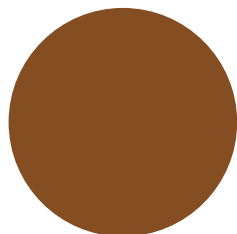


Helping People change their Lives

A Social Work manifesto
for UNISON and BASW members
in Scotland





Introduction

UNISON & BASW welcome the positive steps taken in Scotland to address the problems in Social Work in the past few years. These include

- ◆ The 21st Century Review and the *Changing Lives* Report.
- ◆ The regulatory framework including registration of staff and inspection of services.
- ◆ The lifelong approach that includes the new training programmes and continuing professional development for all social services staff.
- ◆ The right of people who use services to expect dignity and social justice within the social services.

However there is still much to be done and this manifesto highlights some of the key issues to be tackled if we are to implement *Changing Lives*. It is based on views collated from frontline staff within all sectors of the social services workforce.

Supporting the people who deliver services

People are essential to the quality of service provided. Therefore we need to make sure that they are trained, supported and resourced to undertake the often difficult and complex tasks required by our service users.

The increase in demand across the whole range of social work services, from home care to child protection, criminal justice to services for people with learning disabilities, has not been matched by an increase in available resources. This means that staff are constantly overstretched and leads to stress and burnout in dedicated and enthusiastic staff. This then leads to deterioration in the quality of service.

These are the key issues that we suggest could help change this scenario:

1. Workload management

We believe that steps should be taken by all employers to introduce effective **workload management systems**. Few employers have effective systems in place to ensure that what staff are asked to undertake is manageable and allows for sufficient time for staff to apply their skills appropriately.

“Workload management helps us to make explicit that there simply aren’t enough hours to meet all the incoming demands. Managers have to acknowledge that they must adjust caseloads and ensure we are better resourced.”
– Maggie Rands, Social Worker

2. Bureaucracy

Writing about people should be meaningful and fit for purpose. All workers complain about increased bureaucracy, not least of which is repetitive form filling and updating IT systems.

“Too much of my time is spent sitting in front of a computer. I would like more time sitting in front of a child or parent to develop a better understanding of their needs”

– Iain Nairn, Social Worker

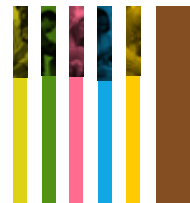
With increased requirements in report writing we calculate that some children may have at least 8 reports/assessments on them at any one time. We do not think this complies with respect for the child and we do not think that these reports are compiled to improve the service for the child, but rather to protect the professional and the agency in case something goes wrong and there is an inquiry. We would like this system abuse to end and the re-focusing on the needs of the child, including a right to privacy in family life.

Reduction in bureaucracy should be a clear objective for all employers and needs to be driven by government.

3. Staffing levels

We suggest guidelines are produced for local authorities on **appropriate levels of staffing** to meet the needs of their communities and that these are monitored via the Inspection process. These guidelines should take

“We are run off our feet trying to cover all our service users, deal with everything and spend some time with the older people. You feel the pressure to cut short visits to get to the next person. That isn’t fair on the service user.”
– Evelyn Conroy, Homecarer.



cognisance of safety and assessment requirements as well as the demographics and poverty indices.

4. Supervision, support, mentoring and consultation

"I value the supervision I get from my line manager. It not only helps to manage my workload but it allows me time with another professional to reflect on my practice and consider options for service users." – **Social worker**

Working with people where meeting need, assessing risk and ensuring human rights are respected is a skilled task. Whilst workers are responsible for their own level of decision making and recommendations they need access to **good quality supports and supervision** to do the job. (See UNISON's position on *Supervision for Social Workers* - www.unison-scotland.org.uk/socialwork/supervision.html)

5. Accountability

Social service workers are accountable for their professional conduct through the Code of Practice for employees. We also promote ethical social work through our training and development. (See BASW's *Code of Ethics* at www.basw.co.uk) Employers have begun to be accountable through the inspection process and Care Commission inspections. Greater attention needs to be given to ensure that they fulfil the **responsibilities of employers** under the SSSC *Code of Practice for Employers*, to support staff and service users.

"Holding individuals accountable for their professional practice is right. However the employers are accountable too and there needs to be a clearer, more transparent and balanced approach to this." – **Andy McAllion, Children's Residential Worker**

6. Reporting problems

"No-one gets it right all the time but sometimes staff are reluctant to report problems for fear that they will be blamed. We need a non-blame culture where problems can be discussed and addressed with support." – **Jane Lindsay, BASW**

Identifying and reporting problems within workplaces is essential to improving services. This is best done through **effective staff support in a non-blame culture**. Staff need to be able to discuss concerns and weaknesses without fear of being pilloried in the media or hung out to dry by risk averse management. Strong unions and professional staff organisations are critical to this. Relying on whistle-blowing procedures is not effective.

7. Career in Social Care and Rewards

Career paths are haphazard in social work services and many of the managers left their practice base many years previously. We need to develop **Social Care Leaders** in the workplaces and not just in the management teams. The experienced practitioner is not valued in terms of the career paths and managers' lack of recent practice experience can lead to chasms growing between service delivery, planners and managers. This does not lead to good outcomes for the people using services. We need clear career paths and rewards that enable experienced practitioners to remain in practice.

"I have seen many excellent practitioners leave the front line, not because they were fed up with working directly with families but because to develop their career there was no choice but to apply for a promoted post away from the frontline." – **John Stevenson, Edinburgh Children and Families Service**

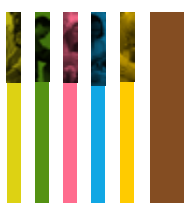
8. Accessibility

"Some social work offices are really depressing. They are old, run down, and not welcoming to service users or staff. When you visit a modern well laid out office with well lit and open reception areas, good sized interview rooms and a range of information clearly displayed, it makes a difference." – **Ruth Stark, BASW**

Often the image we have is a service for other people. The reality is that most of us will use at least one of the social work services at one time in our lives, whether we are getting on in years, needing a nursery placement, adoption and fostering, a mental health issue, dementia or just some help getting through one of those difficult times in our lives.

The vision reflects the move from a service of social control centred on the poor in our society to a **universal service** 'that should be as accessible as the NHS' (Scottish Office Circular introducing the implementation of the Social Work Scotland Act 1968). It does not negate working with people who harm others.

As a workforce we are committed to working with service users and carers to ensure the



“personalisation” of services so that they are appropriate, flexible and effective in maintaining independence and dignity.

● However we need bright, welcoming workplaces that people with a difficulty or concern want to come to at an early stage, rather than a refuge of last resort. We want places to work where people feel good about coming into work at the start of the day or their shift.

9. Social Services in the Community

Accepted in the role of social work services is **achieving safe, strong and cohesive communities**. This means working towards the reduction of risk to people and we acknowledge the responsibility we have in using statutory powers that affect people's human rights and liberty. Social Work is in practice a human rights discipline and the practice governance framework needs to reflect this aspect of our work, along with a meaningful commitment to equality for service users and for staff. This also needs to be acknowledged by employers so that they can support their workers operating within our Code of Ethics.

Preventing people entering the social control systems like courts and children's hearings was achieved more successfully in the 70's and 80's when we had more social service workers involved in community and group work and we reduced the number of places needed in expensive residential schools. We would like to see more investment in this type of approach where social work professionals employed by the local authorities and the community and voluntary sector could practice what they have been trained to do. This would contribute to community capacity building.

“I don't think social workers can address a family's problems in isolation. We all live in a community and rely on it for security, friendship and support. In addition to working with individuals and families more needs to be done to address poverty, lack of resources and fear which have such an adverse affect on our communities.” – Ronnie Stevenson, Social Worker.

10. Resources

Social work across Scotland has seen increased spending in the past few years. However in many cases this has not kept pace with demands of communities and governments. We are now seeing cuts in budgets and real fears about service cuts in the coming months and years. Increasing levels of unemployment, homelessness and poverty will place even greater demands on our services. **The skills of the social care workforce will become even more critical** to individuals, families and communities. Now, even more than ever, Social Work needs additional resources to meet these challenges.

“With rising unemployment and homelessness it is madness to even consider cutting funding to social services in either the public or voluntary sector.” – Stephen Brown, Care Worker with Quarriers.

Conclusion

The entire social care workforce, from social workers to day centre support workers to community service supervisors to residential workers; in local authorities, the community and voluntary sectors; from the front line to the planners, trainers and managers, perform miracles by helping **people change their lives**. This is why they chose to work in the sector in the first place. However, with the increasing demands on them, it becomes difficult to maintain the high standards they set themselves.

This manifesto sets out what we believe needs to be addressed in the next few years to support social work staff to maintain and surpass these standards.

UNISON and BASW look forward to working with all other stakeholders in Social Work in Scotland to achieve these ambitions.

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