems inherent in the quasi-market of services for older people that are.

Penny Lloyd

As a global profession we must stand in solidarity with oppressed colleagues around the world

I have read with great interest the correspondence in previous editions regarding how BASW might respond to the issues which affect our colleagues in Palestine.

Arguably, it touches on the core function of BASW, which is to provide a platform that promotes professional solidarity for a community of UK social workers.

This solidarity centres around core beliefs regarding the necessity for the profession, the place of the profession, as well as both the future and history of the profession.

It represents a body which promotes the highest professional standards and highlights its ethical core.

As a previous BASW chief executive once commented, social work is a profoundly honourable profession, which is built on principles and high

standards of compassion and humanity.

BASW was not only a signatory of the 2010 Global Development Agenda for Social Work but also played a significant role in pioneering this. This agenda recognises the global nature of the profession and the commonalities of our practice as well as the contrasts. It also represents a principle of peer-to-peer solidarity between social workers around the world.

In many countries, however, we know that our colleagues practise under deeply repressive conditions. Under totalitarian regimes, social workers face numerous forms of repression and efforts to stop them from doing their work.

The fact that governments and non-governmental actors around the world continue to focus repression on social

workers is a tribute to their importance in the struggle for justice and accountability for the oppressed.

Repressive measures that social workers face include arbitrary detention and imprisonment, cyber-attacks, extra judicial violence and killing, defamation, torture and interrogation, travel bans, reprisals, surveillance, and censorship.

Such persecutions of colleagues are a global phenomenon, of which Palestine is but one example.

Solidarity is a verb, more than a noun, and poses the question of what could/should we do? Raising awareness, standing in solidarity, and challenging may be the very least.

We really need to keep such international awareness flowing through BASW.

David Harrop

When I give a hug I am able to justify it

I totally agree with Eddie O'Hara [Is it ok to hug? PSW online]. Hugs are often more a sign of I care about you, I am showing the person empathy, when words are not enough.

I hug children and colleagues; however, we have to remain professional and do not want to put ourselves at risk. If I hug anyone other than family I am able to justify why I am doing this. I also check out their body language, and ask if they want a hug. It is not only the physical connection, it also releases endorphins. I think it is important for everyone to have someone to hug them.

Ally Edson

I have and will continue to hug in practice

I read Eddie O'Hara's article and it got me thinking.

I was recently delivering a session to a cohort of social work students and was shocked when they told me they had been told that hugging was a hard no.

While I agree with Eddie that we need to be cautious and reflective about when it would be appropriate, I think there are times when it definitely is.

I wonder if it is something that might be less taboo for female practitioners (although I don't think this should be the case).

I have unashamedly hugged people in my practice and will do in the future.

Helen Love



The state of **SOCIALWORK**

Social workers are resilient and care deeply about their roles... but the annual BASW survey shines a light on a myriad of pressures from both inside and outside the profession. **Louise Palfreyman** assesses the findings

As an annual snapshot of views and feelings across an array of topics, the BASW annual survey seeks to capture insights into how social workers are faring out there on the front line.

It covers workload, professional development, challenges both personal and sector-wide, the negative impacts of bullying, discrimination and harassment and the impact of societal pressures on the people helped by social workers.

It offers respondents a chance to reflect on the past 12 months. And it performs a litmus test of attitudes and feelings across core issues affecting both the profession and the experiences people come up against every day.

Key findings

- ▶ Three quarters of respondents (76 per cent) reported that the cost of living crisis had driven the people they were working with into deeper poverty.
- ▶ Almost four-fifths (79 per cent) reported that the cost of living crisis was causing additional problems for the people with whom they work.
- ▶ Recruitment and retention is one of the biggest challenges facing the profession (54 per cent cite this).
- ▶ Over half (57 per cent) say that peer support has the most positive impact on their workplace experience.
- ▶ Three quarters (75 per cent) of respondents reported feeling unable to complete their work during their contracted hours.
- ▶ Almost one-quarter (23 per cent) of those who felt unable to complete their work within their contracted

hours reported working ten or more additional hours per week, largely unpaid.

- ▶ Almost half of respondents (49.5 per cent) reported having been verbally abused while working and almost a quarter (24 per cent) had been threatened with physical violence.
- ▶ Respondents' views on how the public perceive social work and social workers, already negative last year, has worsened slightly.

The positives

Peer support was found to have the most positive impact on the workplace experience. The same was found in 2021, but this year saw a marked increase from the previous survey with almost three-fifths (57 per cent) citing peer support in their top three for having the most positive impact, compared to fewer than half last year.

When asked whether they were now working in a higher pay band or grade than when they joined the profession, almost four-fifths of respondents (79 per cent) reported that they were.

Just over three-fifths of respondents (62 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that they were happy in their current role, slightly up on last year.

Almost two-thirds of respondents (64 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that they felt secure in their current role with almost a quarter (24.5 per cent) disagreeing.

And when asked if there are sufficient opportunities to advance their careers, results provided an even split with two-fifths agreeing (44 per cent) and two-fifths disagreeing (40 per cent).

Challenges

Workload came top when respondents were asked to choose the three biggest challenges to them in their workplace (45 per cent).

The biggest challenge to the profession as a whole was

IN FOCUS

seen to be the 'failure to adequately fund social care' (68 per cent of respondents listed this in their top three), with recruitment and retention coming close behind at 54 per cent.

When asked to rate their confidence in the UK government to improve conditions for social work practice from one (poor) to ten (excellent) the average rating was 1.71.

The same question was asked in Northern Ireland (1.62), Scotland (3.59) and Wales (3.09).

In the last twelve months 72 per cent of respondents across the nations had signed a petition.

Career progression

The top three barriers were: limited number of promotional opportunities (32 per cent), not enough opportunities to advance in my area or specialism (26 per cent) and lack of time off for training or development (20 per cent).

Ten per cent of respondents overall reported being agency workers, with 70 per cent citing pay as the main advantage, followed by flexibility, and three quarters (75 per cent) having no plans to change this employment status.

Despite the trend towards agency work, three quarters of student social workers said they plan to apply for their first job with an employer like a local authority.

Workload

Respondents were also asked about their workload and whether or not they worked additional hours.

A worrying 75 per cent of respondents reported that they are currently unable to complete all of their work within their contracted hours.

And just over half (52 per cent) disagreed that they could 'manage my current workload', up from 38 per cent last year.

Respondents were asked if they worked additional hours outside their contracted hours. Almost three quarters (74.5 per cent) said they worked between one and fifteen hours over a week, and ten per cent reported working more than 15 extra hours a week. A shocking 90 per cent received no overtime for additional hours.

Bullying, harassment and discrimination

One of the most troubling findings in 2021 was that around two-fifths of respondents had either personally experienced or been aware of someone experiencing bullying, discrimination or harassment in their workplace. The 2022 survey contained further questions around these experiences.

Again, almost two-fifths of respondents (38 per cent) reported that they had either personally experienced bullying, harassment and/or discrimination in the workplace, or were aware of someone who had.

The most common experiences were bullying, harassment and/or discrimination (61.5 per cent);

someone confiding that they had experienced this (55 per cent), and witnessing behaviour that could be seen as bullying, harassment and/or discrimination (42 per cent).

The most common reasons given were professional grievance (37 per cent), ethnicity (33 per cent) other (20 per cent) and gender (18 per cent).

Managers or someone more senior were cited as the cause in 58 and 45 per cent of responses, respectively.

Abuse

Respondents were asked about experiences of abuse from people using services during the past 12 months.

Nearly half (49 per cent) had experienced verbal abuse, and 24 per cent had threats of physical violence. The most common reason given for abuse was frustration (35 per cent) or a known history of violent or abusive behaviour (28 per cent).

Cost of living

With increasing rates of poverty being experienced across the UK in 2022, and a growing squeeze on the income of families and individuals, the 2022 survey introduced a new section on the impact of the cost of living crisis.

Almost half of respondents (49.8 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the number of people they worked with had increased as the cost of living had increased. The survey also asked whether, in the experience of respondents, the people they worked with were being driven deeper into poverty as a consequence of the cost of living crisis. This produced a striking result, with three-quarters of respondents (76 per cent) agreeing or strongly agreeing. Unusually for this type of question, more respondents were in strong agreement than in agreement.

Respondents were asked whether the cost of living crisis was causing additional problems for the people with whom they work. Almost four-fifths (79 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed.

Finally, respondents were asked whether they were supporting more people with their own resources as the cost of living has increased, a trend that can also be seen with other professions (such as teachers) in the shared concern for those with whom they work. Almost one-third (32.7 per cent) reported that they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

Three quarters of respondents reported that the cost-of-living crisis had driven the people they were working with into deeper poverty



The latest BASW annual survey was answered by 1,602 social workers. It was conducted across the four nations between 8 December 2022 and 9 January 2023 and was open to member and non-member social workers. Most respondents worked in England and qualified more than ten years ago. More than half were experienced social workers and a quarter were managers, practice leaders, consultants or principal social workers. Two-thirds were employees, and a quarter were independent, self-employed or agency workers.

In defence of agency social workers



Though much-maligned, locums do some of the most difficult work in local authorities, preventing the workforce from collapse.

Instead of vilifying them, the profession needs to address why so many people leave local authority employment, writes an anonymous agency worker

In my 15 years working in permanent roles for local authorities I've had some great experiences and, unfortunately, some truly awful ones. The stories I could tell about awful working conditions are endless. Not that I focus on these. The accomplishments sit far better than the battle scars we all gather along the way.

But the long story short is that I left local authority social work after those 15 years. I didn't want to and it was the hardest choice I've ever made because for many of us this work is a calling.

I'm one of those workers that was failed as a child and who as a result practises in the most child-focused way. Not because I learnt it in a lecture room or on placement, but because I lived vulnerability in my formative years.

Locum work has kept me practising. I'm not embroiled in all the politics and entrenched issues. I can just do the job where it's most needed. I never just up and leave a role, always giving a month notice, ensure things are polished and tidy, and always have excellent references.

I have received praise directly from Ofsted, the courts, heads of service and others for my practice. In my last locum position I worked so hard that I only had five children to hand over out of caseload of 30.

My current locum role is being made permanent. It's a new, innovative way of working and after three months of hard slog it's off the ground. It was supposed to be a six month contract to see how it goes and I'm proud that I've done myself out of a job in half the time.

Locum work is much harder, cases are often in a terrible state after permanent workers have left or gone off on long term sick. It's the saddest thing to see the job crush people. Only those who have seen it, experienced it, really understand the deep sadness of burnout. If it happens in the police you get pensioned off early.

My first locum role covered long-term sickness of a truly wonderful woman who had been crushed and I'll never forget how grateful she was when I handed back a caseload in a much better place. I'd crossed the 't's and dotted the 'i's and she felt she could return to her role and breathe, dare I say, enjoy the role again.

In the few locum positions I've had, my experience is that we are doing the roles that local authorities cannot recruit for or find someone to step in and cover when things have gone badly wrong for permanent staff.

We rock up, get our heads down and turn things around while knowing full well that the authority's objective is to recruit permanently and, at any given moment, we

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could get a week's notice to end our contract because we've contributed largely to making things better.

We do this tirelessly day-in-day-out without moaning, without taking holiday or sick leave, for children, young people and their families and our permanent comrades. We want them (the senior managers) to be able to recruit permanently. We want them to fix working conditions and pay but recognise that most of this is out of their control. That, like us, they are just trying to do the best they can in a broken system to improve the lives of the vulnerable.

None of us is comfortable that we've had to work through a middleman to keep us hanging on in there or that our role only exists because of how bad things get for permanent workers.

I'm against project workers who get paid ridiculous rates and caseload protection. So far this week alone (it's Wednesday as I write) I've received two emails about project work, one offering £70 per hour, the other £7,000 gross per annum.

Contrary to what the powers that be would have you believe, we are not money grabbers. On many occasions I have been alarmed by the number of students who have gone straight into locum work, or are planning to straight after graduating, without the support and guidance of the assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE). The sad thing is that they all just burn out too quickly.

The ASYE programme is there for a reason. Newly qualified social workers need the ASYE programme and experience under their belt before transferring to locum work, if that's what they choose.

My experience has never been of a 'them and us' culture between locums and permanent workers. Permanent workers have always shown gratitude that we're there picking up the worst parts of the job. Many feel they couldn't look at locum work because it really is the hard end of social work.

I've known a few move over to locum work solely because they've felt driven out by working conditions – not because they think the grass is any greener, but because they hold on to practising by the skin of their teeth. Just like I did.

With locums paying tax, National Insurance and pension contributions, the apprenticeship levy, umbrella payroll costs, plus not benefiting from sick or holiday pay, the financial difference to many is not worth it. They just leave the profession altogether.

I agree we need to resolve the recruitment, retention and funding issues. But I do not feel that regulating to cap locum rates, as is being suggested, will do anything towards this.

In the Midlands, a memorandum of understanding capped locums rates, something the government is looking to extend. It worked for a short period, while retention bonuses were live. But it drove locum social workers out of the area, worsening work conditions, because even the sticking plaster of retention bonuses couldn't stop burnout. More permanent staff left, ultimately resulting in a number of local authorities opting out of the cap to fill vacant positions.

A longer period is required to stabilise the workforce



and address working conditions along with pay for permanent staff.

When I started local authority work in 2007 in an unqualified post, my salary was £32,500 with an essential car users allowance of approximately £100 a month. When I left in 2021 as a qualified senior social worker, my salary was £31,500 with no essential car user allowance.

For those that don't understand the essential car user allowance, it was there to cover wear and tear, vehicle maintenance, business insurance, MOTs, road tax and breakdown cover, and could be swapped for a company vehicle.

It was scrapped in 2010 and we have since been expected to cover these costs out of our gross salaries. Address the issues of working conditions and pay and there won't be any vacancies for locums to fill.

The latest workforce figures state that 18 per cent of social workers in England are locum. Vacancies are at an all-time high of 7,900. Local authorities report locum workers are covering these.

Some 5,400 social workers left the profession in 2022, an increase of nine per cent on the previous year.

The profession needs to address why so many of us are leaving the profession instead of vilifying those of us who have found safe ways to continue in practice. I am acutely aware of the concurrent movement to ignore our voices and recruit from overseas.

Cap my rates and I'll be off. I'll grieve, hard, for a profession I am so proud to be part of, then shake myself down, regroup and most likely start a cleaning business or something. A friend is a cleaner and earns 32.5 per cent more per hour than permanent social workers.

I'll be available to clean your houses when you're reeling from burnout as a result of having no locums to fill your vacancies...

'Contrary to what the powers that be would have you believe we are not money grabbers'

Malcolm Jordan's epic book *Social Work and Proud* was 30 years in the making and spans 172-years. One reviewer says of it: 'I have never read anything quite like this before.'

Shahid Naqvi spoke to the 89-year-old author and BASW member about a unique contribution to the profession

Life of Malcolm

It starts when Dickens was in his prime and ends with Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

BASW member Malcolm Jordan's memoir *Social Work and Proud 1850 – 2022* is an epic: an extraordinarily ambitious fusion of social work, world and personal history that, somehow, works.

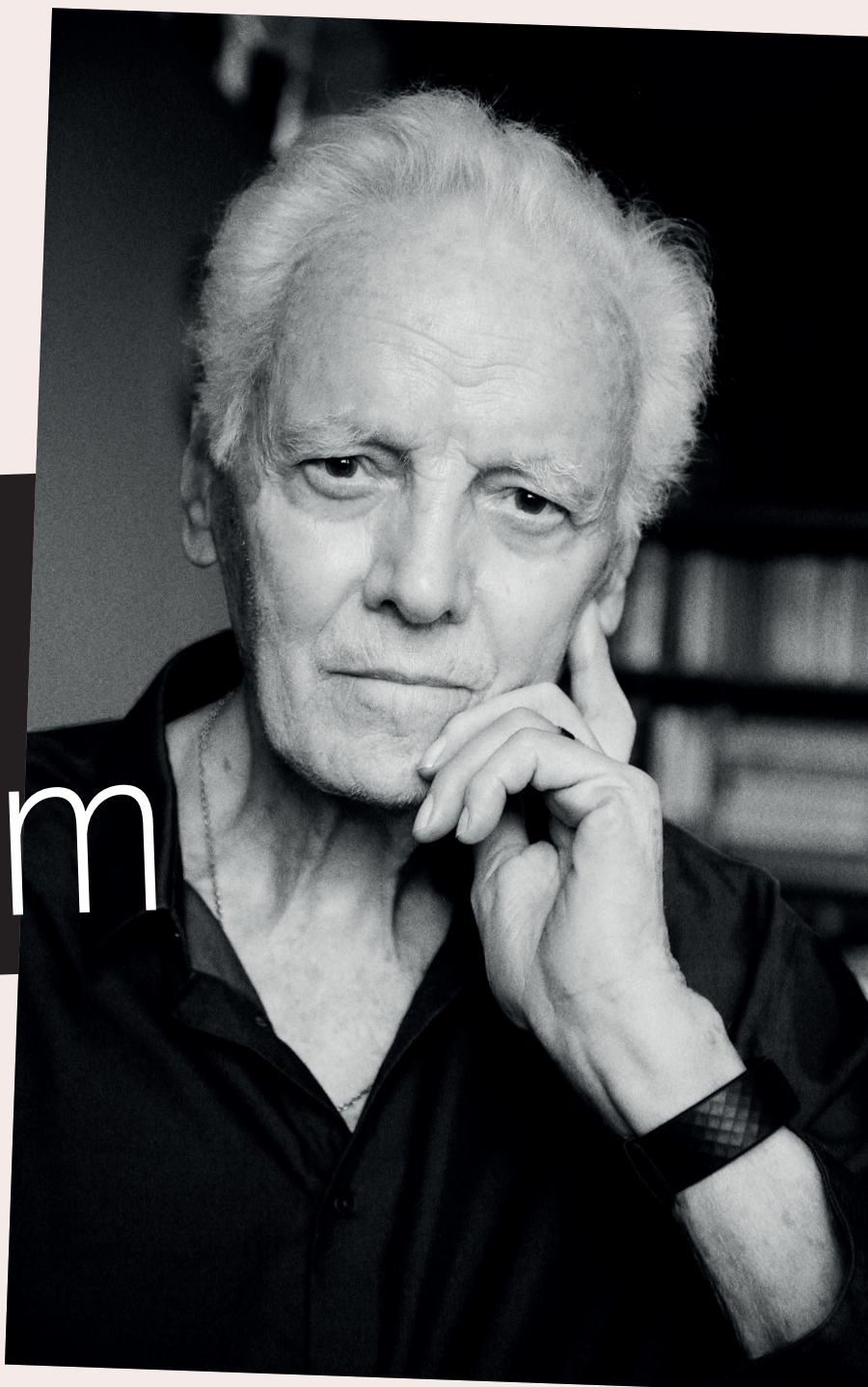
What makes it more extraordinary is that Malcolm has lived through more than half of the 172-year period in question. Aged 89, he is one of BASW's longest serving members and is currently a serving executive of the Social Workers Union.

Social Work and Proud, which has been 30 years in the making, is his "definitive view of social work".

It is also a highly readable and authoritative social, political and cultural history spanning nearly two centuries that puts social work in its wider context.

"Looking back, you can see how it all relates. That's what really got me," says Malcolm referring to the interconnection of personal, social work and world history.

"I wasn't particularly interested in history myself, apart from having lived through it. I started writing the book when my wife and I were on holiday in my mid-50s in a tiny Turkish village with nothing much happening. I got a pen and paper and started writing and kept going. It grew and grew."



Malcolm covers an astonishing breadth of developments. The origins of social work are described in an account of the Charity Organisation Society (COS) set up in 1869 for the purpose of "regulating the charitable flow of help by assessment of need and application of appropriate help".

The society's investigative methods, however, were disliked and described as "brutal" by one Labour MP.

An early experiment in preventative work in Peckham at the turn of the last century has relevance today. Malcolm writes: "The founders believed that health could be conceived as contagious, in the same way as a disease. In the right environment people could 'infect' themselves with 'wellbeing' or happiness. Within a large building was established a club where, for a small subscription, people

SOCIAL WORK AND PROUD

could use the gym, eat carefully prepared organic fresh food and take advantage of a swimming pool, a creche and regular medical examinations to forestall ill health.”

And in case anyone thought high caseloads and lack of resources is a modern phenomenon, think again. Research Malcolm was involved in while a social work academic in Maidstone shows it was as much of an issue in 1970 as now.

A survey of 245 social workers at the time showed 58 per cent had caseloads of between 50 and 99 in children's services. It found: “The most frequent complaint concerned poor resources to enable the social workers to see clients. This increased the existing pressure from too heavy caseloads, crowded offices, lack of privacy and clerical help and too much minor administration falling to professional staff.”

Malcolm believes the creation of generic social work departments, based on the ambitions of the Seebohm Report, was the best of times.

“I was entirely devoted to Seebohm,” he says. “You compare that to social work today which, as I understand it, is all about shortage of resources. Apart from all the time spent filling computer forms in, it is all about self-protection.”

He blames the Conservative premiership of Margaret Thatcher for the latter. “The Thatcherite thing was that you have to have targets; trying to pretend you are a business when you are not. You can clock up a sale but you can't clock up success in social work. It just doesn't fit but we are being forced into that. All this data collection is crap in my view.”

In his book, Malcolm applauds New Labour's Sure Start programme of multi-agency support in communities as an initiative of which the party “should always be very proud”.

However, he criticises the Blair government's continuing focus on target-setting and value for money in public services.

“How they accepted the basis of that I never really understood. It is responsible for some of the problems we have today.

“You are under pressure, your manager is under pressure because he has targets to meet, your manager's manager is under pressure...”

Malcolm laments the split of children's and adults services brought in by the Children's Act 2004, a response to Lord Laming's critical report into the death of Victoria Climbié.

Now finding themselves in multi-agency teams, social workers found it increasingly hard to “maintain their role and professional values against more powerful professions”, says Malcolm.

He correlates this period with the growth in social workers becoming independents and

using their skills “outside the bustle and pressure of the over-bureaucratised offices”.

The post-Laming expectation that child deaths from neglect or abuse “will never happen again” increased the pressure on children's social workers, observes Malcolm.

It did happen again, with the death of Peter Connelly – Baby P – in 2007, and Malcolm writes: “The effect of financial cuts, the consequent shortage of staff, the increasing use of agency staff, the time taken on tick box bureaucracy (increased by the Laming Inquiry into Victoria Climbié) lack of supervision, overbearing computerisation with macho managerialism and continued failure of inter-agency communication all played a part in this tragedy.”

Decrying the erosion of community-based practice, he adds: “These tragedies underlie the main issue of modern social work. Staff need time to build relationships, which means more time with service users and much less time in the office.”

Malcolm does, however, see cause for optimism in the current direction of travel within children's social care in England. The government's focus on preventative work through the creation of family hubs within communities is one he welcomes.

“This whole thing called community work needs to be front and centre. I welcome the family hubs, but they need to be right in the community, not five or ten miles away.”

In his book, Malcolm describes the “chameleon-like personality” of social workers. “At the end of the day you are dealing with every part of society,” he says.

“When I was working in Kent, I was called out in the middle of the night for a very famous violinist who was in a manic state. The next day you are talking to someone who is homeless.”

Though chameleon-like, social workers must always follow their core values “despite the particular colour of their current surroundings”, he says.

“I have always applied my basic understanding of values to all the work I have done. I have never deviated from that.”

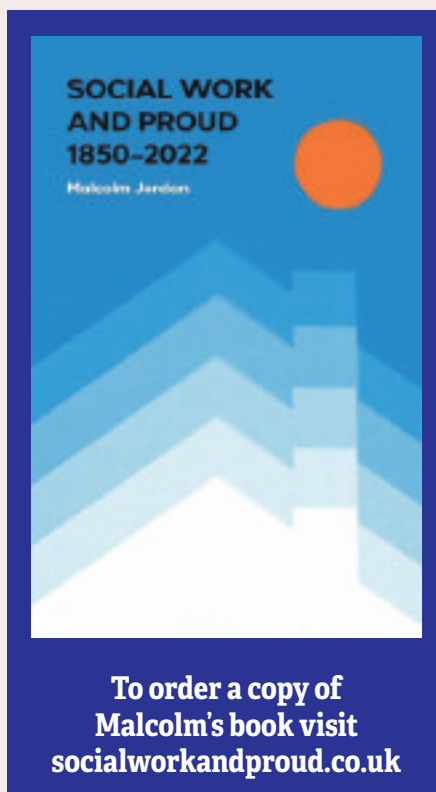
Asked to define how he sees social work, Malcolm says: “To ease the pain. It's a bit above the medical one of to do no harm.”

So what advice would this stalwart of social work give to the next generation coming into the profession?

“Throughout your career you are going to do really good things for people and improve the lives of people in society, if you do it well. That is quite a privilege.”

He hopes to increase understanding of social work through his book, which he says is not just for social workers but anyone who is “interested in social science or society at large”.

‘I have always applied my basic understanding of values to all the work I have done. I have never deviated from that’



MEMOIRS OF A SOCIAL WORKER

In a career spanning four decades, **Sam Waterhouse** has seen it all. Here he talks about the often intolerable pressure of working in an under-resourced local authority children's services department

“Nobody heard him, the dead man,
But still he lay moaning:
I was much further out than
you thought.
And not waving but drowning.”

I guess most social workers will read the above stanza from Stevie Smith's poem 'Not Waving but Drowning' and relate very closely to it. Social work is beyond doubt a stressful job, dealing with sexual and physical abuse, neglect, poverty, domestic violence and so on. I could probably fill the page with a list of the traumas that we encounter daily. Yet it would be easy to count on the fingers of one hand local authorities that have in place effective interventions to alleviate these pressures.

Some years ago, I was seconded to manage an exceptionally busy urban team. The previous manager left a copy of her exit interview on my desk. In short, she wrote that the job was untenable, the organisation dysfunctional and that it had made her ill. Most sensible people would probably run a mile on finding this, not me though. I went in with confidence that I could turn things around, so applied for the permanent job.

The following week I walked into the managers' meeting and was greeted by a burly, red-faced colleague who said: "Have you lost the plot?" Chuckling ironically, he pointed out he was married to my somewhat broken predecessor.

A well-respected retiree advised me the team ran on adrenaline and had little time to think things through. It had developed a reputation as the "child snatch squad", possibly a response to the relentless bombardment of referrals the team received. A vicious cycle of stress, self-sacrifice and scapegoating inevitably fuels risk aversity.

My reflection now is that one of my flaws is seeing everything as a challenge. As a lifelong cyclist (not a very good one to be fair) the metaphor is pedalling up a big hill – try hard and you get to the top. This is not the case in social work. We all know the well-worn clichés: being parachuted in, thrown in at the deep end and set up to fail. To pursue the cycling analogy, if you realise you can't reach the summit, your heart pounds and you turn round, gently freewheeling back down. As we all know, in our job there is no way of escaping the constantly crushing palpitations.

My new team comprised of nine. Three were still undergoing training, two were social work assistants and only the remaining four were qualified. The authority had

Not Waving



developed a work around whereby the qualified workers nominally held all of the team's cases but in reality, the unqualified ones were working them.

On my arrival the team's longest serving social worker was holding 45 child protection cases. Within weeks she quit, saying she could no longer cope with the pressure. The rumour going round among the service managers was that in her 50s, she was no longer up to the job. Hardly a fair assessment, given the severe stress she had been subjected to.

Those still standing survived on chips, coffee and chocolate. More worryingly, heavy drinking, smoking and, in some cases, cocaine abuse had all been developed as "coping mechanisms". I was not immune to these vices and found myself going out straight after work on a Friday and leading the not so healthy lifestyle of drinking heavily and finding myself at 2am in the kebab shop. Most of the weekend was then written off by vicious hangovers. I found the most effective way to get rid of them was a few more pints the following day.

MEMOIRS OF A SOCIAL WORKER



but Drowning

The workers all suffered in their different ways. One had a photo of Baby Peter on her desk. She said it helped her to stay focused and to overcome the pressure of exhaustion. A dedicated professional, she got upset during care proceedings when a solicitor for the family accused her of obsessing with minutiae. A more generous appraisal would have recognised her attention to detail.

During supervision she confessed to spending most of her weekends writing up case notes through fear of accusations she was not doing her job properly. Another worker had detached from her caseload, in a manner like victims of abuse. What does this say about the role? Absolutely overwhelmed, she seemed paralysed by the volume of work she had been given.

The cocaine addicted worker didn't stay around long. It's very difficult to sustain a highly pressured job with these issues. There were suspicions that she was taking money from unattended purses and snorting in the toilets. Not surprisingly she didn't ask me for a reference and fell off my radar for a while. Incredibly, she then re-emerged as a team manager in another part of the authority. This was

despite her 'Class A' issues being known about.

The worker I felt most sorry for was a trainee. She had come into the profession with strong values and commitment. She was working four sets of care proceedings when it should have been none. In supervision she told me that she couldn't sleep and would regularly wake at 4am to write court statements. I suggested that this was unlikely to help.

Due to her being unqualified I would regularly attend court with her. Late one day I have a distinct memory of sprinting up the court steps, my pulse throbbing against my stiffened shirt collar, a sensation of my tie choking me. I had put on weight due to my unhealthy lifestyle. To add to the embarrassment, or shall we say comedic farce, as I was cramming a flapjack down in the lift, the doors slowly opened and the family who we were in contest with were all standing in front of me. Smiling, they were surprisingly empathetic, one of them saying: "You have your dinner, mate."

In many of the cases, due to a lack of local authority solicitors, we were represented by locums. This meant having to start again outlining the case only to receive conflicting advice to that given by the previous ones. Shortly after I left the team the trainee quit the profession, choosing instead to work as a learning mentor in a school. A loss, as despite the pressures, she produced some highly commended work. Even middle managers were not immune. They adopted a culture of "sleep working", sending incoherent emails in the middle of the night. Insomnia was clearly pervasive.

Undoubtedly the most serious incident was a worker in another team who, under severe stress, developed psychotic depression. She believed she could fly. Despite feeling loyalty and love for her two-year-old daughter, she jumped off the roof of a multi-storey car park.

Our colleague landed feet first, shattering both legs and was very lucky to be alive.

Some months later in our grim, greying monolithic 1970s office, a man jumped off the car park roof opposite. He was not so lucky and was killed instantly, the police shrouding him in a heavy woollen blanket. A service manager walked into the office and glibly said: "It's not one of ours, is it?" Ten minutes later our director, generally known as a corporate psychopath, sent an email instructing people to not look out of the window. Talk about shutting the gate.

After two years I began to experience chronic panic attacks, my heart pounding, sweat pouring off me. I went to my doctor who said she could give me temazepam, but I would not be able to drive. She asked me if I felt suicidal. A lump in my throat choked me. Eventually I was signed off with stress and it all got very dark for a while.

And the authority's paltry response to everything above? An independent counselling line was contracted in. Human resources complained that no workers ever used it.

Maybe they were too busy drowning, not waving.

Sam Waterhouse is a newly retired social worker who spent most of his career in the south of England. Next time, he writes about working in a psychiatric hospital – you can read it in *PSW's* ebulletin on Thursday, 13 April. Names and details have been changed where appropriate to protect identities

IN FOCUS

The scales of INJUSTICE

On her first visit to court as a social work student, **Clare Patrick** bore witness to the power imbalances that perpetuate inequalities

Following my visit to a court as a social work student, my initial feelings were an overarching sense of bemusement about the process. I felt like there was a rulebook I had not been given. I found much of the language used in the courtroom alien, and so for a service user I imagine the legal jargon could act as a real barrier to understanding and effective participation in court processes. Defendants must be able to understand and effectively participate in their trials – this is reflected in Article 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998, which states that everyone has the right to a fair trial. Article 6 also states that, if necessary, defendants should have their understanding facilitated through access to resources and legal aid.

Austerity cuts, however, have meant that safety nets like legal aid, which are meant to protect the vulnerable, have diminished. We are then left with a judicial process that is far from 'fair' because there is insufficient support for vulnerable defendants, which limits them from effectively participating in and understanding proceedings. Here, social injustice is perpetuated because vulnerable defendants are not given equity and the opportunity to fight their charges in the same way that someone with a more robust education and/or economic background is.

This contrasts with our core values and ethics as social workers. Our code of ethics states that we should challenge the abuse of human rights and be prepared to challenge oppressive practices that exclude people from participating in decisions that affect them. The code also stipulates that we should promote social justice and challenge oppression, which in this context might mean legal jargon that is exclusionary, disempowering, and oppressive as it does not allow for the delivery of services in a way that is appropriate for the people who use them.

Social workers are always trying to balance care and control. However, in court it seemed as though the scales tipped in favour of power and privilege at the expense of the vulnerable. The marginalisation that the defendants perhaps already feel in society could well have



contributed to the reasons as to why they were in court that day, and yet these vulnerabilities were only intensified by the courtroom. I wondered if the effects of this would entrench them further into the criminal justice system.

There seems to be no holistic consideration of a defendant. No personal, cultural and social model or social graces are used to help understand the intersectionality of oppression that defendants might face. There is no consideration that defendants are in fact products of their environment. This lack of opportunity for sociological imagination makes for unempathetic

IN FOCUS

courtroom practices and fearsome conditions for the welfare class.

If people were to truly receive a fair trial, the makeup of the professionals in the courtroom would reflect the diversity of the community in which they serve. However, from my observations, the judges were disproportionately white, middle class, older men. Statistics back up this observation.

It is the privileged few in parliament who create and pass legislation, and it is also the privileged few who interpret such legislation and hand down sentences to people who, in the main, they do not represent. I wondered if the judges had experience of the realities that those who make up the larger proportion of society face. If judges pass sentences that do not embody empathy, particularly for the socio-economic conditions that influence someone's experience of reality and that are beyond an individual's control, then I question whether it is truly a fair trial.

I wondered whether the judges, when they put on their gowns, undergo a transformation of character that allowed them to display such dominance and power, or had they internalised their success? Did they leave behind their individual identities to embody the state

and all the power and control that it encapsulates, even if it was factors involving luck and inherited privileges that had earned them at least a portion of their success? They did not earn their sex or skin colour. I wondered if they considered their privilege when passing down their judgments and, equally, I wondered if they considered the defendant's lack of it.

The implications of this for defendants are potentially significant because judges might be less sensitive to their lived experience. Perhaps from this I have learnt that for every privilege there is exploitation.

I can see how judges who might lack experience of, for example, living in poverty, might make judgments that lack empathy for oppression. In this way I think that inequalities are not only highlighted but reinforced in the courtroom, which then perpetuates the growing gap between the rich and poor that political conditions create.

Professionals in the courtroom, in turn, perpetuate neoliberalist doctrines which add momentum to the cycle of disadvantage. Perhaps that is why the profile of the general prison population is one of people from disadvantage.

Conservative governments prioritise neoliberalist policies as witnessed in austerity cuts, tighter budgets and the rationing of services which means that everyone, including the most economically disadvantaged, is left to rely more on their own capabilities. Those who cannot equip themselves with a good standard of legal services in order to help them overcome barriers, such as interpreting legal jargon, don't get a fighting chance.

My experience underlined the need for social workers to slow down their thinking, making their thinking processes conscious and thorough to prevent them placing unsuitable blame on individuals for the circumstances they find themselves in. Perhaps doing this will allow us to connect matters of agency and individual challenges on a micro level to societal issues on a macro level while also illuminating the conductive nature of influence between the two.

This will inform my future thinking. It will allow me to ask myself whether the negative behaviour of an individual is really something that they themselves can take full ownership for. Or is that individual's behaviour, at least partially, a result of some greater longstanding societal influence within that person's environment?

My experience of being in court has spurred me to promote greater understanding and compassion within the legal system. I will investigate further the political rhetoric that is promoted by our government which invests in neoliberalism without due consideration or empathy for the impact on people's lives. This ideology perpetuates social injustice and has caused me to question my own relationship between social structure and agency and whether much of our pathway is already predetermined.



‘There is no consideration that defendants are in fact products of their environment’

IN FOCUS

Counsellor **Ellie Finch** and psychologist **Joanna Griffin** are both parents of disabled children. Here they highlight the discrimination and stigma parents like them face – and how social workers can best support them

Parents of disabled children are at greater risk of poor mental health. One study suggests they are one-and-a-half times more likely to be depressed and anxious than parents of non-disabled children.

Some of the additional stressors families with a disabled child experience may be connected to the child's medical condition, but the majority relate to the social context in which families suddenly find themselves.

On top of financial and housing pressures or being unable to work, they can experience stigma and discrimination. Sometimes this takes the form of double discrimination where there are overlapping or intersecting social identities, such as ethnicity or the parent's own diagnosis. As a result, parents often report poorer physical as well as mental health.

Parent carer blame

Parent carers often have more than one professional involved in their family life with the aim of providing greater support. At times, though, this can create conflict, invasion of privacy, and feelings of vulnerability.

A report published last year, *Parent Carer Blame*, found that the 'one-size-fits-all' approach of local authorities in England can lead to difficulties.

It highlighted that even when parent carers sought support for their disabled child, social workers were primarily concerned with safeguarding issues or parental failings rather than support needs.

The report states: "Parents felt the process to be 'humiliating'; 'bullying'; 'devastating'; [they] likened it to 'the police turning up at your door and [saying] we've got a warrant to search your house.'"

So how can social workers avoid becoming embroiled in an adversarial relationship with parent carers?

Know the law

An important place to start is knowing the law.

The Children and Families Act 2014 defines a parent carer as "a person aged 18 or over who provides or intends to provide care for a disabled child for whom the person has parental responsibility".

The Act describes the conditions that need to be met for a local authority to undertake a Parent Carer's Needs Assessment (PCNA). These include identifying that a parent carer needs support or that there has been a request from the parent carer for an assessment, and

PARENT CARERS

we can and should do better by them



Joanna Griffin (top) and Ellie Finch

that the family and child are eligible for services under Section 17.

According to the *Parent Carer Blame* report some local authorities are using unlawful eligibility criteria to turn down parents who request a PCNA. Seventy per cent of families stated that they either never knew the PCNA existed or had to find the information themselves.

Trusting the parent's lived experience

In 2022, BASW published *Fabricated or Induced Illness and Perplexing Presentations: Abbreviated Practice Guide for Social Work Practitioners*.

The guidance outlines concerns about parents being falsely accused of fabricated or induced illness (FII) – where a parent causes harm to their child by claiming they have an illness – and asks that there is a recognition of the very low incidence of FII.

Social workers often find themselves in the difficult situation of gatekeeping resources. It is possible that FII offers us a concrete solution that takes that pressure off us as professionals. And this could potentially mean professionals are doubting parents more than they should.

Working with parent carers, who are often the experts on their child's diagnosis and needs, can establish a collaborative partnership, rather than a 'us and them' relationship which is detrimental to both parties.

Stages of support for parent carers

► **Understanding emotions:** recognising the emotional impact on parent carers includes having a basic understanding of how emotions affect people's wellbeing and behaviour. Parents report feeling a "rollercoaster" of emotions. Empathy and meeting the family where they are can help to build connections. People under significant stress are more likely to react instinctively. When carers are overwhelmed or exhausted, seemingly harmless comments can be taken as criticism or judgement.



► **A chance to talk:** often, parents have not had a chance to talk in an open and receptive environment. In the first instance it may be helpful to listen to the person's concern with compassion. There may not always be a solution but the act of sharing experiences may alleviate some concerns.

► **Supporting wellbeing:** parent carer wellbeing can be supported when professionals relate to them in an empathic and empowering way. This includes avoiding comparison to other families – people want services that are personalised to their families' needs.

► **Practical support:** short breaks or appropriate educational interventions can be a big help. When social workers help coordinate different services and appointments or attend meetings to support them, this reduces the parents' load.

► **Group support:** parent carers often report feeling isolated and being part of a supportive special needs parents group has considerable benefits for mental health. Providing a social scaffold to help access support is one way a professional can help.

► **Specialist emotional support:** sometimes parents benefit from accessing more specialist emotional support. Services that offer flexibility in their appointment systems, or offer online sessions, may help those who find it hard to arrange appropriate childcare for their child.

Having knowledge of the context in which parent carers find themselves, including awareness of the social model of disability, is also helpful.

There is a list of emotional support services for parent carers at www.affinityhub.uk.

Looking after yourself as a professional

Connecting with families who are in acute distress is challenging and having a reflective space is vital to enable practitioners to manage day-to-day demands. This includes thinking about your own beliefs and assumptions about disability.

You may find yourself in an institution that doesn't value reflective space and it may be helpful to work with management on developing good practice in this area.

* For confidentiality purposes, the case studies in this article have been amalgamated and anonymised.

CASE STUDY

Neeta's son was diagnosed with a life-limiting condition at the age of one. Neeta was advised by a charity to seek support from social services. She called up social services and after a brief chat on the phone, was told they did not consider her and her son eligible for assessment or support.

Neeta gave up and struggled alone with depression and feeling overwhelmed. A few years later she moved to a different local authority and sought support again. She received the same response.

She had a friend who worked in a different children with disabilities team who was shocked at the lack of support Neeta was getting and helped her draft a letter to her local authority.

In this letter Neeta's friend helped her to refer to the Children and Families Act 2014. They also spelled out the nature of Neeta's son's condition.

This was emotionally hard for Neeta as it involved detailing the challenges she had been facing as a parent carer, the severity of her son's condition and the grim statistics on her son's likelihood of surviving to adulthood.

The next day Neeta got a call from the social services manager apologising and offering to send a social worker round to do a carer's assessment straight away.

Her family now receives direct payments to pay carers for their son, enabling Neeta to have some precious time to focus on other areas of her life and family needs.

TOP FIVE TIPS

- Parent carers are at greater risk of poor mental health
- Know the law and ensure families are informed of their rights and support
- Be sensitive to each individual family and avoid comparisons
- Treat parents in an empathic and empowering way; work with families to identify strengths and solutions
- Look after your own wellbeing, then you are in a better position to support others

Ellie Finch is a counsellor and social worker who specialises in supporting families of children with additional needs. Dr Joanna Griffin is a counselling psychologist and author of *Day by Day: Emotional Wellbeing in Parents of Disabled Children*. She runs www.affinityhub.uk which signposts to support for parent carers. Thanks to Laura Burchett for support with this article

Eurocentric and white

challenging racism within our mental health services

Social workers have a vital role to play in challenging a system that can be oppressive to people from ethnic minority backgrounds. **Dr Narinder Bansal**, who led research in the area, and mental health social workers **Tom Baines** and **Samali Kalubowila**, who supported the study, explain why

Drivers of ethnic inequalities in mental healthcare

Ethnic inequalities in mental healthcare have been widely reported across the Northern hemisphere. People from non-majority ethnic groups (commonly referred to as 'ethnic minority') are more likely to have undiagnosed mental illness and come into services through involuntary pathways, such as compulsory detention, compared to the majority ethnic group.

In the UK, these disparate patterns of access and treatment have persisted for over 50 years despite significant research, policy and legal efforts to understand and tackle inequality.

In our recent study, *Understanding ethnic inequalities in mental healthcare in the UK*, we found that tensions around power, identity and knowledge drive ethnic inequalities in service access, experience and outcomes.

This relates to the characteristics of services and how these conflict with the everyday experiences of people from ethnically diverse groups. A key finding was that prevailing biomedical models of healthcare, which centralise a "European" and "white" experience to the exclusion of alternative ideas of mental health and healthcare, are major barriers to equitable care.

Services fail to recognise the influence of social factors,

particularly racism, both as a cause of mental ill-health and as a driver of poor treatment within health services. Current methods of assessment and treatment were seen to exclude the wider everyday realities of people's lives, including religion and stresses associated with migration. These clinical approaches were widely experienced as disempowering and either created or exacerbated feelings of injustice.

People avoided statutory mental health services due to a perceived absence of relevant knowledge and a fear that they would experience further racist, oppressive, and stigmatising treatment. A sense that the benefits of seeking help did not outweigh these risks meant services were only used as a last resort.

In this way, service avoidance was described as a form of self-preservation for individuals, families and their wider community. Negative experiences within services included racist treatment, oppressive clinical encounters, and pathologisation of cultural behaviours and beliefs. These experiences exacerbated mental distress, mistrust, and fear and resulted in service disengagement.

Mental health professionals from ethnic minority backgrounds, while more likely to identify racist practice, reported feeling too marginalised and disempowered to challenge it and introduce approaches to healthcare which would be more meaningful and appropriate to their diverse patient group.

Implications for mental health social workers

Social workers are well placed to be advocates of anti-oppressive practice, where critical thinking around power and exclusion are core components of training and practice. In addition, the strong focus on self-reflective practice encourages clinicians to be mindful of what they

IN FOCUS

bring to the clinical encounter. However, similar to other professionals working in mental healthcare, there can be a drift and disconnect between professional values and what actually happens in practice, particularly in the face of high caseloads and working in a healthcare system that increasingly prioritises efficiency over care.

In addition, social workers may feel challenged when working in multi-disciplinary teams where the power base for decision-making sits with other professions who may have a less socially-oriented and more biomedical paradigm, such as clinical psychiatry.

In our study, we identified a significant research gap on the experiences of mental health social workers supporting people from ethnically diverse backgrounds. However, mental health social workers in our patient and practitioner advisory group provided examples of how power imbalances between social workers and consultant psychiatrists can act as barriers to holistic care.

This is particularly so when offering an alternative social or cultural/racial perspective during patient assessment. Navigating these power imbalances may be even more difficult for practitioners from ethnic minority backgrounds.

The need for a radical change in mental healthcare

Our study highlights the need for services to be explicitly anti-oppressive and anti-racist in their identity and approach to assessment and treatment. This requires structural changes that go beyond cultural competence training and recruitment of staff from ethnic minority backgrounds.

All practitioners need to be empowered and supported to report concerns and challenge oppressive and racist clinical practice without fear of reprisal, particularly in

multi-disciplinary team settings.

Managers need to demonstrate a willingness to take these reports seriously by taking action when required and not brushing concerns under the carpet. Regular clinical supervision and the creation of safe spaces for practitioners to reflect and talk openly about race, racism and racist care can help facilitate anti-racist practice.

Importantly, there is a need for holistic methods of assessment and treatment that consider the overlapping experiences of oppression relating to racism, migration and complex trauma. This requires all members of the mental health team to be aware of the ways in which repeated experiences of oppression, relating to ethnic and racial identity, shape mental healthcare access and clinical outcomes across diverse ethnic minority groups.

They must also understand how current biomedical and monocultural methods of assessment and treatment can create and perpetuate experiences of oppression.

Our key recommendations are for the inclusion of recent research findings in undergraduate, postgraduate and CPD courses, and for clinical training to be coproduced with people from a wide range of ethnically diverse backgrounds.

‘Tensions around power, identity and knowledge drive ethnic inequalities in service access’

Narinder has worked as an academic in the field of ethnicity and health for 15 years, is an honorary Research Fellow in mental health at the University of Bristol and consultant on the Ethnicity and Mental Health Improvement Project.

Tom is a mental health social worker who currently has a dual role as a psychological practitioner in a recovery team and lead for the Bristol Mentalisation Based Therapy Service.

Samali Kalubowila is a specialist mental health social worker for Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust, working within Bristol's Central and East Crisis Service.



IN FOCUS

Stepping up our understanding of **STEPFAMILIES**

Better training and assessment tools for working with blended families could prevent abuse and neglect, says **Kellie Potter**, herself a stepchild and now a specialist social worker in the field

Stepfamilies are arguably the most complicated set of family systems. Yet in professional practice, and in my role as a social worker, they appear to be the least understood.

It is widely accepted that fathers can often be overlooked, but this also applies to stepparents – at times with very serious consequences. There has been no framework for assessment and barely any recognition of the clear differences between stepfamilies and nuclear families.

Sadly, as a practising social worker, I have come across numerous child abuse and neglect cases where the stepfamily factor was clearly part of the risk.

It is a fact that the overwhelming majority of stepfamilies are not bad or dangerous and the vast majority of stepchildren will not be abused, neglected, or killed. As social workers we know about avoiding stigmatising people – and indeed, most stepfamilies function perfectly well without harming their stepchildren or requiring extra support or help. Yet, we must recognise that many child deaths happen because of stepparenting problems.

It is clear that a very high number of child deaths featured on the news have involved stepparents:

- ▶ 1973 – Maria Colwell, aged six, was killed by her stepfather
- ▶ 1984 – Jasmine Beckford, aged four, was killed by her stepfather
- ▶ 2007 – Peter Connelly, aged one, was killed by his mum's boyfriend
- ▶ 2014 – Daniel Pelka, aged four, was killed by his mum and her boyfriend
- ▶ 2020 – Arthur Labinjo-Hughes, aged six, was killed by his stepmother
- ▶ 2019 – Teddy Mitchell, aged 11 weeks, was killed by his stepfather
- ▶ 2020 – Star Hobson, aged 16 months, died after suffering catastrophic injuries caused by her stepmother
- ▶ 2021 – Logan Mwangi, aged 5, was killed by his mother and stepfather

The circumstances leading to these child deaths are well documented in serious case reviews and practice reviews.

However, there is limited analysis of why there are increased levels of risk where the child is living with a stepparent; analysis such as what might be happening in the parent/child dynamic, what is leading to stepparents (and sometimes the parent) acting in an abusive way, or what could be compromising protective factors from being effective.

Where reports have highlighted the need for better assessment of stepfamilies, I have seen no clear recommendations that a specialist assessment framework is used or that practitioners are trained in understanding the complexities that exist within blended families.

Numerous theories about the risks surrounding stepfamilies exist. For example, research by psychologist Professor Lisa Doodson states that stepmother anxiety and depression rates are higher in stepfamilies. 'Evolutionary perspectives' argue that humans are not biologically programmed to raise other peoples' children.

Daly and Wilson (1988) referred to the mistreatment of stepchildren as the 'Cinderella effect', emphasising

'These children were all at risk, partly because they appeared 'happy and content', even while they suffered horrendous and prolonged abuse'



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the risk of scapegoating. There are numerous other theories that would enable us to properly examine certain situations if we took the time to consider them.

Most parents are not evil, sick, or wilfully cruel and they do not set out to harm a child. However, problems can arise that make situations untenable, and sometimes very quickly. When this happens, any stepchild who lives with a stepparent who cannot adjust to their role could be at risk.

For example, although we generally think babies are cute and cuddly and that their 'appealing' features can keep them safe, numerous stepparent killings have involved babies or very young children. Sadly, their cuteness does not always protect them, neither does their high dependency and inability to tell someone if they are being harmed.

Children with avoidant personalities could be at significant risk. These children are often misperceived as smiling, happy, bright looking children but who suppress their negative emotions to stay out of trouble. Children like Peter Connelly, Daniel Pelka, Star Hobson – these children were all at risk, partly because they appeared 'happy and content', even while they suffered horrendous and prolonged abuse.

As we know, Arthur Labinjo-Hughes' grandparents described his smile as his 'superpower'. It is ironic that Arthur's smile may also have contributed to his death, especially if those around him observed what they believed to be a happy child.

Sadly, many professionals do not understand stepfamily differences, nor do they feel confident to assess the stepfamily factor. Sometimes, they fail to acknowledge stepparents in the first place due to variables, such as if the couple are unmarried, living apart, or the relationship is new.

They may assess that the care of a biological child is good enough and fail to spot the stepchild's 'cry for help'. They may inadvertently



Kate and Rio Ferdinand featured in the BBC documentary *Becoming a Stepfamily*

allow a deceiving parent to blame the stepchild. They may also lack curiosity and struggle to identify discrepancies, for example spotting the difference between a happy child and an avoidant one, or accepting it when a parent says: "I love my stepchild like they are my own flesh or blood."

In 2015, I began working in partnership with Prof Doodson, who is a well-renowned expert in the field of stepfamilies and recently appeared on the BBC documentary *Becoming a Stepfamily* featuring Rio and Kate Ferdinand. Prof Doodson created 'integrated stepfamily therapy', which is a specific programme to support stepfamilies.

With our shared view that better awareness of stepfamilies could prevent abuse, neglect, and child deaths, Prof Doodson and I have worked collaboratively to devise a range of assessment tools to enable professionals to assess stepfamilies with the correct knowledge and confidence.

If we are to improve practice in this area, professionals must understand the complex differences between biological and step families and hold this in the forefront of their minds when assessing or working with such families. They must learn how stepfamilies form, develop, and evolve, and about the unique stresses they face.

Practitioners need to know what makes successful stepfamily situations so they can identify ones that do not work and those that could potentially result in seriously damaging situations for children.

Professionals must assess the developmental histories of individuals and examine any parental problems to identify potential risk families. They must look closely at the parental relationship, the most important union in the family. They must learn how adults define their roles as partners and parents in stepfamily situations and discover how and why things go wrong.

Practitioners should know how to consider the voice of the stepchild in their context and not compare with biological children. This includes how and why problems can arise in adult/child dynamics, and which children could be more vulnerable to harm and neglect.

Professionals need to be curious about the co-parenting situation, the wider family, and their roles. Sometimes friends and family members can alert professionals when they are concerned about harm and neglect, but it is also known they can be easily overlooked or ignored.

Professionals must know how to seek out and provide appropriate interventions that are focused on strengthening stepfamily situations – for example, they need to understand that a basic parenting course is not the same as stepparent intervention. Finally, better understanding and assessments of stepfamilies must become commonplace.

For how to learn more about stepfamilies please contact: kelliepotter@icloud.com

Kellie Potter has 17 years' experience in social work, was a stepchild herself and has successfully step parented. She has undertaken much direct work with stepfamilies and is currently doing a Master's degree exploring theories related to stepparenting.



IN FOCUS

In January, Jan Roberts started a pioneering post as a social worker supporting staff in a hospital trust with issues outside the workplace. Could it be the start of something new?

Shahid Naqvi reports

Jan Roberts' job title is 'workforce social worker'. Based at London's Kings College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, she's responsible for supporting some 14,000 staff in a role believed to be the first of its kind in the UK.

Often when she speaks about it people are "shocked" that nothing like this already exist, says Jan.

"Why do we expect 14,000 people to give their all and we haven't even considered that there are issues they might be dealing with and might need some support as well?"

"We know what is happening in the big wide world – there is a cost of living crisis and a lot of our staff are on low pay. The NHS is stretched at the moment and our workforce is coming in and dealing with a very heavy workload.

"So if they are dealing with issues outside work, that will impact on them. We know one in four women are affected by domestic abuse. If you look at our workforce that is a considerable number of women coming in with potentially difficult domestic situations. We want to help them manage whatever is happening to them socially in a community-based social work way."

The kind of support Jan gives is very different to that offered by the mental health and wellbeing hubs set up to support the health and social care workforce during the pandemic.

"I am talking about the stuff outside the hospital that may be affecting staff," says Jan. "People who come into work who are carers for family with care needs – how can we support them better, or connect them with teams outside in the community?"

"I am looking to set up a carers network within the hospital so they can sit down and share experiences and best practices that can help one another."

Other issues that Jan deals with include substance use, bereavement, and food insecurity. She is planning to use her social work skills to help staff affected by the cost of living crisis.

"The media keeps telling us nurses are going to food banks, so we are trying to make connections with food banks for staff suffering food insecurity."

Dealing with safeguarding issues in a work setting presents particular challenges, says Jan.

"That is a difficult one because confidentiality is a big thing. If someone has disclosed something to me, it is the same as within the community.

"If it is a matter that might put someone at risk, I need to escalate it, but it happens with discussion.

"That is where the relational aspect of social work



'As a social worker within a hospital, I could see them on a day-to-day basis, so the relationship is crucial to how I support them'

comes in. I have to gain their trust and hope they will put trust in me."

In some ways, being a social worker within a work setting is the same as working within the wider community.

"It is the same values as community social work," says Jan. "I am looking at injustices, making sure everyone has equality within the service I am providing, valuing people and their skills and experiences."

But in other ways it's very different.

"As a community social worker, I would normally only see my clients when I go to their homes.

"But as a social worker within a hospital, I could see them on a day-to-day basis, so the relationship is crucial to how I support them.

"I also have to consider patient care as well and maintain my professional identity throughout."

Jan's post is being funded for 18 months through Urban Health, a charity based in Lambeth and Southwark working to reduce urban health inequalities. The project seeks to better understand the support staff need to remain happy and healthy in the long term. A hospital trust in Leeds has already been in touch with a view to doing something similar.

"Hopefully it will be something that is permanent and rolled out to other hospitals," says Jan.

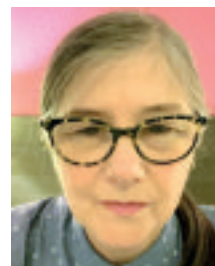
"But we need to demonstrate the impact we are having before they spend money. I am getting data so we can show the impact and how it has benefited the staff group."

Jan used to work in the Middle East where every government department had its own social worker focused on the wellbeing of staff.

"Could that be rolled out to similar departments in this country?" she wonders. "There is no reason why it should not apply to other groups of workers too..."

RUTH ALLEN

BASW's chief executive on a month that celebrates social work and its values



We are invited to act together in pursuit of our shared goals

Spring is around the corner and BASW is already in the midst of what are often our busiest months of the year.

These months bring annual activities that focus on the essence of what it means to be social workers – our collective identity, shared values and ethics, irrespective of role, status, hierarchy, field of practice or employment context at home and internationally.

March is World Social Work Month, hinged around World Social Work Day (WSWD) on the 21st. The global WSWD theme this year is 'Respecting diversity through joint social action'.

I confess, this theme didn't immediately strike home – and this was despite the fact I was involved in the creation of the 'People's Charter for an eco-social world' from which it was derived in the summer of 2022 (see www.newecosocialworld.com/the-peoples-charter-for-an-eco-social-world).

The wording of the theme seemed vague, clunky and opaque. But it has really grown on me. Its initial oddness has since struck me as conveying an important and quite difficult concept that helps me think about and address the real-life challenges I experience and witness in making inclusion, equalities and real respect for diversity a reality.

For me, the theme is a call to action, to focus on joint, collective, common objectives, rooted in social work ethics and values, and embracing our diversity – overcoming our differences, striving to understand each other through constructive dialogue and committed effort.

Movements for change against oppressions of all kinds need to highlight what is distinct about each – their history, form and politics. Respecting the diversity of oppressions and the different experiences and places from which people need to speak out is a core social work skill and ethos. Creating connections, understanding and platforms for joint action on shared aims is also a core skill.

The global theme this year is an invitation to work harder to understand each other, walk in each others' shoes for a while and recognise what having diverse identities and experiences really means. It invites us to act together as a profession and as a community of social

'Respecting the diversities of oppressions and the different experiences from which people need to speak out is core social work'

justice-minded citizens towards shared goals.

You can explore aspects of the global theme and other parts of social work through our month of events in March organised by BASW teams, member groups and branches. Staff and lead members will also be out and about speaking at, and visiting, events held by organisations.

In the second half of the month we release your nominations for Amazing Social Workers – colleagues and inspirational social workers that have made a difference to you, to the profession and to the people we work with. Sharing their stories and why they have inspired you is a great fillip in these tough times.

We are also releasing the findings from our annual survey of social work through publication of our summary report and a webinar on 20 March. The report paints a picture of the state of the profession. This year we have dug deeper on some themes that came through strongly in 2021/22, as well as picking up contemporary issues that have escalated in the last year – such as poverty, impact of the cost of living crisis and recruitment and retention.

In May our international focus continues with European colleagues in the International Federation of Social Workers delegates' meeting and conference to promote our joint work on projects at a regional level.

And of course we are building towards the BASW annual conference (13 June) and our AGM (14 June). Check your bulletins, the website and BASW events pages for the conference programme and get booking! Places are limited and filling up.

The conference on 13 June will be a place where we can exercise the WSWD call to action. It will be a place to respect (understand and imaginatively connect with) our diversity as social workers and as a society, and come together to commit to our shared aims of developing the profession.

We do this also by including as equals people who use our services and bring lived experience expertise, exploring the leadership we need for the future and promoting social justice.

See you there, if not before!

There's global unity in our shared compassion

David Harrop explores how observing social work abroad has informed his own practice



Several years ago, while visiting a children's primary school in Hebron, I spoke with the social worker attached to the school and asked her about her work. After talking about child support, working with families and advocacy, I asked her if she could be more specific. She then told me that as she arrived at school that morning the headteacher asked her if she could speak to one of the pupils.

She was directed to a weeping seven-year-old little girl curled up in a ball under the stairs. She got down on her knees and gently coaxed the little girl to tell her what was wrong. Eventually the child told her that one of the soldiers at the checkpoint she went through on her way to school and back every day had frightened her and had indecently exposed himself.

The social worker said she had discussed this with the headteacher and a colleague from the social work union before formulating a plan to ensure that the child could be taken through the checkpoint safely. She told me she was going to monitor this over the course of the next few days and that she would review it with the other parties to make sure that the plan was working.

To me this was a pivotal moment. It was clear that she was informed by an understanding of the nature of childhood trauma and of the need to support. She demonstrated her skills of talking to children and hearing the child's voice. She understood the critical nature of child-centred multi-agency working to make plans and of the need to implement the plans, to monitor and review.

I worked in an English northern inner city then, another world away, yet it was profound to recognise that through our shared professional activity I could instantly recognise the practice issues. This gave me a capacity to attune to her actions, processes, and rationale. In essence, it was recognisable in many senses to what we would have done.

Several years later, working in post-earthquake Nepal, we were concerned at the industrial scale of child-trafficking. Many thousands of children were being taken away from their families into illegal child labour and exploitation.

After working alongside a Danish NGO, we analysed

'They are different expressions of the core social work task'

data from a large research project and it was apparent that absolute family poverty was the overwhelming causal factor. We then sought funding to look at developing social entrepreneurship to generate income which might in turn cause families to view their children as assets rather than liabilities.

In one case we worked with a German NGO to help to set up a co-op for women to produce organic hygiene products, and in so doing hopefully ensure that the children had a safer future.

What is central to both these diverse experiences as well as my own westernised/Euro-centric practice is that they are different expressions of the core social work task, albeit contextualised by different geographical locations.

These opportunities afforded me global insights which have enabled me to review my own practice. All these activities are united through ethical foundations, through a body of professional knowledge, and are delivered by practitioners who have accredited expertise and vocation.

Practitioners have shared values of compassion which are based on an understanding of suffering. There are principles upholding human rights and the worth of humanity. These experiences have helped me to recognise that, irrespective of context, social work practice is universally a safeguarding and protective activity.

Through meetings with Norwegian colleagues in 2013, I learned about their policy of levying their members a small extra portion of their membership fees to create an international development fund as a member benefit. Thus, I proposed to the 2014 BASW AGM that we do something similar. This was accepted and a £2 levy was agreed to enable the establishment of the BASW International Development Fund.

I would strongly encourage BASW members to consider applying to this to enable them to meet with fellow practitioners around the world and discover their own commonalities and contrasts. Your daily social work practice will thank you.

David Harrop is a retired social worker

Neurodistinct social workers need allyship

Members of the BASW Neurodivergent Social Workers special interest group* set a challenge for Neurodiversity Week between 13 and 18 March



Neurodiversity, as a term, is becoming more widely used, yet not without danger of being misunderstood, oversimplified, or undermined.

It is important to acknowledge what it stands for, with the most obvious recognition that all humans are complex beings. In all our complexity, our minds function differently; more importantly, there is no one 'right' way. As the autistic writer and educator Dr Nick Walker clarifies, there cannot be one 'normal' or 'healthy' type of brain or neurocognitive functioning in the same way there is no one 'healthy' or 'normal' ethnicity, gender, or culture.

Perhaps, when we come across the much-favoured 'normal', we should ask ourselves (and others) who has the authority to define what 'normal' is for the context in question?

The main difficulty comes from our inherent need to apply value to one person over another. This is commonly seen in ableism or discrimination in favour of able-bodied people. Confronting internalised ableism is difficult when practitioners attempt to promote an inclusive ethos while perpetuating ableist language.

Therefore, developing a culturally conscious approach to engaging with others while seeking to explore shared meaning and understanding in our daily practice matters. Starting with our own knowledge base, while continuously challenging our own assumptions and biases, makes our empathy visible. When this is embedded systemically within organisational culture and practice we stand a chance of more authentic, core anti-oppressive practice inside and outside of our organisations.

Neurodivergent or neurodistinct social workers have some impressive strengths; the ability to connect with trauma, identify patterns, analyse detail, solve problems, seeing beyond the 'norm' to identify creative solutions. Fitting neatly 'into boxes' is not our forte as we tend to overlap, rarely seeking social hierarchies or competition with others, and we are open and honest. All these strengths will shine if they can be channelled; they may excel when met with an open mind, acceptance and support.

The willingness of managers and colleagues to learn and recognise pressures and triggers that lead to debilitating

'Who has the authority to define what 'normal' is for the context?'

overwhelm and discomfort can add significantly to a conducive and more productive work environment.

Solutions are often very simple and inexpensive, starting with understanding the other's differences. So, next time you walk into the room, think about the lighting. Is the room too bright? What is the noise level? Could wearing headphones help to maintain focus and manage that sense of overload?

Checking in with colleagues and asking what helps create a more inclusive environment minimises segregation, isolation, and potential burnout. By being observant and supportive of colleagues' needs, perhaps linking to particularly intensive periods at work and reminding them to have a break, you can model self-care in your team. And never underestimate the power of the 'quiet space'! Remember, small changes can offer huge outcomes that benefit everybody. You hold the power to consider and adapt some key working practices in your service without compromising standards. Is it time to dismantle assumptions about that one 'best' way for all?

As social workers, we pledge commitment to strengths and relationship-based practice with value-laden approaches embedded in working with people. We tend to forget that social workers themselves happen to be human. We should aim to lead by example through our work with each other and by championing our colleagues and friends alongside those that we support.

Neurodistinctiveness is for life and not just for the celebration week. This year's Social Work Day celebration calls for 'Respecting Diversity Through Joint Social Action': an invitation for us all to go beyond a day, a week, an event, or a training session. Neurodistinct social workers exist, we need allyship and commitment to change a profession we belong in.

BASW Neurodivergent Social Workers Special Interest Group welcomes all colleagues to join regular meetings. Come and share your ideas and practice. Contact Helen. Randle@basw.co.uk

* The other authors of this article are Deb Solomon, Jenni McCabe, Sandy Symonds, Aga Buckley and David Grimm

A whole new virtual reality world awaits

Dr Neil Thompson considers the myriad of opportunities afforded by using virtual reality technology in care settings



The history of technology tells a story of a mix of positives and negatives. The discovery of electricity brought many benefits, but it has also led to many deaths and, arguably, created other problems too.

The internet has provided access to a fantastic array of information and facilities, but it has also given birth to the major problems of trolling and cyber-bullying, as well as contributing to information overload in general.

However, one distinct positive of modern technology I have become very aware of recently is the use of virtual reality (VR). This came about because I was invited to become part of a project developing VR-based training for staff in care homes.

On finding out more about this, I discovered that it was an offshoot of a project developing the use of VR for care home residents.

I was amazed to see the positive impact of VR in terms of health and wellbeing.

By making use of a specially prepared VR headset, residents were able to engage in virtual visits to a wide range of locations and see a whole host of sights that they could not visit in person.

“It’s so realistic, it’s as if you are really there,” is typical of the comments residents make when first introduced to the technology.

Options included waterfalls, wildlife, historic places of interest, cityscapes, tourist attractions and gardens. The possibilities are likely to increase significantly over time as the value of this approach becomes more fully recognised.

It is clearly making a very beneficial difference to people whose lives may be otherwise curtailed in terms of what they can have access to.

Its immersive 360-degree content means that it is much more realistic than, say, watching a flat image on a television screen. When I tried it, I could see very well why it was being so warmly welcomed. I could see how misleading it is to think of VR in narrow terms as just another gaming platform for young people.

One care home manager claimed that the use of VR had resulted in a reduction in medication as a result of the

‘I look forward to the day when use of VR to boost quality of life in care home residents is the norm’

calming and mood-enhancing effects of the headsets

In addition, a resident with limited eyesight had been delighted with how clear and visible the VR images were.

Seeing the results of using technology in this life-affirming way showed me that there is much to be gained from taking seriously the opportunities presented by developing more resources and vastly increasing access to the facilities.

I shall certainly be giving a lot of thought to how VR can fulfil its potential as a useful tool in various ways and in various settings.

However, from what I can gather, at the moment the use of this impressive technology remains the exception rather than the rule. Given the benefits of moving in this direction at relatively low cost, I look forward to the day when the use of VR technology to boost the quality of life of care home residents is established as the norm.

I am also hoping that there will be scope to make use of these empowering facilities in day care and community-based services for older people – and indeed in the disability and mental health fields as well, where the potential for enhancing quality of life is immense.

In addition, there is also potential for the use of VR technology to be used in children’s services.

As we are all too aware, social care is in a parlous state and very much in need of additional funding and a greater emphasis on innovative approaches.

Virtual reality has the potential to play an important role in this. While underfunding of social care seems likely to continue for some time, the imaginative use of VR could be part of a much broader project of seeking innovation in social care in order to make the best use of limited resources while campaigning for more realistic levels of investment continues.

There is considerable scope for effective training (the immersive nature of the experience removes distractions and aids concentration) and who knows what else creative minds can come up with as we get more used to what this exciting technology has to offer?

Dr Neil Thompson is an independent writer, educator and adviser, and a visiting professor at the Open University.

REVIEWS

BOOKS

Promoting emotional wellbeing for a profession on the front line

Title: The mindful social worker: Living your best social work life

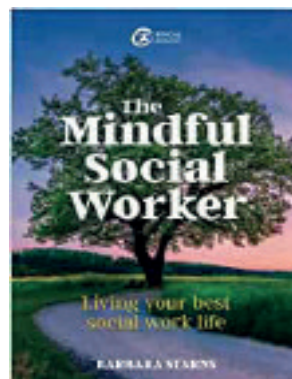
Author: Barbara Starns

Price: £16.99

Publisher: Critical Publishing

Website: www.criticalpublishing.com

ISBN: 9781915 080356



As a social worker who has spent most of their career ploughing through paperwork, staying on top of relentless emails and forever hopeful to attend training without being pulled away by a case crisis, I was very sceptical about the premise of this book.

I wondered how we can truly be mindful social workers when the demand on our time is relentless?

I felt that the author intuitively knew this would be a question for many social workers, which leads to a challenge being set. What are our inner barriers that could prevent applying mindfulness principles to our daily life?

The author's practice as a social worker and yoga instructor is evident throughout the book as she links the world of social work to teachings, research and models of mindfulness.

It was also helpful to be aware of the emotional benefits of mindfulness practice because a common issue in social work is burnout. This is often due to the pressure and secondary trauma caused by the information we process and issues we observe. Providing social workers strategies on being able to separate yourself from such strong and often toxic emotions can only promote emotional wellbeing in a profession that is on the front line of human interaction.

The book concludes with user-friendly activities that can be done from a desk space. I would encourage managers to buy this book and incorporate practical mindfulness examples and research findings in team meeting discussions.

Shuli Greenstein

BOOKS

A road map for social care if we are brave enough to follow it

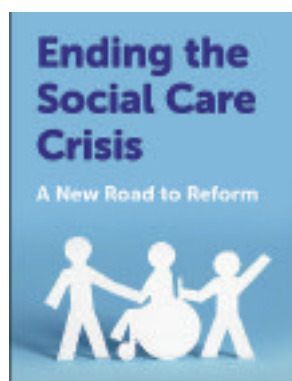
Title: Ending the Social Care Crisis A new Road to Reform

Author: Richard Humphries

Price: £14.99 (BASW members receive a 30% discount – enter code WEX7413EGW at www.policypress)

Publisher: Policy Press

ISBN: 978 1447364450



This is an eminently readable *tour de force* on the social care crisis. Many will have known Richard Humphries as a wise, thoughtful and experienced commentator on social work and social care.

This long overdue treatise is beautifully crafted, highly coherent and amply illustrates the value of listening to the lived and living experience of people who use services, including the author's own parents.

A strong advocate of social work and BASW, Richard has been a personal friend and colleague for many years.

Here at last we have a definitive picture of our social care crisis, what went wrong, the politics of it all and how over many years we failed to solve the

problem. Quoting Pericles: "What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments but what is woven into the hearts of others."

In his final chapter, A New Future for Social Care, Richard looks for solutions. He has bravely laid out a road map for us. The question now is whether we have the courage and the determination to walk down that road and this time make a real difference.

It is for all of us to grasp this opportunity, not just the politicians, not just the government and the accountants. It is also up to us in our local communities and as individual social workers to weave that way forward into all that we do.

Julia Ross

TV/RADIO

What makes men post sexual abuse?

Emily Attack: Asking for it - BBC iPlayer

As much as I dislike celebrity-led, self-promoting documentaries, watching this in the run up to International Women's Day was poignant.

In it, actress/TV presenter/comedian Emily Attack uses her experience of online sexual harassment to look at the wider societal issue.

The documentary attempts to answer two questions: why do men do it and what should we do about it?

One bloke in a group of men interviewed by Attack in a pub answers the first question: "Because we can." Another claims society "incentivises us to", by which he means it bombards men with ideals of manhood that make them feel insecure. Another blames pornography.

Attack messages one of her abusers to ask him why he does it. He blames her for her "reputation" of "sleeping with lots of other men".

What is clear – and no great insight – is that the core motivation is a desire for "power and control".

Back in the pub, one of the group stresses fixing the problem isn't down to Attack, or any woman – it's down to men. Jamie Klinger, who founded Reclaim the Streets in the wake of Sarah Everard's murder, asks: "At what point do men start taking responsibility for male violence?"

Attack's celebrity, at least, helps get the message across.

By Shahid Naqvi

Social Work Employment Services

The trusted and ethical umbrella service exclusively for BASW members

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Created by social workers for social workers and exclusively for BASW members, Social Work Employment Services is the UK's only not-for-profit umbrella company.

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If you have any questions – give us a call on: 0333 311 0922.

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"I have always been wary of using umbrella companies and have previously moved agencies to avoid using their services. However, Social Work Employment Services has changed all that and provides me with a stress-free solution to all my employment needs."

"The process is very simple with everything explained clearly, and if I have any queries, I can speak to someone directly. All my experiences have been very positive and I'm extremely happy. I would not hesitate to recommend Social Work Employment Services to anyone looking for a trusted umbrella company."

Sandra Golding, BASW member.

A WORD OF ADVICE

Easter is a good time to spring clean your career

Alasdair Kennedy's top tips on achieving eggcellent career progression

1. Linking In!

At this time of renewal, revival and even resurrection why not dig out that old CV? Spring is the perfect time for a change of job. So send off that resumé to employers via LinkedIn, yes, LinkedIn! You may not like LinkedIn, but most local authorities and commercial care companies are on there. Hubspot found that LinkedIn is 277 per cent more effective at generating interest in your profile than Facebook and Twitter.

2. No yokes

A lot of social workers use online tools to find jobs, but many forget about networking. Speak with people in the industry that you want to work in. Networking can lead you to a job before you even know it and is more fun than filling out application forms. I was offered a short-term role recently because my profile was discussed at a house party (must have been a boring party), but before I knew it I had some work come my way via word of mouth. So put down those Easter eggs and individualise a LinkedIn message – never send out a general “I am looking for work”. Also, read recruiters’ profiles very carefully, so you have their details correct.

3. No Humpty Dumpties

If you get a new job, joining in spring tends to be a more relaxed time of year. So, enjoy your onboarding, don't rush it. Learn all you can and make allies, positive ones. Budgets have just been set, so results-driven issues are reduced. Also, competition for jobs at this time of year is reduced as people are putting their feet up and not looking for work.

4. Hardboiled good eggs

Interim hires increase during spring, despite the latest government potential crackdowns and doom-mongering. Their uptake also increases dramatically when new budgets go live at the end of March/April. Evidence shows if you start as an interim then the chances of you becoming permanent are 70 per cent more likely. A recent report states 15 per cent of all directors of children's services start off working as interims.

5. Bunny hopper

Apply early and quickly. Teams will want to hire and settle staff quickly. They have holidays to plan! Hence sometimes application dates can shorten quickly without warning. So, prepare cover letters early, or have one written beforehand. Draft one that's generic and specific to the jobs you are keen on.

6. Hunting for eggcellence

New 2023 budgets mean new job pay scales. Be strategic and shop around when looking for work. There are signing on and retention bonuses, and four-day weeks up for grabs. Some local authorities are entering into a “memo of understanding” to reduce poaching, but many will still want the best people. After all there's Ofsted to think about. Read their last ILACS and study staffing levels. Speak to current staff if you can about levels of toxicity, workloads, support and leadership – not just management (the two are very different).

Alasdair Kennedy is an interim social work manager and runs the popular Sociable Social Worker Youtube channel

LIVING IT

Reflections of a service user
by Jodie McLoughlin

Patronised, invalidated and fobbed off by NHS

You may have read that people cannot access NHS dentists, which leads to problems with dental hygiene and related self-esteem and pain issues.

Like a lot of people, I've been struggling to get GP appointments more than ever, despite having several health conditions that need regular check-ups.

Even though I have made lifestyle changes I feel that my medications are no longer working. I'm also experiencing pain on top of my mental health conditions, asthma and visual impairment.

I recognise that the NHS is in crisis and that there is great difficulty with retention and training of GPs. Demand far outstrips supply, and you are still offered telephone appointments which I find difficult.

In addition, not only do some doctors demean my weight loss attempts but they always attribute other health conditions to one or two things, such as being slightly overweight or mental health. I call it medical gaslighting.

You have to meet specific criteria for further investigatory treatment or procedures.

One GP suggested that I go private but the procedure I need would cost between £3,000 to £4,000 which I just don't have and not many people I know do!

He even went ahead and wrote the private referral letter without my permission!

I can't get private medical insurance as these are pre-existing conditions. These used to be standard procedures that got you referrals fairly easily.

Apparently, the hospitals are turning down referrals. I asked if the decision was down to individual GPs or practice managers but apparently not. Who knows? I feel as if my relationship with my GP surgery has broken down and that I cannot trust them to talk to me with dignity and respect as a disabled, working-class woman.

I am patronised, invalidated and fobbed off at every opportunity as my mum, who has multiple chronic illnesses and disabilities, often is too.

I'm thinking of taking out a loan to pay for the procedure, but I shouldn't have to should I? It's so wrong. I wonder how many other people are in this position. Consider how lack of access to dental and GP surgeries might be affecting some of your clients and service users and how this will impact on their overall wellbeing, both mentally and physically.

THE ADVANCEMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

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1972-2022

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Were you aware that BASW run an online Social Work Vacancies Jobs Board advertising SOCIAL WORK vacancies in organisations across the whole UK?

Do you have any involvement in recruiting SOCIAL WORKERS
into your Organisation or Department?

The online Jobs Board can be found at
www.basw.co.uk/home/vacancies

1

Use this Jobs Board yourself when looking for a career move

2

Recommend this Jobs Board to your HR Team when they are
looking to recruit SOCIAL WORKERS

A SOCIAL WORKER'S **DIARY**

March, 2023

There are some interesting things going on in court at present. Hearings seem to be consistently adjourned – I have one case which is having four Issue Resolution Hearings and I hasten to add not because there is anything the local authority hasn't done or is late in completing. I am seeing this across my cases, where there is significant delay for the children, resulting in distress and confusion for them. I am not understanding the rationale and feel frustrated by the decisions being made. For example, an additional five months delay, on proceedings already outside of the 26 weeks, because the judge has nothing earlier to book in for a final hearing. How is this OK?

When the local authority is late or doesn't complete something this can be published in the media etc. When it is the Court... tumble weeds.

It may shock people to know that the barristers – or counsel representing on behalf of the local authority, parents or guardian – are paid on average £500-600 an hour. I have known them to be paid £1,000 an hour.

I have witnessed them arguing like children in pre-hearing discussions over who talks first and then becoming upset because someone spoke over them. I am being flippant and not totally fair as some do work hard and represent us really well and take instruction. Some do not, and have little interest in the care that we have for the children and how hard we work to achieve the best outcomes for families.

Maybe I feel disillusioned as I did hold court in high regard, almost intimidated by the environment. We have a

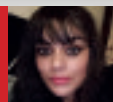
flawed system. For the most part, I feel people in it care. We are human and make mistakes or have bad days – goodness knows, I tick both of those.

I am still a fan of my current local authority. There was an interesting interaction the other week where I was asked to complete a parenting assessment. The timescale, however, with all my other cases and hearings etc meant I needed about ten weeks. The court asked if I could do it sooner, and who did the last parenting assessment? I told them this was an independent social worker and my legal asked me to contact her. The ISW said it would take five weeks – much better for the court. So I have to ask my service manager for approval and she said no, you have capacity to do in five weeks! I am already working over my contract hours for no extra pay. The service manager responded: "Tough." My team manager's response was: "You can always leave and get another job." Another member of my team tells me she is handing her notice in because she was told the same thing!

This is the first time since I have been here that I have said I cannot do something in the timeframe, not even that I won't do it. I lost all respect for my service manager in her very disrespectful, uncaring and dismissive response to me. I felt I was a piece of mud on her shoe to be flicked off. And I now know my team manager for sure does not have my back.

So, I am pretty certain, given the sad state of affairs in management in local authorities, I will not return to a manager post. It is a pandemic of toxicity. I would look for more of a consultant role or implementation lead, something that explores improvements. Anyhoo, that's my update and I am doing OK, as am just keeping in my little bubble, sticking to what I need to do, getting on well with most folk and staying the heck out of any politics!

STUDENT NOTES



Georgiana Ndlovu is an MSc social work student

Multi-agency work - it's sharing a mission

It's good to be back after unfortunately being unable to produce an article last month due to a painful back injury. A good dose of physio and plenty of rest and self-care has got me back on track.

I always try to look for the silver lining within bad circumstances and my bad back has been no different. I find having had issues with physical impairment has made me resilient, resourceful, encouraged me to take better self-care and given me first-hand experience of what service users with physical impairments experience every day.

This month I've mostly been concentrating on university assignments, which included an extremely interesting paper on the potential advantages and disadvantages of multi-agency working in situations where there are adult-oriented issues within a family, such as mental health issues, substance misuses and domestic violence – known as the 'toxic trio'.

I believe the increase in lone working, working from home and working mostly through Zoom and such has sometimes eradicated our confidence when it comes to multi-agency work. It was interesting to get fresh insights into how to work as a team well.

Serious case reviews continually flag up poor multi-agency

working as contributing to poor execution of child protection work and consequently to tragic child deaths.

One of the points I made in my essay was the need for teams to work towards the same mission within a case, despite different styles, priorities, thresholds, budget restrictions and confidentiality protocols.

Writing this essay, along with most of the assignments I have done as a university student, has bolstered my own knowledge and understanding of this key mode of social work, which is now a legal duty, and has provided armour for my future practice, especially since I will be a new social worker with lots to learn and much experience yet to gain.

Ultimately we work best when we accept that most things in life that are worthwhile involve conflict and challenge. But we must overcome the barriers, stay true to the reasons why we entered the profession in the first place, be mindful of the needs and pressures of our fellow professionals and always keep the service user at the centre of our work. We must not forget that even though we are working with myriad professionals, it starts and ends with the vulnerable service user themselves.



ASK DEREK

(He's been a social worker for considerably longer than eight years)

I would like to advocate to your readers a new approach to work which I have found useful. It's called The Art of Saying No. Do you think this is something that could help promote wellbeing in our profession?

Anastasia, Glasgow

Derek says: No

I live in the countryside and this time of year it's lovely to see the flowers come into bloom and the baby lambs leaping in the fields. If only we could bring something of the countryside to our urban areas I believe it would enhance people's lives, increase community cohesion and maybe even reduce crime. Any ideas on how?

Patrice, Warwickshire

Derek says: I've herd some daft ideas in my time but this sounds like woolly thinking to me! You could try baaartering with someone

who has the Freedom of the City of London to bring sheep into the capital. Perhaps start in Lambeth.

I know we are under-resourced, under-staffed and under-funded, but every morning I wake up full of joy to be doing a job that I love. Is there something wrong with me?

Daisy, London

Derek says: Bloody zoomers.

We recently relocated to an open plan office which we share with the pensions team. I find this a completely unsatisfactory arrangement as I can barely hear myself think above their chatter, and that's not even mentioning the confidentiality issues it raises. What should I do?

Neeta, Sussex

Derek says: Not sure, but could you ask them what an 'Uncrystallised Funds Pension Lump Sum' is?

I make a point of learning one new thing every day. For instance, today, I have learned that Barry Manilow didn't actually write his hit single 'I Write the Songs'. Fancy that! What have you learned lately?

Judith, Liverpool

Derek says: That some lessons aren't worth learning.

Conflict resolution is core to our work but some conflicts are unresolvable. For instance, several people in our office refuse to wash their mugs no matter how many notices we put up. What's the solution?

Eric, Bournemouth

Derek says: Paper cups

Clare Classics



From Harry Venning's back catalogue of cartoons for *The Guardian* spanning a quarter of a century. *The Clare in the Community Collection* is available at www.clareinthecommunity.co.uk

ENGLAND VIEWS

In support of integrated services but we must be respected equal partners



We know that the integration agenda is here to stay. I am an advocate for integrated services but on the proviso that every partner holds equal levels of autonomy, influence, and mutual respect and, most importantly, that individual professional identity is actively supported at all levels.

The BASW England Mental Health Thematic Group undertook a survey of members in 2022 to gain a better understanding of how social work is represented on NHS Mental Health Trust Boards and found that very few had a social work representative at board level.

For many social workers, working within a variety of integrated services, there are concerns that the role is not always fully understood or represented at senior level.

Members report issues with accessing appropriate CPD opportunities, access to professional supervision and opportunities for reflective discussion.

In some instances, members have reported feeling the role is misunderstood and that their career progression is limited compared to colleagues in other professions. Conversely, some members note that working within

a health-led organisation, where trauma informed practice is being promoted, has led them to feel that they have better opportunities to build effective working relationships with the people they support than if they were in a local authority team where there might be a bigger emphasis on process-driven activities.

I am really pleased to be working with members who wish to improve this situation by coming together as a newly ratified BASW England Social Work in Health Thematic Group.

The group aims to reach out to partners to share examples of good practice, promote better understanding of the role and value of social work, and promote better access to CPD opportunities.

The group will be hosting regular peer support forums for members who are working within health organisations.

If you are interested in being kept informed of the work of the new group and upcoming events, please contact me denise.monks@basw.co.uk

Denise Monks, professional officer

'We are coming together as a newly ratified 'Social Work in Health' group'

NORTHERN IRELAND VIEWS

BASW NI survey show social workers value doing relationship-based work



The need for a diversification of skills mix within social work teams has been highlighted by Professor Ray Jones, chair of the independent review of children's social care services.

Prof Jones has sought the views of social workers concerning which roles and areas of expertise they consider key to social work and which tasks could be undertaken by additional support staff.

To make sure social workers' views are included in the review, BASW and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council administered the Core Social Work Roles Survey at the start of this year. It attracted 445 responses from social workers who either currently or have previously worked in children's services.

The findings reinforce BASW NI's view that social workers value relationship-based practice as they strike the difficult balance between working supportively with families to tackle childcare issues and protecting children. Respondents were clear that communication with children and adults, the capacity to build effective relationships, and the ability to make decisions in the context of risk and

uncertainty are at the heart of effective practice.

However, the results paint a frustrating picture of a service which continues to be heavily bureaucratised. BASW NI maintains that social workers must be afforded sufficient time and space to spend with children and families, so they feel confident to use their professional judgement, provide family support, and intervene in partnership with families.

Respondents cited a series of core case considerations concerning the wellbeing and development of children as central to the skills and knowledge children's services social workers require. These were closely followed in importance by domestic abuse, which was identified by a worryingly high proportion of respondents as a key area of knowledge. In the challenging practice environment created by austerity, the vast majority of social workers also report that a knowledge of poverty is core to practice.

The findings, which are available to download from the BASW NI website, provide much for the review team to reflect on.

Andy McClenaghan, public affairs and comms officer

'A knowledge of poverty is core to practice'

SCOTLAND VIEWS

The national social work agency dilemma: where should it sit?



During the development of the new national care service (NCS), it is important to stay focused on what we ultimately want to achieve for social workers and the social work profession in the new delivery model.

Representing the views of our members – which are often diverse, complex, and nuanced – is our priority.

As the various workstreams emerge, we are piecing together the national care service jigsaw.

Some pieces slot easily into place, but others are more challenging.

A National Social Work Agency (NSWA) will be established as part of the NCS to support social work in education and improving and scaling up good practice.

It will also support workforce planning, training and development as well as terms and conditions – including pay.

The dilemma for social workers is where the NSWA should sit within structures.

It is a difficult piece of the jigsaw!

The government's proposal is to have it as a government

department, a vision supported by some members, who see the potential of having a seat at the decision-making table at the heart of government.

But on the other side of the coin, there are members who express the view that there is a need for distance between the government that makes and implements policy and a profession that holds government to account for the impact of that policy on citizens – especially those that are marginalised and disadvantaged.

One potential solution proffered by those who hold this view is that the NSWA could, for example, be a non-departmental public body.

There are advantages and disadvantages in both models and we are holding engagement sessions for members in March to explore this further.

The question is: where will our voice be most heard to bring about the change so desperately needed for the profession and for the people we support?

The answer must lie in where social work can have the greatest influence and impact.

Anne-Marie Monaghan, adult services lead

'Where will our voice be most heard to bring about change?'

SOCIAL WORKERS UNION VIEWS

A strength-based approach from employers to staff would be good



Iam told by colleagues in human resources that January and September are peak times for recruitment activity, which makes me wonder how many readers are completing application forms or preparing for interviews.

Once, when I was leaving a role, a senior manager warned me in their parting words that I had better not be thinking of recruiting any of my current staff to my new workplace.

I was initially a little affronted that this was my sole leaving message. I was expecting the more usual, 'Thank you for all that you have done.' That was until, upon reflection, I realised that it was one of the greatest compliments they could give the staff group.

They valued them and wanted them to stay. It was a shame the staff group had no idea they were perceived in such a positive light. Their experience was constant requests for information, briefings, and a feeling that it would make little difference to the organisation if they were to leave.

Such perceptions are important to employee relations.

Within social work there is much talk of strength-based approaches and relational practice, yet many social workers feel this is not the approach taken with them.

Within the day-to-day work of the advice and representation service we experience many employment situations based upon sometimes misplaced perceptions within the employee/manager relationship. When left unaddressed these can lead to mistrust, stress, and anxiety.

There are, of course, occasions when a formal grievance is the only available route for the employee. In such circumstances members can be supported and represented by the Social Workers Union. The first step is to have early structured, informal discussions. It might be that a perception or a misunderstanding is preventing a just resolution.

The Advice and Representation Service has further information should you want to make contact. In the meantime, good luck to any social workers participating in interviews.

Martyn Burrell, A&R official



WALES VIEWS

Those who work in it see the crisis in social care on a daily basis



Watching the news these days, it's all a bit depressing to say the least! With nurses, ambulance workers and teachers on strike.

We all know about the crisis in the NHS – we hear about it all the time. However, rarely do we hear about the crisis in social care.

For those of us who work in the sector we see evidence of this crisis daily.

Social workers are on the front line when it comes to social care. We are the ones who must explain to people that the care they require is not available.

We deal with those who are sent home without a care package; and at times we end up being the provider.

I have staff undertaking welfare calls; arranging foodbanks deliveries and even doing shopping for citizens. Some might say this is our role but when there is no care and we know that it's not going to get better, I wonder how sustainable this is?

Social workers are, like our health colleagues, on the edge of burnout. Many are considering leaving the profession, if they haven't already.

'We entered the profession to make a difference'

All local authorities have vacancies and rely on agency staff, with agencies themselves having difficulties in recruiting. We just do not have the social workers to fill these positions.

So, what's the answer? There's talk about better pay, but let's face it – did we come into social work for the pay? Of course, it helps. We all know about the cost of living crisis and know of colleagues claiming benefits and not being able to heat their homes; but they still turn up for work.

We entered the profession to make a difference and most of us would do it regardless of what pay scale we are on.

Small changes could be made – giving teams their own safe office space where they can be with their colleagues to reflect and talk over issues and having their own desk would help many. A tiny change that might have a big impact.

This is why it's so important that we all access the free BASW Professional Support Service to help support wellbeing and make you feel valued. Find out more at: www.basw-pss.co.uk/register-coachee-cymru

Andrew Pennington, BASW Cymru co-chair

CYMRU VIEWS

Mae'r rhai sy'n gweithio ym maes gofal cymdeithasol yn gweld yr argyfwng yn ddyddiol

Owyllo'r newyddion y dyddiau hyn, mae'r cyfan braidd yn ddigalon a dweud y lleiaf! Gyda nyrsys, gweithwyr ambiwlans ac athrawon ar streic.

Rydym i gyd yn gwybod am yr argyfwng yn y GIG – rydym yn clywed amdano drwy'r amser – ond anaml rydym yn clywed am yr argyfwng mewn gofal cymdeithasol.

I'r rhai ohonom sy'n gweithio yn y sector rydym yn gweld tystiolaeth o'r argyfwng hwn yn ddyddiol.

Mae gweithwyr cymdeithasol ar y rheng flaen o ran gofal cymdeithasol. Ni yw'r rhai sy'n gorfod egluro i bobl nad yw'r gofal sydd ei angen arnynt ar gael.

Rydym yn delio â'r rhai sy'n cael eu hanfon adref heb becyn gofal; ac ar adegau, ni fydd y darparwr yn y pen draw.

Mae gennyf staff yn gwneud galwadau lles; yn trefnu cyflenwadau i fanciau bwyd a hyd yn oed siopa i ddinasyddion. Efallai y bydd rhai yn dweud mai dyma yw ein rôl ond pan nad oes gofal a'n bod yn gwybod nad yw'n mynd i wella, tybed pa mor gynaliadwy yw hyn?

Mae gweithwyr cymdeithasol, fel ein cydweithwyr iechyd, ar fin cael eu llorio. Mae llawer yn ystyried gadael y proffesiwn, os nad ydynt wedi gwneud hynny eisoes.

'Aethom i mewn i'r proffesiwn i wneud gwahaniaeth'

Mae gan bob awdurdod lleol swyddi gwag ac maent yn dibynnu ar staff asiantaeth, gydag asiantaethau eu hunain yn cael anawsterau recriwtio. Nid oes gennym y gweithwyr cymdeithasol i lenwi'r swyddi hyn.

Felly, beth yw'r ateb? Mae sôn am well cyflog, ond gadewch i ni wynebu'r peth – a ddaethon ni i waith cymdeithasol am y tâl? Wrth gwrs, mae'n helpu. Gwyddom oll am yr argyfwng costau byw a gwyddom am gydweithwyr yn hawlio budd-daliadau ac yn methu â gwresogi eu cartrefi; ond maent yn dal i droi i fyny ar gyfer gwaith. Aethom i mewn i'r proffesiwn i wneud gwahaniaeth a byddai'r rhan fwyaf ohonom yn ei wneud beth bynnag byddai'r raddfa gyflog yr ydym arni.

Gellir gwneud newidiadau bach - byddai rhoi gofod swyddfa diogel i dimau lle gallant fod gyda'u cydweithwyr i fyfyrion a siarad am faterion a byddai cael eu desg eu hunain yn helpu llawer. Newid bach a allai gael effaith fawr.

Dyma pam ei bod mor bwysig ein bod ni i gyd yn cael mynediad at Wasanaeth Cymorth Proffesiynol BASW. Darganfyddwch fwy ar www.basw-pss.co.uk/register-coachee-cymru

Andrew Pennington, Cyd-Gadeirydd BASW Cymru

DIARY DATES

28 MARCH

Neurodivergent Social Workers
Special Interest Group

30 MARCH

Talk to SWU: Workplace issues
webinar

3 APRIL

Direct observations, gathering
feedback and reporting progress

18 APRIL

BASW England Student & NQSW
Group Event: Child Exploitation -
with guest speaker Lisa Finch

19 APRIL

Ethical dilemmas, legal literacy
and professional discretion

20 APRIL

Reflective practice and complexity
with Siobhan MacLean

25 APRIL

The Inaugural National Anti-Racist
Practice Conference:
Moving from Words to Action

26 APRIL

Why it is hard to talk to children in
child protection

3 MAY

Assessing the quality of evidence
and addressing concerns

4 MAY & 13 JUNE

Cultural competency, diversity
and inclusion

9 MAY

Safeguarding adults level 4:
The role of the service provider
lead

16 MAY

Managing conflict in child
protection

1 JUNE

Principles for assessing and
quality assuring provisions and
practice

13 JUNE

BASW UK Annual Conference:
Practice, Research, Solidarity:
Celebrating the social work
community in tough times

14 JUNE

BASW UK Annual General Meeting
2023

14 JUNE

Stepping Stones Social Worker
to Supervisor

21 JUNE

Effective assessment in child
protection - Avoiding common
pitfalls

27 JUNE

Trauma informed interventions
- key concept training

5 JULY & 3 AUGUST

The right side of regulation:
recording with care and critical
reflection on learning for
NQSWs Training

12 JULY

Effective assessment in child
protection - Practical ideas
& tools

16 AUGUST

Top tips on how to use attachment
theory and trauma

1 SEPTEMBER

Wellbeing in the workplace and
professional leadership

13 SEPTEMBER

Stepping Stones Moving into
Leadership and Management

7 NOVEMBER

Developing creativity as a practice
assessor / supervisor / practice
educator

BASW BRANCH EVENTS

WEST YORKSHIRE BRANCH:

6 April: Charlotte Goulding:
My role as Palliative and End of
Life Care Programme Manager

BLACK COUNTRY BRANCH:

18 April: Poverty: A Black Country
Perspective

PAN DORSET BRANCH & WILTSHIRE NETWORK:

19 April: Poverty in a cost-of-
living crisis

WORCESTERSHIRE BRANCH:

18 May: Details tbc
20 July: Details tbc

INFORMATION IS CORRECT AT TIME OF GOING TO PRESS. VISIT WWW.BASW.CO.UK/EVENTS FOR FULL DETAILS

The British Journal of SOCIAL WORK

VISIT

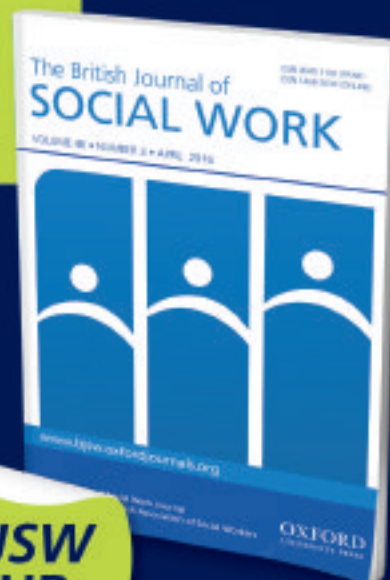
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BASW
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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

THE BASW UK ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2023

IN PERSON AND ONLINE EVENT

PRACTICE, RESEARCH, SOLIDARITY: CELEBRATING THE SOCIAL WORK COMMUNITY IN TOUGH TIMES

Date: Tuesday 13th June 2023

Time: 9.30am-4.30pm: Conference

5.00-7pm: BASW's inaugural Social Work Journalism Awards and drinks reception

Venue: Conference Aston – Conference Centre and Hotel, Aston Street, Aston University Campus, Birmingham B4 7ET and Online

Bookings are now open to reserve your place at the BASW Annual Conference in June

The conference will focus on bringing the community of social workers - and students - together to celebrate and explore the value of social work, our allyship with people we work with, and the courageous responses the profession is making during tough political and economic times through themes of Practice, Research and Solidarity.

The programme will:

Showcase

the work of social workers, BASW and our partners

Inspire

social work through presentations and discussion

Include

social workers and allies in diverse fields of practice, research, advocacy and action

Co-produce

with Experts by Experience

Network

across the association and sector, in the UK and beyond

Support

and promote wellbeing of social workers and the sustainability of our work

Cost (In person)

In person attendance includes lunch, refreshments and early evening event and places are limited so early booking is advised.

BASW also welcomes people with lived experience to attend our conference free of charge. Please contact us for details.

Members:

- Full rate: £45.00
- Student, retired and not in remuneration members concession discount: £20.00

Non-members:

- Full rate: £90.00

Cost (Online)

- Members: £15.00
- Non-members: £30.00

All costs exclude VAT

Book online: UK Conference:

www.basw.co.uk/events/basw-uk-annual-conference-2023

UK AGM (Wednesday 14th June 2023):

www.basw.co.uk/events/basw-uk-annual-general-meeting-2023

BASW

The professional association for
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BASW'S TAUGHT SKILLS - GENERAL



ONLINE
TRAINING

20.04.23 REFLECTIVE PRACTICE & COMPLEXITY WITH SIOBHAN MACLEAN

MEMBERS £49 + VAT | NON MEMBERS £75 + VAT | CPD: 3 HOURS

09.05.23 SAFEGUARDING ADULTS LEVEL 4: THE ROLE OF THE SERVICE PROVIDER LEAD

MEMBERS £99 + VAT | NON MEMBERS £149 + VAT | CPD: 6 HOURS

14.06.23 STEPPING STONES: SOCIAL WORKER TO SUPERVISOR

MEMBERS £29 + VAT | NON MEMBERS £59 + VAT | CPD: 3 HOURS

27.06.23 TRAUMA INFORMED INTERVENTIONS - KEY CONCEPTS TRAINING

MEMBERS £49 + VAT | NON MEMBERS £75 + VAT | CPD: 4 HOURS

BASW'S TAUGHT SKILLS PROGRAMME FOR NEWLY QUALIFIED SOCIAL WORKERS

MEMBERS £49 + VAT | NON MEMBERS £99 + VAT | CPD: 6 HOURS PER SESSION



04.05.23 & 13.06.23 CULTURAL COMPETENCY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

05.07.23 & 03.08.23 THE RIGHT SIDE OF REGULATION: RECORDING WITH CARE AND CRITICAL REFLECTION ON LEARNING

BASW'S TAUGHT SKILLS PROGRAMME FOR PRACTICE EDUCATORS & ASSESSORS

MEMBERS £29 + VAT | NON MEMBERS £59 + VAT | CPD: 3 HOURS PER SESSION



03.04.23 DIRECT OBSERVATIONS, GATHERING FEEDBACK AND REPORTING PROGRESS

03.05.23 ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF EVIDENCE AND ADDRESSING CONCERNS

01.06.23 PRINCIPLES FOR ASSESSING AND QUALITY ASSURING PROVISIONS AND PRACTICE

01.09.23 WELLBEING IN THE WORKPLACE AND PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP

NEW
FOR
2023!

BASW CHILD PROTECTION SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE MASTERCLASS SERIES

MEMBERS £16.50 + VAT | NON MEMBERS £25 + VAT | CPD: 1.5 HOURS PER SESSION

Get inspired with highly practical, research-based training that will equip you with ideas to implement in your social work practice. These focused sessions will be jam-packed with knowledge, practical ideas, and research. Delivered by Richard Devine, who draws on his wealth of experience and expertise. You will leave feeling more confident and re-energised in the work you do with children and families.

26.04.23 **WHY IT IS HARD TO TALK TO CHILDREN IN CHILD PROTECTION** Key principles and practical tools to help you overcome the challenges to capture the child's voice and build lasting relationships

16.05.23 **MANAGING CONFLICT IN CHILD PROTECTION** – how to overcome confrontation, resistance, and denial so you can feel confident balancing authority with compassion in forming collaborative relationships with parents

21.06.23 **EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT IN CHILD PROTECTION** – avoiding common pitfalls and minimising errors in judgement, and how to use the chronology as the most powerful tool to assess risk and the impact of harm on children

12.07.23 **EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT IN CHILD PROTECTION** – practical ideas and tools to write evidentially robust, analytical, and child-centred assessments of children and families that make a difference

Full detail of all BASW CPD events available at: www.basw.co.uk/events