SOCIAL WORK MATTERS

THE COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK magazine

MARCH 2012

TIME FOR DADS TO CARE

Social work's identity crisis

The College's London summit

Thumbnail navigation
Accessible via Contents tab

TO DOWNLOAD the issue to your computer, click on the **Options** tab on the top toolbar, and select **'Download offline version'**.

TO PRINT either the whole issue or selected pages, click on the printer icon on the top toolbar.

TOP TIP
To make *Social Work Matters* easier to read on screen, maximise your browser window **(press 'F11' in Internet Explorer)**

Digital interactivity

To make *Social Work Matters* as easy to use as possible, all interactive elements of content are coloured in **purple**. Clicking on any purple item on the pages will either take you to other pages or sections, or reveal related content. Examples include:

Previous page/ Next page

Show/hide boxed content e.g. CVs *(above)* Resources

Knowledge Buttons show/hide related article

UPDATE
INTERVIEW

Links to other sections

SOCIAL WORK MATTERS

Editorial team
Editor Mark Ivory
Tel: 020 7024 7706
mark.ivory@tcsw.org.uk

Sub-editor Mike McNabb

Design and Production CPL (Cambridge Publishers Ltd), 275 Newmarket Road, Cambridge CB5 8JE.
www.cpl.co.uk

Editorial advisory panel (interim)
Claire Barcham, professional practice development adviser, The College of Social Work
Owen Davies, public affairs adviser, The College of Social Work
Richard Barker, chair, Policy Development Group, The College of Social Work
Daisy Bogg, member services development officer, The College of Social Work

Social Work Matters is a monthly digital-only publication written, commissioned and edited by The College of Social Work for its members.
The College of Social Work
Fifth Floor, 2-4 Cockspur Street, London, SW1Y 5BH.
www.tcsw.org.uk

Social workers and all those with an interest in the profession are invited to contribute ideas for content. Ideas, comments and enquiries concerning the publication should be directed to the editor Mark Ivory, mark.ivory@tcsw.org.uk

To obtain a regular digital edition of *Social Work Matters*, you will need to be a member of The College of Social Work. Join The College at www.tcsw.org.uk

The College of Social Work is a professional college developed and led by social workers to set and raise practice standards, improve the public image of the profession, and shape the policies and procedures under which social work practitioners operate.

The opinions expressed in the editorial content do not necessarily represent the views of The College of Social Work. Unless specifically stated, goods or services mentioned in the publication are not formally endorsed by The College of Social Work, which does not guarantee or endorse or accept liability for any goods or services featured in this publication.

THE COLLEGE OF **SOCIAL WORK**

Contents

SOCIAL WORK MATTERS

March2012

CONTENTS

FROM THE EDITOR

MARK IVORY

A set of metaphysical questions hangs over social work. Who exactly are we, practitioners have been heard to ask, and what do we stand for? The truth is that social work has an identity crisis and the answers are elusive.

Social work has been forced to fight its corner, particularly in adults' services, as the financial grim reaper cuts a swathe through the local authority workforce. When it comes to social work, some local authorities simply don't get it.

The evidence from service users is that they see social workers as vital to their support and well being. As social workers are set free from the iron cage of care management, they are starting to flourish as advocates for people who need their help in connecting up to community networks, managing risk and safeguarding them from harm.

> Social work has been forced to fight its corner, particularly in adults' services

But social work's identity confusion makes it vulnerable to the depredations of local authority bean-counters. For all its commitment to social justice for service users, it must do more to specify its unique contribution to their care and support.

So here is one reply to the metaphysical question. In these pages social worker turned academic Martin Webber argues for more investment of time and effort in finding a scientific methodology for practice. Ultimately, social work would have its own set of evidence-based social interventions instead of having to borrow them from other professions.

Dr Webber cites mental health practice, where therapeutic programmes are primarily underpinned by findings from psychology and psychiatry. Why not new kinds of programme founded on findings from social work? They may be a much needed answer to the crisis.

See Martin Webber interview here and articles on pages 7, 18 and 20.

Pride in social justice

'What is it that makes social workers unique?' a student recently asked me. I work in a multi-disciplinary team where, as a social worker, I am alongside OTs, nurses, psychologists and doctors, but what is it that I do that none of them can?

Previously I'd have been able to fall back on the ASW (approved social worker) role, but that has now been rebranded AMHP (approved mental health professional) and expanded out to other professions.

The International Federation of Social Work's (IFSW) definition explains that social work is defined by the use of theories of change in our work and models of practice that strive for empowerment.

While this answer satisfied the student, it made me consider a couple of points. Why had it been so difficult for me to find a general definition of what social workers – and *only* social workers - do?

I know what I do, of course, but social work is so broad that there are other aspects I know little about. I also considered to what extent we really do empower people and how far we are able to challenge the systems we work in.

Social workers are usually involved in people's lives during periods of difficulty or crisis. As a profession, we have a unique role and a unique voice in advocating for those who need the services we provide.

Looking back at that IFSW definition, though, takes us to the heart of what it is we do that is different. That is, promoting social justice is the essence of our role. It makes me incredibly proud of the work I do. It reminds me how vital it is, now more than ever.

See articles on pages 18 and 20

VICTORIA HART is a social worker in London

at the SHARP end

User view from **Sue Bott**

Are social workers on the same side as service users? Well of course they are – what a silly question except... at the launch of The College in January it was acknowledged that many service users are actually frightened of their social worker.

This is also the message we receive from many of the callers to our information line on direct payments and personal budgets.

Being wary of the social worker is well understood in work with families and children. There are bound to be tensions in situations where the needs of the child have to be protected. In adult social care this fear factor is less expected.

It is unfortunate that in recent years the social worker has had to be the bringer of bad news to the service user. 'We have undertaken a reassessment and unfortunately although we all know your needs have not changed, and increased if anything, we will be cutting your funding...'

The changes in community care that were introduced in 1993 were never meant to be like this. The idea was that the money management was separate to identifying the need, but lack of resources led to it all being wrapped up together.

> There are bound to be tensions in situations where the needs of the child have to be protected

If we are to end the fear and establish mutually beneficial relationships between social workers and service users, we have to let social workers be social workers not budget managers.

Sue Bott is director of development, Disability Rights UK

THINGS I LIKED

Social workers offer their practice highlights of the month

Victoria Hart

mental health social worker

Walking away from someone's house after discharging them and knowing inside that they were going to be just fine without my input and involvement.

The less someone needs me around the happier I am. This was one of those happy occasions.

Dan Mushens

social work student

I visited a local community resource centre enquiring if the duty social worker had ten minutes free so I could pick his brains. I was grateful not only to get an hour of his time there and then, but to also be offered a shadow shift the following week.

Jemma Fordham

child protection practice leader

I was impressed in a meeting between birth parents and adopters by their bravery and dignity in making this difficult and emotional exchange work. A truly humbling experience and a stark reminder that working relationships can be forged when all have the child's best interests at heart.

As a second year social work student, I'm still asked by many people what service user group I intend to work with once I become a newly qualified social worker (NQSW). It seems to me that they believe social work students must have a preferred client group before they've even completed their UCAS form.

As well being a full time mature student, I also have two relief jobs and two voluntary jobs, giving me the opportunity to experience working in four different settings.

One of my paid jobs involves working with adults who have a diagnosis of schizophrenia in a residential unit, while my second job involves supporting children with learning and physical disabilities in the community.

> It wouldn't be possible to be a truly effective social worker if you stayed within the comfort zone of the service user group that you had long ago decided on

My two voluntary positions, which are both as important to me in terms of gaining experience as my paid jobs, include working with adult offenders in Barlinnie prison in Glasgow and volunteering with homeless youths in a temporary supported living unit.

On top of all this, I have university work placements each year. To be able to apply your newly acquired knowledge base to service users who have different needs is an invaluable opportunity that all social work students should try to achieve. For me, it wouldn't be possible to be a truly effective social worker if you stayed within the comfort zone of the service user group that you had long ago decided on.

So to answer the question 'what service user group do you plan to work with?', I always reply that it's impossible to say as I've yet to work within all settings. The questioner usually looks puzzled, but how many other social work students began their studies knowing what future social work job they wanted?

Dan Mushens is a social work student at the University of the West of Scotland.

BLOGLOG

Thoughts from the College blog

Being seen as a "profession" isn't an issue that people should spend time considering or worrying about. If practice decisions are well informed and credible, this will look after itself.

MIKE

For me, 'enabling' is not just about an individual doing what they want to do, it is also about recognising power relationships and planning for crisis to enable the individual to have a say about what they want to happen when they are unable to make their own choices or are at significant risk

DAISYB

Reports written whether for court, case conference, or decision making and sharing, are best written succinctly and simply, without being an academic assignment and a presentation of intellectual prowess.

GM

You will have time to find sources and put in references as well as write your assessments in day to day social work life? Methinks not!

SIMON BANKS

Why then do so many of the social workers I know roll their eyes and look thoroughly uneasy when integration is discussed? It's because we fear it means being swallowed by the organisation and management approaches that so often accompany the health service.

ETIENNE

Working on rolling out a personalised service to service users, as a support worker, I feel it has been proven to work towards service users gaining independence, but the funding is only for two years!!

THERESA

UPDATE Time to 'liberate' social workers, College tells minister

Social workers should be 'liberated from the care management straitjacket' in order to take a more creative approach to supporting users and carers, The College of Social Work has said in a letter to social care minister Paul Burstow (pictured).

In the letter, which will feed into the government's care and support White Paper due in the spring, The College emphasises that qualified social workers are best placed to safeguard vulnerable adults and ensure that adult protection systems work effectively.

It calls for 'significant change' in training for best interest assessors (BIA) under the Mental Capacity Act. Describing existing training as 'rudimentary,' the letter urges the Department of Health to work with The College on new arrangements for training and retaining BIAs.

'Self-confident social workers, relishing the chance to be creative and to exercise professional judgement despite challenging circumstances, must be a key part of your workforce,' the letter from College interim co-chair Maurice Bates and Transition Board member Jo Cleary tells the minister.

The move follows The College summit on the future of adult social work held in London on February 3.

➜ Letter to Paul Burstow

Legal framework to stress role of dads

Fathers will have a more prominent place in the legal framework for the care of children under major reforms to the family justice system.

The Ministry of Justice, responding to last year's Family Justice Review (FJR), said that it wanted to emphasise the importance of children's relationships with both of their parents following a separation.

It promised a 'legislative statement' focused on establishing meaningful relationships wherever this was in the child's best interests, stressing quality of parenting rather than spending equal time with both parents.

But the government's proposal opposes the FJR, which urged caution after learning that similar legislation had fared badly in Australia.

'In principle I welcome this development as I believe that there should be a presumption that, all things being equal, a child's welfare is promoted by having continued contact with both parents,' said College spokesperson Gary Hickman.

➜ Read the government's response to the FJR

➜ See article on fathers, page 13

Inspections may put dogma first, children second

Ofsted's new inspection regime for adoption risks putting dogma before the interests of children, according to College of Social Work interim co-chair Corinne May-Chahal.

Professor May-Chahal (pictured) said Ofsted's decision, which will deny the top rating to any local authority which takes more than a year to place children for adoption, may lead councils to give less attention to other permanence options for looked after children.

'We support adoptive placements wherever these are best for a child and any unnecessary bureaucracy should be cleared out of the way,' she said.

'But it is important that social workers are able to make balanced judgements about the future of children in care without external pressure to choose one option above all others.'

➜ Read College statement

Social work's IDENTITY CRISIS

Social worker-turned-academic Martin Webber believes the role of the professional is often muddied by the emphasis on psychological interventions rather than social solutions. He spoke to Natalie Valios

It seems that every few years a social care organisation is tasked with re-defining social work. In 2008, the General Social Care Council, Skills for Care, the Children's Workforce Development Council and the Social Care Institute for Excellence produced their social work 'roles and tasks' statement, only to be superseded a year later by a new definition from the Social Work Task Force.

And, yet, ask a member of the public what a social worker does and you are likely to be met by either a blank face or the words 'they remove children'. This lack of understanding has dogged social workers in a way unknown to doctors, teachers and the police.

But the need for a definition may not be the most important factor, says Martin Webber, lecturer in social work at the Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London. In his view, it would be more valuable for social workers to be able to clearly communicate what they do and their realm of expertise.

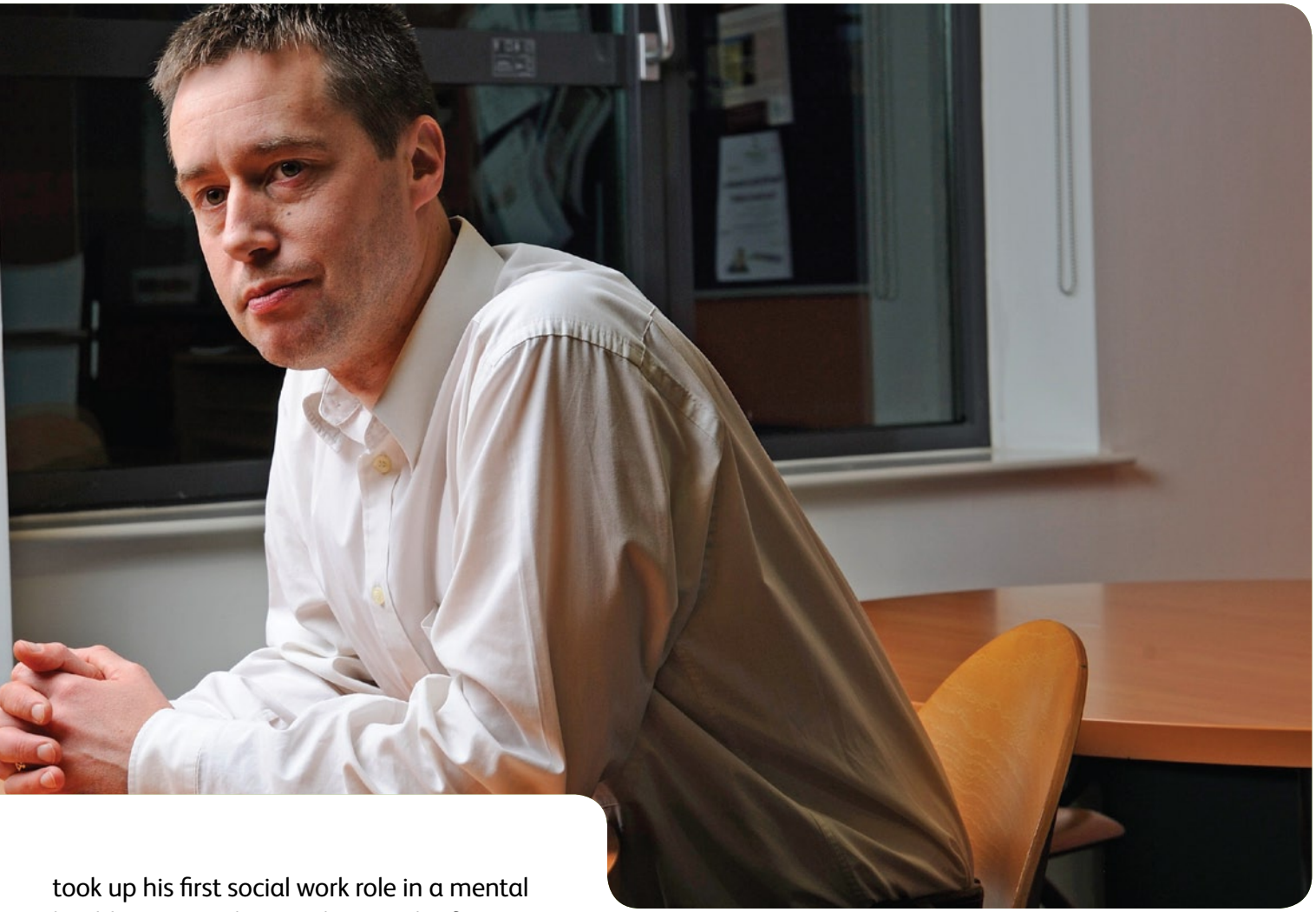
A good example of this, he says, is the recent BBC2 programme, *Protecting Our Children*, which follows Bristol City Council's child protection team. 'It helps that part of the profession says "this is what we do". It is a positive portrayal,' he says.

Martin himself laughed at the idea of becoming a social worker when a friend suggested it at university. 'I didn't see myself in that role, partly because I didn't know what a social worker was and, like anybody who doesn't know, you are imbued with prejudice because of what you think it is,' he recalls.

After investigation, he changed his mind: 'I was interested in where we have come from as a society, and the clues that history give us as to the future and how we can progress as a society. Within that, I was interested in people's lives and how they are affected by politics and power. For me, inequality has always been the most pressing concern. Social work seemed to be a profession that had something to say about it.'

Throughout his training Martin realised there was an identity crisis in social work, and to this day says it is still an enduring question and for me it is unresolved.

One reason for this became clear when he



took up his first social work role in a mental health team at the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames. Here, he saw that the power in multi-disciplinary teams resided predominantly with psychiatry and psychology because of their scientific evidence base. 'They can articulate with confidence what they do and the outcomes; that is the crucial difference to social work,' he says.

'Social workers were respected for their knowledge of the law, but the frustration for me was that social workers were not

> I saw social work practitioners doing good work, but it wasn't evidenced or communicated in the same way as psychiatry or psychology

recognised for their ability to address and to intervene in the social context of people's lives. That is predominantly the work of the community mental health team.

'Although there is the medical and psychological component, underpinning all this is a strong sense that we are working with a cross-section of society that is incredibly disadvantaged. Social justice is about recognising that, confronting it and doing something about it. I saw social work practitioners doing good work, but it wasn't evidenced or communicated in the same way as psychiatry or psychology.'

The uniqueness that social workers brought to the team was missed, he says. 'Social workers typically have a good knowledge of what is going on in their community, and they can plug people into the right resources that they need at different points in their engagement with services. It is what social workers do with that knowledge that is the unique aspect.

'I found that health staff might have that knowledge but social workers make more of an investment in getting people engaged with their own lives. It's saying you're not just a person with a diagnosis, you have a life and interests and strengths.'

This understanding of the importance of social capital – building stronger social networks to improve service users' lives – is key to the social work role. Martin's concern today is that social workers are being appointed on their ability to carry out interventions rather than solving such social problems.

Numerous mental health practitioners have told him that interviews focus on the evidence-based interventions they can deliver, such as cognitive behavioural therapy or behavioural therapy. 'My question is: "what is social work's role in developing that evidence base and whose evidence base is it?"'

The longstanding problem for social work is that it has drawn on theories and evidence across a range of disciplines for many years. Although Martin sees this as one of its strengths, 'it leaves us a bit impoverished in the sense of what can be claimed to be owned by the profession'.

The NHS and Community Care Act 1990 brought further complications by introducing the purchaser-provider split, commissioning and the care manager role to adults' services. As a hybrid social work role, the latter can be done by any member of the multi-disciplinary team and has added to confusion, he says.

This has all had a profound impact on Martin's career, as he felt forced to leave life as a practitioner if he were to bring about change. "I loved being a practitioner but I decided that an academic career would help make a difference to the profession, which will consequently make a difference to people," he says.

As yet there are no academic-practice roles in social work as there are in health, where psychologists and psychiatrists can become clinical academics working part-time as both practitioner and academic under one contract.

'I would welcome the opportunity to blend the two roles in social work,' he says. 'Research is grounded in practice and it would help to square the circle. It would give academics more credibility with practitioners because they could see that what we do is relevant to practice.'

Martin is passionate about articulating what social work does and evidencing it, and how this will help solve the profession's

CV

Martin Webber

Education

2009: King's College London, Institute of Psychiatry (PhD social psychiatry)

2003: King's College London, Institute of Psychiatry (MSc in mental health services research)

1999: Royal Holloway College, University of London (MSc in social work)

1999: Royal Holloway College, University of London (diploma in social work)

1994: University of York, (BA (hons) history)

Employment

2002-now: King's College London, Institute of Psychiatry. Since 2010, lecturer in social work; since 2006, programme leader, MSc Mental Health Social Work with Children and Adults; 2002-6, social science fellow

2003-6: The Open University, associate lecturer

2000-4: British Institute of Learning Disabilities, distance learning tutor

1999-2002: Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames, social worker/care manager/ approved social worker

1994-7: The Sons of Divine Providence, support worker/deputy manager/senior support worker/support worker

identity crisis: 'Social workers are scared of scientific methodology being applied to social work practice; it seems distant from the lived reality of people.

'I understand that, but you need to look at the value it can bring in terms of reliable evidence about what will happen if you do A rather than B. Embedded within scientific methodology should be a process of understanding how it works, not just whether it works and the outcomes.'

In his mind, social capital provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding social work practice. To this end, Martin is leading a pilot, The Connecting People Study funded by the National Institute for Health Research, which will explore social capital interventions for young people recovering from psychosis. Social workers and service users will co-produce individual action plans. 'It is not a case of care planning, it is goal setting; it is reframing practice,' he says.

> I loved being a practitioner but I decided that an academic career would help make a difference to the profession which will consequently make a difference to people

His hope is that the agencies piloting the intervention find that the method resonates with them and makes sense: 'The pilot has some of the elements of the old core values of social work, what I was doing when I was a social worker. That changed under care management but is coming back with personalisation. At its core is building social capital and this is about articulating how it might happen in reality.'

So what chance does Martin think the profession has of solving its identity crisis? 'With an independent college [The College of Social Work] to speak for us, the best chance it has ever had. But I don't think we should rely on The College; we as a profession should take ownership of ourselves. We need to be guided by the strength of our own collective wisdom.' SWM.

Discover who's speaking at Community Care Live 2012

COMMUNITYcare live12

The Premier Event For Social Care Professionals

16th AND 17th MAY 2012

BUSINESS DESIGN CENTRE, ISLINGTON, LONDON

In partnership with

THE COLLEGE OF SOCIALWORK

Unifying the workforce and helping social care professionals deliver positive outcomes during challenging times

Join your professional colleagues by registering for this year's **FREE** event. We are developing a conference programme that will give you the opportunity to hear from key leaders from the children and families and adults' social care sectors on the issues that matter most to you.

Day one - 16th May

Key speakers already confirmed in debate sessions include:


Tim Loughton MP

Debate Sessions

- **Tim Loughton MP**, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families, *Department for Education*
- **Martin Narey**, Government Advisor on Adoption


Martin Narey


Jeremy Vine

Question Time

Hosted by:

- **Jeremy Vine**

Panellists include:

- **Julia Unwin CBE**, Chief Executive, *Joseph Rowntree Foundation* and *Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust*
- **Louise Casey CB**, Director General, Troubled Families, *Department of Communities and Local Government*
- **Kay Sheldon**, mental health service user and Board Member, *Care Quality Commission*


Julia Unwin CBE


Louise Casey CB


Kay Sheldon

Day two - 17th May

Key speakers already confirmed in debate sessions include:


Paul Burstow MP

Debate Sessions

- **Paul Burstow MP**, Minister of State for Care Services, *Department of Health*
- **John Goldup**, Deputy Chief Inspector, Education, Children's Services and Skills, *Ofsted*
- **Gary Vaux**, Head of Money and Advice Unit, *Hertfordshire County Council*


John Goldup


Gary Vaux

Risk Factor

- **Perdeep Gill**, Social Care Consultant, *ADITI Consultancy and Training*


Perdeep Gill

To find out more about exhibitor or sponsorship opportunities please contact Nicky Davies – sponsorship and Event Manager at nicky.davies@rbi.co.uk or call 0208 652 4782/ 07787 151949

Headline event sponsor

Essex County Council

Sponsor of Question Time

JRF JOSEPH ROWNTREE FOUNDATION

Register for your FREE place at www.communitycarelive.co.uk

Conference · Advice Clinic · Exhibition · Debates · Workshops · Question Time · Risk Factor · Wellbeing Clinic · Grafitti Zone

Delegates must be over 18. All conferences places are available on a first come, first served basis.
Conference programme may change at short notice, so please refer to the web site for the latest updates

Out of the shadows

Workplace cultures need to change so that fathers are engaged in child protection, argues Dr Mark Osborn

Fatherhood in the UK is changing: fathers are becoming more involved in their children's lives and in recent years they have been engaging more with a wide range of child welfare services. However, fathers remain peripheral within child protection work, despite the acknowledgement that abusive men are the main cause of safeguarding concerns (Scourfield, 2006).

This unfairly places the emphasis of scrutiny and investigation on mothers as well as the responsibility for the child's welfare.

Dr Mark Osborn is programme manager, safeguarding, at the Fatherhood Institute

This is repeatedly a key issue within serious case reviews, and yet little appears to change. The Department for Education has funded the Fatherhood Institute in partnership with Family Rights Group to work with local authorities to develop and trial resources which aim to address this.

In recent years there has been significant change in the way that fathers' roles are developing within the family. British fathers'

> Low interest by fathers in children's education has a stronger negative impact on their achievement than does contact with police, poverty, family type, social class, housing and child's personality

care of infants and young children rose 800% between 1975 and 1997, from 15 minutes to two hours on the average working day – at double the rate of mothers' (Fisher, McCulloch & Gershuny, 1999; Smeaton & Marsh, 2006).

There is a growing body of research about the positive and negative impact that fathers have on their child's development (Burgess, 2010). Children with positively involved fathers statistically achieve better educational, cognitive and emotional outcomes (Flouri 2005).

Poor paternal involvement impacts upon behaviour and aggression of children; and low interest by fathers in children's education has a stronger negative impact on their achievement than does contact with police, poverty, family type, social class, housing and child's personality (Blanden, 2006).

In recent years, many health and child welfare services have made strides towards developing father-inclusive practice. The same progress does not appear to have happened in child protection services. In Scourfield's ethnographic study of social work culture, he found that men were perceived by social workers as a threat, as being of no use, frequently absent, or irrelevant, even when little was known about them (Scourfield, 2001).

> Ofsted's report describes the men as being 'invisible' to practitioners or ephemeral like 'ghosts'

There is a well-documented tendency in social work to view fathers as either good or bad, as risk or resource, rather than a mixture of both (Ashley et. al., 2010). This approach is misleading, ineffective and at times dangerous – and can only be remedied through greater engagement and assessment.

Serious case reviews

The recent Ofsted report *Ages of Concern* focused on learning lessons from serious case reviews over the years 2007 – 2011(Ofsted, 2011). The report identified recurring messages from the reviews that concerned babies less than one year old and found that: 'In too many cases... the role of the fathers had been marginalised'.

Ofsted's report describes the men as being 'invisible' to practitioners or ephemeral like 'ghosts' and highlights the needs for practitioners to 'maintain a focus on the father of the baby, the potential implications of his own needs and his role in the family'. This is a systemic issue and not simply about failings of individuals.

None of this is new. Previously Brandon et. al. (2007) noted: 'The dearth of information about men in most serious case reviews; failure to take fathers and other men connected to the families into account in assessments.'

In the Brandon article, this is related to a bigger pattern of the lack of engagement with fathers in child health and welfare services identified in the previous decade by Haskett et al (1996), describing a powerful image of men almost as an ominous and brooding presence:

> 'The (health workers) were aware of the father being very much in the background and not participating. Rather, he was an onlooker standing in a darker part of the room.'

This image echoes the paper produced the decade before by Olive Stevenson (1988) which reviewed previous enquiries, where she talks of the phenomenon of 'shadowy men' within child protection work.

Changing workplace cultures

It will not be easy to change this situation. It is built into existing workplace cultures (Scourfield, 2001) and there are significant barriers that inhibit change. These barriers are institutional, cultural and individual and are maintained by fathers, mothers and social workers.

If change is to happen, then there must be acceptance of the fact that the workplace culture has to be challenged. Opening up an appreciation of gender within policies, procedures and practices is important to begin to address this issue.

Appreciation of the role and implications of gender within social work needs to be explicitly addressed in training, and this must happen at all levels within an organisation for a culture to be affected. Creating a supportive environment where staff can discuss their concerns, their fears, their safety, and their management of risk around engaging

with men is fundamental to establishing a learning culture where change can happen.

Facing the unknown is one of the hardest things we have to cope with. We need to shine a light on the fathers and father-figures who are closely involved, as well as those who are on the periphery of children's lives. Only then will we bring these figures out of the shadows and properly into focus. **SWM**

BARRIERS TO FATHER-INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

There are many factors that inhibit engagement with fathers.

Traditional assumptions about gender roles view mothers as the primary caretakers of children, and this is often reflected in social work practice. Child welfare services frequently underestimate fathers' involvement in children's lives: their value and impact, both positive and negative.

Fathers may be dismissed as uninterested, unreliable, incapable, irrelevant or inherently problematic by services and by mothers and fathers themselves. Parenting programmes are commonly viewed by fathers as being for mothers and not relevant to them. Fathers may also have a perception that social care is a largely female domain and feel self-conscious or intimidated, and believe that they will not be valued or listened to.

If the problem of engagement is thought to lie with individual practitioners or within the men themselves, agencies may not review their own practice to identify and overcome organisational barriers. Agency policy may reflect lack of clarity about how important it is to work with fathers as well as mothers.

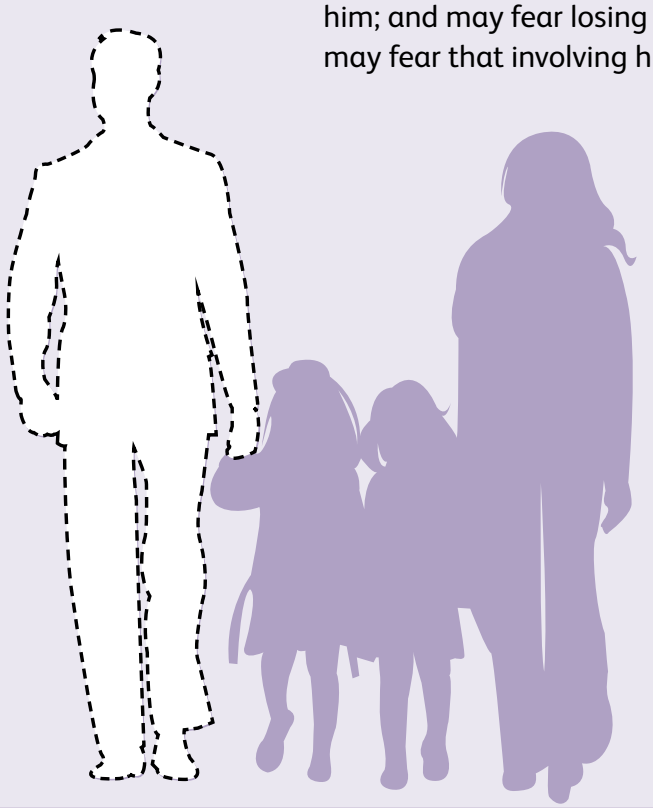
Time constraints on social work practice may also encourage the view that including fathers is time-consuming and not essential, particularly if the social worker has already seen one father figure and considers that to engage another is a low priority, particularly if he is not resident with the child. It is well documented that practitioners are often fearful of fathers who are known to be violent or aggressive (Ryan, 2000). Unless this is addressed by an open and supportive workplace environment, it is left to individuals to shoulder this burden.

The social construction of masculinity stresses the need for men to be powerful, independent and not to show vulnerability or weakness. This can be highly influential on how men engage with support services.

Some fathers who want to be involved may remain in the background and appear uninterested. Some fathers will be waiting to be given permission to be involved, and professionals who are persistent in encouraging their participation can help them to understand how they are important to the outcomes for their children.

Fathers may also have concerns that getting involved will cause problems with their child's mother, the benefits she receives, or other partners and children.

A mother whose partner uses violence or drugs, is involved in criminal activities, or is an illegal immigrant, may fear his reaction to service involvement and services' reactions to him; and may fear losing their children. Some may fear that involving him might weaken their relationship with a key worker or 'open the door' to his (or his parents') being able claim greater contact, residence or even sole custody.



This is by no means an exhaustive list and there are other barriers not mentioned here. These factors work in combination to provide powerful barriers to the inclusion of fathers in practice.

FATHERS AS RISK AND RESOURCE

By focusing primarily on mothers and failing to assess or work with fathers, systems fail to adequately protect vulnerable children. Men frequently become labelled as either a 'risk' or 'resource' when they may represent a complex mix of both.

The tendency to polarise views of fathers as either good or bad, risk or resource, is repeatedly identified as a failing by academic research and practice reviews. The Brandon et. al. (2009) serious case review analysis illustrates this polarisation as unsafe practice: if the parent is viewed as either good or bad then evidence to the contrary may be ignored or not trusted and therefore not acted upon.

They cite situations where social workers ignored both the concerns raised by fathers who were seen as untrustworthy, and conversely, the harmful behaviours exhibited by apparently co-operative and compliant fathers. They identify the importance of recognising patterns of behaviour affecting child welfare or safety rather than making assumptions based on character or personality; the latter may encourage professionals to overvalue positive behaviour by fathers, and underestimate risk.

Evidence suggests that helping fathers towards a realisation of the negative impact their behaviour is having on their children – or initially limiting contact with a child while providing support for the father to help him tackle seriously negative behaviours – can stimulate positive change (Hall, 2004).

When men's behaviours are violent and oppressive, risk to family members' safety is of course direct and immediate. Managing and addressing these risks is crucial – not only for the safety of their immediate family, but also for other women and children with whom they may interact.

However, difficult and even dangerous men may also be able to offer a resource for children. Featherstone & Peckover (2007) argue that the construction of domestically violent fathers solely as 'perpetrators' or 'offenders' can render invisible their identities as parents, and that this has seriously compromised the development of effective policies and practices to support women and children, while at the same time failing to offer men opportunities to develop non-violent parenting and partnering relationship patterns.

Improved communication, assessment and engagement with fathers creates the potential to make improvements to risk management, employ untapped resources and impact positively on outcomes for our most vulnerable children.

RESOURCES

Ashley C. Roskill C, Fraser C, Featherstone B, Haresnape S and Lindley B. (2010) *Working with Risky Fathers – Fathers Matter volume 3: Research findings on working with domestically abusive fathers and their involvement with children's social care services.* London: Family Rights Group

Blanden, J. (2006) *'Bucking the trend': What enables those who are disadvantaged in childhood to succeed later in life?* Working Paper No 31 Corporate Document Services. London: Department for Work and Pensions.

Brandon, M., Bailey, S., Belderson, P., Gardner, R., Sidebotham, P., Dodsworth, J., Warren, C., and Black, J. (2009) Understanding serious case reviews and their impact: a biennial analysis of serious case reviews 2005-2007 (PDF). London: Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).

Burgess, A., (2010) The Costs and Benefits of Active Fatherhood.

Fisher, K., McCulloch, A. & Gershuny, J. (1999) *British fathers and children.* Working Paper. University of Essex: Institute for Social and Economic Research.

Flouri, E. (2005) *Fathering & Child Outcomes.* Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons.

Featherstone, B., & Peckover, S. (2007) *'Letting them get away with it': fathers, domestic violence and child welfare.* Critical Social Policy.

Hall, A. (2004) Parental psychiatric disorder and the developing child. In M. Gopfert, J. Webster & M.V. Seeman (eds.), *Parental Psychiatric Disorder: distressed parents and their families.* (2nd ed.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ofsted (2011) *Ages of concern: learning lessons from serious case reviews. A thematic report of Ofsted's evaluation of serious case reviews from 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2011.*

Ryan, M. (2000) Working with Fathers. Abingdon: Radcliffe Medical Press (for the Department of Health).

Scourfield, J. (2006) The challenge of engaging fathers in the child protection process. Critical Social Policy, 25(2), 449-449.

Scourfield, J. (2001) Constructing men in child protection work, *Men and Masculinities*, 4, 1: 70-89.

Smeaton, D., & Marsh, A. (2006) *Maternity and Paternity Rights and Benefits: Survey of Parents 2005. Employment Relations Research Series No. 50.* Department of Trade and Industry.

Stevenson, O., (1988) Practice Issues Arising from Enquiries Unpublished Paper.

Stop all the clocks

Eight local authorities are trying a more flexible approach to child protection assessment timescales. Here, three College members debate the pros and cons

The Munro review recommended a more flexible approach to the assessment of children and young people in child protection cases. Under current rules, initial assessments have to be completed in seven working days, and core assessments in 35 working days.

But Munro said social workers should be liberated to use their professional judgement, so in eight local authorities the government is allowing assessment timescales to reflect children's needs and has relaxed the prescriptive element.

Findings from the eight trials, due to finish at the end of March, may be used to amend *Working Together to Safeguard Children*. So we asked three social workers unconnected with the trials to give their views on the pros and cons of assessment timescales.

Amy Norris
Children's social worker

Maggie Siviter
CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCE CHAIR

When considering assessment deadlines, the main question has to be what are the deadlines for? There may have been good reasons historically, but in my view sensitive, child-centred and evolving assessments do not need imposed deadlines.

Close attention to any child's development will tell you when they have a new and emerging need that requires prompt attention. Assessments are, as currently practised, a series of snapshots of a child's situation – a frozen picture in time – brought about through a brief process of information gathering.

These 'snapshot' assessments stand along a child's life as a series of pictures in an album. Yet children's lives evolve in the four dimensions of space and time, where physical and developmental stillness are adult concepts in a child's rapidly changing world. Assessments create adult-centred, unnatural photographic stills of a child's world in motion.

But the need for a child to receive support should not depend on waiting for the picture to 'develop'. A child needs what they need when they need it. Assessment has to be an evolving and dynamic process, with needs met as soon as they arise. Children too often have to wait until the system requires their needs to be reviewed before anyone realises their needs haven't been met in the first place.

> A child needs what they need when they need it. Assessment has to be an evolving and dynamic process with needs met as soon as they arise

It is this practice which, I feel, can sometimes let children down. Parents assess and meet children's needs in a fluid, continuous way. Children's needs take shape in different ways at different times and assessments should aspire to react as quickly as the most attentive of parents. SWM

RESOURCES

Jan Parker
University lecturer

Jan Parker
UNIVERSITY LECTURER

Prescribed timescales create the stress of meeting deadlines dictated by the system – and relaxing them has got to be a positive move, especially if it gives social workers the ability to manage their own caseloads.

But if you take something away it must be replaced with something else. If this fails to happen in the case of initial and core assessments, then there will be a danger of drift occurring in casework. The answer is good supervision.

Critical thinking and research-minded practice need to be supported and understood by supervisors in order to ensure that the workforce continue to develop the skills they began to develop as social work students.

A newly qualified social worker once asked me why she had been told by her manager to undertake a risk assessment 'when the risks were blatantly obvious'. It occurred to me that the manager had not recognised that this new social worker was unsure of the processes that needed to take place to reach the point where the risks could be evidenced.

> There should be more rigorous attention given to guidelines for supervision to support practitioners to reflect and think critically in their casework

When I set about identifying tasks within the assessment, such as direct work with children, observation, supporting parenting capacity, identifying need as well as the positive aspects, I noticed that the work became more meaningful for the practitioner.

If assessment timescales are relaxed, there should be more rigorous attention given to guidelines for supervision to support practitioners to reflect and think critically in their casework.

Maggie Siviter
Child protection conference chair

Amy Norris
CHILDREN'S SOCIAL WORKER

The Munro review argues that previous reforms, though well meaning, have led to a tick-box culture instead of a focus on the best outcome for the child.

Professor Munro feels that the previous guidelines, such as *Working Together to Safeguard Children* and *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and Their Families*, have inadvertently led to unhelpful timescales and procedures.

But I would argue that these guidelines have not been tested properly, due to the continued lack of staffing and funding that children's services have received.

Social workers are unable to work within the timescales because they have high caseloads and limited resources. They also work with other agencies that prioritise their own guidelines to the detriment of the child.

Eight local authorities are trialling more flexible approaches to assessments, so a definitive verdict cannot be given. Lord Laming, however, made reference to the lack of communication between agencies, overwhelming workloads, low pay and low morale in his 2009 report.

> Social workers are unable to work within the timescales because they have high caseloads and limited resources

Any new initiatives will never be successful if these issues, all of which have been identified since the death of Victoria Climbie in 2000, are not addressed.

RESOURCES

Department for Education (2010) *Working Together to Safeguard Children.*

Department of Health (2000) *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and Their Families.*

Lord Laming (2009) *The Protection of Children in England: A progress report.* TSO.

Munro, Professor Eileen (2011) *The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final report.* Department for Education.

Will 'Cinderella' go to the ball?

Social work's role will be 'at the heart' of the care and support White Paper. Joy Ogden takes soundings from The College of Social Work's London summit on what it might say

Einstein reportedly remarked: 'I never think about the future. It comes soon enough.' But most of us do think about it, not least when it comes to the future of social work with adults, as the people who use services gain more choice and control over their own services.

Many social workers see this trend towards personalisation as a threat to their jobs and a significant number have been made redundant in local authority cuts. But now they are fighting back.

Social workers are making their views known to the government through a series of events mounted by The College of Social Work, which culminated in a February 'summit' held in London to share the latest thinking on the role and tasks for social workers in adult care.

A summary of the lessons of the summit for the remit of the profession has been sent to social care minister Paul Burstow, who has promised that social work will be at the heart of the care and support White Paper due to be published in the spring.

The title of the keynote speech by Glen Mason, one of the minister's senior officials in the Department of Health, was perhaps a good omen: 'Cinderella You Shall Go to the Ball'. He sought to dispel any lingering doubts about the role of social workers in the era of personalisation, despite evidence that some local authorities are cutting back on them.

It was a vision of social work in which practitioners freed themselves from the shackles of the care management regime that has imprisoned them for 20 years. Instead, social work could look forward to being a strong, independent profession in which sound relationships were established as the basis of casework, group work and community work.

Other speakers echoed these views of care management. Dr Adi Cooper, director of adult social services and housing in Sutton, spoke about the 'disempowering and de-skilling of two decades of care management,' while Peter Beresford, chair of user group Shaping Our Lives, said it had turned social workers into a kind of 'Mr or Ms Fixit or mini-manager, who is supposed to create packages of support for service users rather than provide the valued advocacy and support they can uniquely offer.'

> Safeguarding should be used proactively to improve outcomes rather than putting all the emphasis on investigation and monitoring

Beresford said the evidence from service users was that skills and qualities like respect, empathy, reliability, practical help, a sense of judgement about risk and seeing people's lives in the round, not just as problems, were what mattered.

He added: '[Social work] is not a technically based profession like nursing or medicine. It is in these skills and qualities that it has its unique contribution. It is these which define it.'

Adi Cooper warned that social workers needed to demonstrate that they are 'value for money' in this period of austerity, but her experience of reorganising social work in Sutton was that this can be done.

She said safeguarding should be used proactively to improve outcomes rather than putting all the emphasis on investigation and monitoring. A community social work pilot locally was beginning to show the value of community capacity-building, the role of networking and the importance of inspirational professional leadership.

After the de-skilling of care management, social workers were being re-skilled in programmes of attachment-based social work with adults, she said. Making the financial or 'business case' for social workers meant that they would have to focus on assessment and judgement as the key to evaluating risks and needs; empowerment and re-ablement rather than dependency; safeguarding; facilitating family and friends to contribute to care and support; and financial 'gatekeeping' during tough times.

But the jury was still out on the future effects of personalisation, once touted as the Holy Grail. Some were guardedly optimistic, one or two downright sceptical. The optimists saw it as a way to get back to core values: a way to use their judgement and unique set of skills creatively to empower people. But others feared it was also resulting in fewer social workers and, as Beresford put it, 'the use instead of non-professional workers working with set scripts and considerably less discretion and independence.'

The forthcoming White Paper will show what the future holds. **SWM**

'Social work in the 21st century is valuable, important, independent and has the power to transform lives. It's not just about casework but about group work, community work and by using technology, social workers can practise more effectively in a complex environment and recapture judgement.'

Glen Mason

'Sometimes we should stop saying "challenging" and say "really awful": both in terms of budget cuts but also the growing levels of distress and need in our communities that will make it a tricky time, a time when social work skills are going to be needed more than ever.'

James Blewett, Kings' College London

'Much attention is focused on children's care, but children are raised by adults. We need to start formulating stronger partnerships and integration of adults' and children's services.'

Graham Wilkin, Surrey council

'We need to motivate staff to promote creativity to find out what works. And while productivity is important, there must be a business case.'

Adi Cooper

WHO AM I?

Social workers have needs too

What requirements does the profession have if it is to flourish? Ben Martin reports

Social workers are more than familiar with the concept of assessing need. Similarly, reflection is a key part of developing social work practice, so that social workers' diverse experiences can generate change in their actions, outlooks and approaches.

However, it might be argued that we have not been so rigorous when it comes to applying these same principles to social work as a profession. How can we begin to assess the needs of social work as a 'professional whole'?

As a practising social worker and a media volunteer for The College of Social Work, I was recently asked to provide a short talk about The College to a group of social care and health professionals in Torbay.

I started off by taking some of the categories that I commonly use to assess the people I work with and considered how I might use these to have a structured discussion around the needs of social work as a profession. What follows is a summary of the feedback I received from participants under each of the headings used.

Identity

The major aim for most respondents was that social work should be viewed positively, and their supportive role recognised. It was essential for many that social workers were knowledgeable, but that they were also good at sharing knowledge with others.

Values that came up repeatedly included professionalism, person-centredness, integrity and individualism. Above all, there was a strong belief in the role of social work in promoting social justice, but many felt this was under-represented. Social workers also suggested that principles such as valuing diversity and maintaining confidentiality strengthen social work's professional identity.

Relationships

A number of respondents felt that it was essential to form strong relationships with other professionals, because this enabled them to better advocate for service users in different settings. It was noted that positive relationships with other social workers and managers allows social workers to avoid feeling isolated or victimised.

Several people noted the need to be allowed time to build strong rapport and develop trust with service users. The majority of participants agreed that shared training across professions would demonstrate social work's commitment to forging positive relationships by remaining open and inclusive.

Communication

Most people felt that it was very important to listen and be listened to as a profession. One person stated that if an organisation is expected to work in a person-centred way it needs to treat its staff in a person-centred way. The opinion was that social workers needed to have better means by which to communicate directly with the public and that success stories went unrecognised often because of misunderstandings about the idea of data protection.

> Social workers had little professional influence in government and were not always effective at drawing in potential partners including those in the voluntary sector

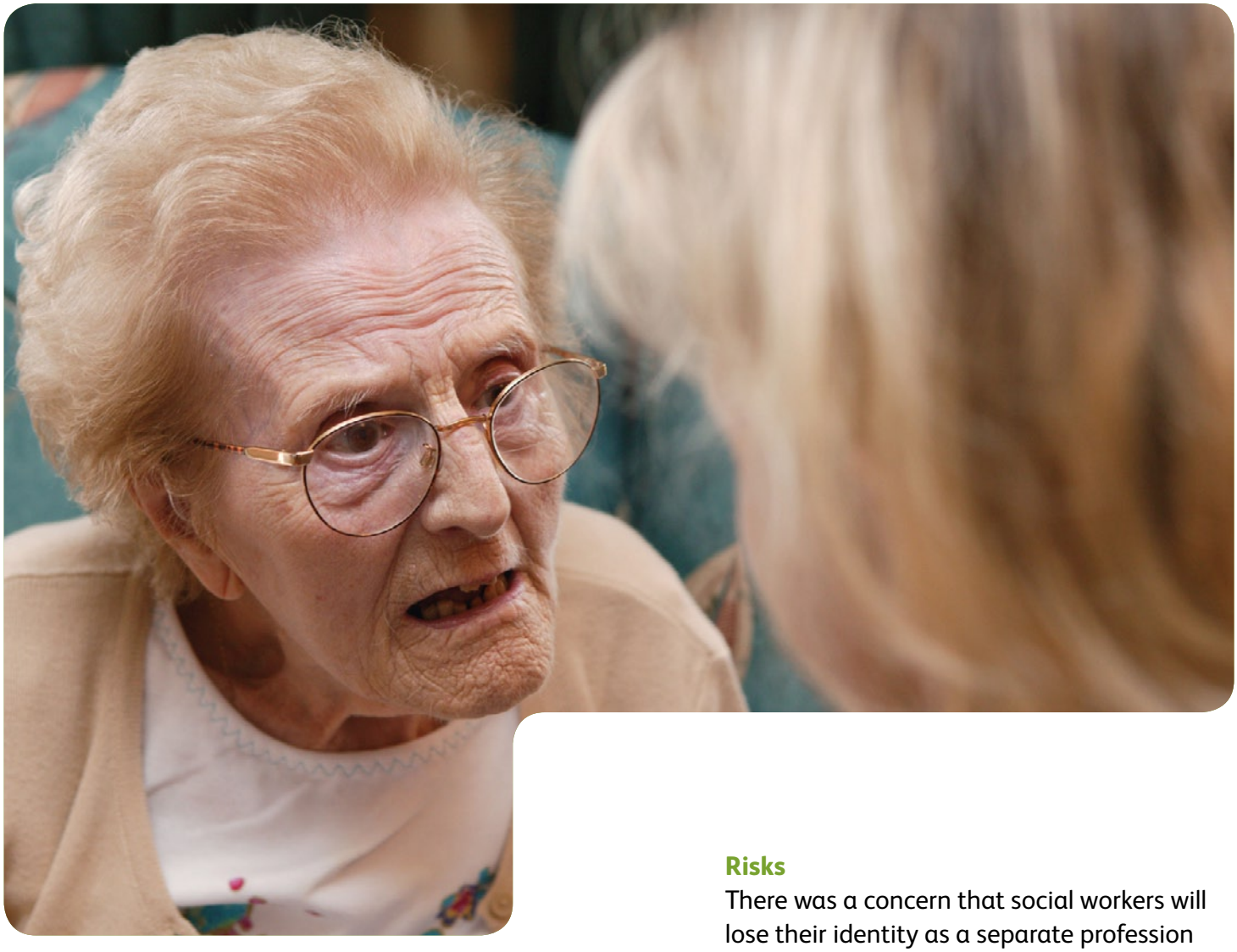
Another comment was that social workers had little professional influence in government, and were not always effective at drawing in potential partners including those in the voluntary sector. Others concluded that the use of exclusive language was a barrier to effective professional communication and advocated more service user involvement in shaping our roles.

It was a primary concern that social work as a profession engages more with the media and challenges directly the way they talk about social work.

Education, training and skills

Many social workers stated that we need to learn from the past and put in place effective systems to prevent history repeating itself. Some thought that there was a need for more proactive work by coalface workers to identify areas for development in education for social work.

Ben Martin is a social worker in adult social care at Cornwall Council



Many wanted to see it made easier for practising social workers to continue to develop academically and contribute to the academic development of others. Others suggested that giving social work a profile in educational settings before degree level would create awareness and advocate for social work as a career pathway.

> There was concern that social work was becoming less holistic and a profession that deals with crisis

On a practical level, some thought that a simple and free online interface that keeps social workers up to date with latest developments in social research would promote best practice and give greater opportunity for contributions to ongoing social research.

Risks

There was a concern that social workers will lose their identity as a separate profession when working in settings such as the NHS.

Some people felt that much of the administrative work that social workers are required to do can detract from their ability to do 'real' social work. Many people felt that social work was becoming less and less about face-to-face work, which in turn would mean it could become an increasingly bureaucratic profession.

There was concern that social work was becoming less holistic and a profession that deals with crisis. At a broader sociological level, some social workers felt that because the role that social work plays in society is underestimated, this promotes a view that social work is not needed.

Others suggested that if social work continues without a strong identity and voice it may indirectly mean that people make assumptions about the causes of social problems rather than understanding their more complex origins. SWM

SOCIAL WORK MATTERS

THE COLLEGE OF SOCIALWORK magazine

The monthly digital magazine focusing on social workers and their changing profession

Next issue due out early April
To ensure that you receive your copy, join The College of Social Work at www.tcsw.org.uk