

## Social Care Council – General Assembly 2019

Moderator,

Always in the vanguard, the church's social care services, provided over the past 150 years, were often the first of their kind, reflecting a desire to respond to the needs of a changing society in dynamic ways. This history forms the basis of the 150 years exhibition which launched formally at Heart and Soul on Sunday, and which is being hosted by St Cuthbert's Church on Lothian Road over the next month. The tradition set back in 1869 continues to the present day, as we seek to follow Christ's own example and look for solutions to the social problems of our times.

Solutions such as Heart for Art, a therapeutic art activity helping those with dementia to communicate and stay connected.

Solutions such as a new befriending initiative at Cale House in Inverness supporting those who have been homeless to build positive relationships in the community.

Solutions such as Go2 in Glasgow allowing children with disability wider access to activities encouraging young people to be more independent as they transition into adulthood. I hope that you will go and learn about all of this, and lots more, at the exhibition. Please also take time to read the CrossReach impact report pigeonholed today.

Our service provision sits alongside the incredible work done in local churches as they reach out to their communities and we often become involved when community resources need to be enhanced by a more formal approach to social care.

Together we are a formidable force working alongside those experiencing disadvantage and isolation.

We hope to capture more of this combined work through the Social Care Forum where we invite you to share your own inspirational social care initiatives.

During the past century and a half it is not only the Church which has evolved in terms of its provision of social services. So, too, has the State with the introduction of both welfare and healthcare services. It is against this backdrop that CrossReach now provides its services, and from which financial provision it accesses the majority of its funding.

The work of CrossReach continues to be highly valued by those who use the services, as evidenced by the latest service user survey, where, in 2018, we recorded our highest scores against all measures.

However, some of the services struggle to break even both as a result of the funding allocated through local authority contracts and the constant juggle to recruit, train and support the staff necessary to provide the high quality care we aspire to deliver. Issues around funding and staffing, prevalent within the whole social care sector, are most acutely felt in our Older People Services and these difficulties have had an impact on the financial results reported to you.

Ours is a significant part of the Church's witness - offering care, without barriers, in Christ's name and thus, while we do not simply serve the profit motive, we are driven, too, by the aspiration to operate our services at break-even and as a result we have taken time to review this service and rebuild the funding model. Additional resources have been introduced to support the senior team to work through the challenges and find the most appropriate way forward.

Our other services are not immune to the vulnerabilities of funding or staffing. Adult Services have been in an almost constant cycle of competitive tendering, the preferred commissioning mode for many of its services for the past two years.

Whilst the Adult Care Team has been successful in retaining services under this process, it is becoming increasingly difficult to compete within the financial arrangements offered. This type of commissioning is now being challenged from many quarters as it creates uncertainty and disruption for service users and staff alike by cutting across supportive relationships and undermining staff contracts.

Issues of recruitment, retention and procurement of services affect the whole sector and have been the focus of a report by The Fair Work Convention which argues that improvement in wages alone has not fully addressed the underlying issues.

The report significantly highlights both the chronic undervaluing of the social care workforce compared with their colleagues in health, and the additional strain placed on staff and service users through competitive tendering. It states that 'Frontline workers feel respected for the work they do by their colleagues, those they care for, and their employers, but they do not feel particularly valued by Scottish Government or the wider public.' It goes on to make significant recommendations around ways in which these issues could be tackled.

Our senior staff will continue to be involved in discussions with Scottish Government on these and other areas of concern and will work collaboratively with others with an interest in the sector to call for change.

It is said that necessity is the mother of invention and whilst involved in political discussion we continually strive to overcome challenges taking practical steps to manage budgets and attract staff by doing things a bit differently.

One of the recruitment initiatives, which we have taken forward during the course of this year, has been a partnership with the Princes Trust which delivered bespoke employability training to young people interested in working in care. This we backed up offering supported placements in each of our service areas.

A resounding success, with fantastic feedback from the young people and service users alike has now been recognised externally by The Scottish Social Services Council who have awarded it a place in the finals of its annual awards scheme in the category 'Making Change Happen'. We are immensely proud of the young people who completed the course, a number of whom are now employees of CrossReach.

[View video – one minute clip extract for the SSSC awards](#)

External recognition of our excellent staff also came from Scottish Care who awarded The Bungalow in Stonehaven the title 'Specialist Care Home of the Year'. The Bungalow is home to 7 adults with complex learning and physical disabilities and the service was recognised for the way in which it values and respects the rights of the service users and enables them to live as normal a life as possible.

We recognise that services work best when central support is fully aligned to their needs and this year we took our central staff through a quality recognition process which drives that synergy. We were pleased as a result to be awarded the government accredited Customer Service Excellence Award and are building on that foundation.

The work may be divine but our staff are only human.

Despite the generally very high quality of the services recorded in the Blue Book, and all of the external recognition this achieves, we are not immune to human error and mistakes. Part of this year has been devoted to improving service quality and understanding the factors at play when quality dips. We have introduced some new systems and processes as

a result, and already see improvement in the small number of services which were experiencing difficulty in meeting the standards we strive for.

Notwithstanding these isolated blips, we recognise that much of the key to service success rests with the individual managers and their staff and we are constantly grateful for their ongoing commitment and dedicated service.

The world around us may have changed in the past 150 years, but there is no doubt that there remains an urgent need to address the social challenges most prevalent today. Some of these challenges are familiar - child poverty, addiction and disability. Some, however, are very much of our time including cyber bullying or the increasing numbers of people living with dementia. All require us to adapt our approach and build on the experience shared with us by those who use our services.

Knowing we have widespread support from friends and colleagues in churches and communities around us helps us to remain steadfast in our mission to make a difference. We are grateful for the efforts of the many people who have offered practical and prayerful assistance or concern over the past year. We thank the folk who have batted in our corner – including some who are attending here today - by taking part in fundraisers, giving time as volunteers in our services and coming alongside us in other ways.

We have appreciated the careful concern of the Pension Trustees as we have worked together to discharge our obligations to past employees but also to look at ways in which we can vary payments so that we can maintain current service delivery at a time when finances are extremely stretched.

We have also greatly appreciated the support for the Christmas Appeal, an initiative of our Supporter Development Department, to which a number of churches and individuals responded, signing up to become guardian angels offering messages of hope and love as well as providing financial assistance.

We have been blessed by our partnership with The Guild working together on the 'Joining The Dots' project, tackling the roots of loneliness and isolation.

We have also celebrated with the community of Erskine as we opened our new school campus offering first class education facilities for children who find themselves otherwise excluded.

We are grateful for the support and encouragement of The Very Reverend Susan Brown throughout the year in a number of locations. In April, she also hosted her own recovery walk, offering solidarity and hospitality to those working to overcome addiction.

While an historic, but recently very public, event has cast a shadow over success, the past 150 years of Christian service have, with very few exceptions, left an extremely positive legacy, offering hope and a better future to many. I invite you as a General Assembly to pay tribute to the immense work which has taken place over that time, to recognise the stories of the staff, volunteers and service users who have made it all happen and to join with us as we ourselves look forward in anticipation to the years to come.

With technological advances, shifting priorities and changing demographics, who knows what the future will hold for social care? However, we will be ready to play our part in it knowing that whenever we give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord, our labour will not be in vain.

Moderator, I present the report of the Social Care Council and as I am not a Commissioner I invite the Principal Clerk to move it on my behalf.