

Cross-Party Group on Social Work

12 March 2024 and 18:15:00-20:00

Minute

Present

MSPs

Collette Stevenson
Fulton MacGregor

Invited guests

Susan Dobson – SASW
Charlie McMillan - SCLD

Non-MSP Group Members

Frank Reilly
Karin Heber
Zoe Sharpe
Adele Cleveley
Smith, Joanne
Jon Gray
Alexandra Slight
Paul Jewitt
John Watson
Alistair Brown
Iona Colvin
Jamie Aarons
Anne-Marie Monaghan
Conn, Natasha
Danielle Shull
Dee Fraser
Caroline Thomson
Jackie Irvine
Gary Spolander
Joanna Macdonald
Alison Bavidge
Calum Gallacher
Taylor Guinness
Susan Dobson
Karen Hoyle
Russell Hogarth

Munteanu, Patricia
Caroline McDonald
Sarah
Collette
Wales, Alison
Suzanne McGuinness
Oluwatoyin Adenugba

Apologies

Cath Montgomery – ILA Scotland.

Megan Farr – CYCPS

Includem

Keith Dyer

Agenda item 1

Fulton introduced the meeting, welcomed everyone

Fulton asked for the minutes of the previous meeting to be proposed and seconded. These were proposed by Danielle Shull and seconded by Frank Reilly. The minutes were thereby approved.

Fulton noted a change in the published agenda as the Mental Welfare Commission were unable to deliver their presentation. Instead, we would hear from Susan Dobson from SASW, then Charlie McMillan as advertised, and Charlie would also deliver an extra piece on the Importance of the LDAN Bill Consultation.

Agenda item 2

Susan Dobson from SASW delivered 10 minutes on the landscape of adult support and protection in Scotland, setting the scene for Charlie's presentation.

Susan said instead of talking about the legislative framework she wanted to focus on the practice landscape and the protective power of relational practice in social work to recognise the unique position that social workers hold in being to work to build strong relationships, why we work in this way, where are the benefits and what does it demand from practitioners.

Susan mentioned that Tosonne says "Relational social work is the practice of using the therapeutic relationship as the principle vehicle to effect change."

Susan went onto to discuss the complex dilemmas facing social workers in adult support and protection. Primarily the role of balancing risk and protection with upholding autonomy and respecting privacy. Susan also discussed the differences between intrapersonal and interpersonal relational practice.

Susan also discussed the power of relationships in practice, the demands this places on workers and the need to resource workers adequately to ensure this work can be done.

Fulton thanked Susan for her presentation and highlighted that Colletee Stevenson MSP was in the meeting but would have to leave early and went on to introduce Charlie.

Agenda item 3

Charlie McMillan from SCLD gave a presentation on the Remember My Name Serious Case Review into the life of Margaret Flemming. Charlie began by thanking Fulton and Susan and applauded her introduction.

Charlie emphasised the importance of reflective practice in social work.

Charlie went on to say that none of us have rights until we all have human rights. To be human, you must bear witness to justice, justice is what love looks like in public - quoting Cornel West. He said that that this is not the case in Scotland and people, especially disabled people do not universally have human rights just now.

This is why the murder of Margaret Fleming is so important. And the report Remember My Name is so important and that the report name is vital and deliberate in this case.

He thanked the CPG for inviting him to speak as he thinks there has been relative silence since the report was published.

Margaret's situation was unique in that it was nearly 17 years before anyone realised she was missing. Her date of death is unknown.

We need to note how much has changed since this time and be proud of these positive changes. People are largely supported now if known to services but being known to services is a key point Charlie said.

Margaret Fleming, Margaret Fleming, Margaret Fleming, we must remember her name.

Charlie went on to talk about the appreciative inquiry model used for the inquiry and why this was an important point. How it brings organisations covering very different policy landscapes and geographical areas together in a positive way. But everyone is held to account and poor practice is called out.

Charlie talked about how considerable thought was put into honouring Margaret's memory and creating a legacy. An independent external reviewer gained the views of approximately 100 people with learning difficulties and carers on what life is like in Scotland today through a series of workshops. The report also asks difficult questions about how we support and protect marginalised people and the role of all citizens as we move forward. It is a clarion call for all.

Charlie went on to talk about involvement of all agencies in Margaret's life and give some perspective on the timeline of this but that ultimately, she ended up isolated and invisible before her death.

Charlie went on to talk about the overarching findings of the report which covered:

- Despite its challenges, Margaret's life was not unusual. Key experiences in her teens exposed her to dangers that she could not protect herself from which ultimately resulted in her murder.
- Margaret was invisible at the time of her death. She was gradually and systematically removed from her world little by little and step by step.
- Authentic choices vs coercion. The role of supported decision making.
- Margaret's murder caused long term and ongoing traumatic impacts for family members, workers involved and the community as a whole.

Charlie then went onto to discuss the recommendations of the report in more detail. Following this, Charlie went onto to talk about whether this could ever happen again. He went on to outline some of his key concerns for people with learning disabilities at this time:

- Many people with learning disabilities continue to be invisible to services, communities and society
- Impact of COVID 19 Pandemic on individuals and support services
- Stigma, discrimination and human rights abuses are frequent and ongoing
- 69% of hate crimes happen because some is perceived to have a learning disability
- 94% of women with learning disabilities have experienced gender-based violence:
- Growth in online grooming, other forms of targeting e.g. county lines, sexual exploitation, cuckooing etc etc.

Charlie finished his presentation by saying that learning from this Review must inform the following legislation.

- Learning Disability, Autism and Neurodivergence Bill Consultation
- Human Rights Bill development
- Mental Health Law Reform agenda
- National Care Service Bill development

Fulton thanked Charlie for his contribution, noted that you can tell how much he cares about the issue and making change and that this was a good testament to

Margaret's life. Fulton then asked for us to move onto a Q&A on the two presentations.

Agenda item 4

Fulton opened a Q&A session and chaired it.

A question was raised by a group member on services making their own definition of the difference between someone with a learning difficulty and a learning disability and their worry that this might push people out towards the boundaries of protection. Charlie answered this question and said that he thinks there are risks with this, we know that needs are growing as a society, but we need to resource this effectively, Charlie said we need to support people to help people and have brave discussions.

A comment in the chat also backed this up, saying family carers are on their knees.

A question was raised about circles of support and what other ways there are to support people. Considering communities and society what are the key things we should be doing to tackle these horrifying stats, especially around gender violence. Charlie answered that organisations such as people first in this field would say that good quality and relationship and sexual health and parenting education, free and available to all. Charlie also mentioned college and life-skills, people need opportunities not certificates.

Fulton then agreed to take 3 questions in a row. The first was that about the invisibility of people with learning difficulties face and the disparity they face in their experiences of services from early in life. An example of lack of public concern in seeing someone being restrained in public highlighted public attitude to learning disability. Additionally, that something goes wrong at transition, when leaving school families and individuals find support diminishes. This can then lead to people wrongly ending up in the mental health system.

The second was that the statistics around gender-based violence are terrifying for someone who is a parent of someone with a learning disability. But that showing someone what safe and boundaries relationships look like, where people can see safe relationships first hand with social work practitioners.

The third was a point that we haven't picked up on the impact the pandemic has had on so many people. Whether they are carers, supported people etc. Things like health checks and following changes through are important.

Charlie came back in addressing these three questions. To the first of the three he said that starting young with nursery etc is vital and parents often don't seek to use their entitlement as they don't think the nursery will provide for their child.

On the second question, Charlie said that we need to start thinking about love in terms of work with adults, we are getting better in terms of supporting kids but to think back to the earlier quote, justice is what love looks like in public. We need to be able to have these discussions in a safe and respecting way.

ON the third question, Charlie agreed that he is very worried about what they are hearing in regard to the impact of lockdown on children. Lockdown was a trauma and that needs to be recognised and addressed. It is also harder to do relational work online.

Charlie then went onto to talk about the LDAN Bill (Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence) Bill.

Charlie mentioned that the Bill is progressing and that the 180 pages is a positive outcome of good co-design. Covering 22 key issues.

Charlie talked about how this model of consultation should be become more standard.

The secretariat shared the SCLD resources on the LDAN Bill in the chat.

Charlie called on people not to try and tackle all of it but to focus on the burning issue for you.

Charlie also mentioned that this is world leading and good legislation.

Fulton thanked Charlie for his presentations and echoed the support in the chat for what Charlie was saying.

Fulton also asked what more the parliament can do to highlight the Remember My Name Report. He noted that this group is likely to be mostly aware but what can be done to raise awareness beyond that.

Fulton also asked if we were to raise the school starting age as is being proposed would having a proper well-funded kindergarten model help address face the problems and difficulties people with learning difficulties face early in life.

Charlie answered the first question that we need to create platforms and amplifying the voices of people with learning difficulties. In Parliament it is about asking questions, and discussions. Ask what are we doing to include people with learning disabilities.

Charlie went on to say that kindergarten education is a fascinating proposal and pointed Fulton towards an SCLD report called 'Building Blocks'. Again, he said would ask the question what the considerations for people with learning difficulties are.

Overall he said we are talking about what Susan was saying, we are talking about relational work, love and ensuring everyone can experience that.

Agenda item 5

Rounding up and closing remarks.

Fulton thanked everyone for the comments and questions and agreed to either lay a motion or ask a question depending on what was possible. Fulton promised to circulate the responses to this agreed work via the secretariat.

In his closing remarks Fulton noted Charlie said Margaret Fleming, Margaret Fleming, Margaret Fleming as Charlie said and that we must remember her name.

Finally, Fulton noted that he wanted to discuss a potential future agenda item on adoption based on a constituency issue. This would focus on how adoption breakdowns are recorded.

Alison Bavidge also asked if Fulton and the group thought it would be appropriate to write on behalf of the group about the issues raised today. Fulton responded that he was going to lodge a question and or a motion, but he needs to check that he is able to lodge on these issues if there was a similar question already laid.

There was another AOCB business question raised that thanked Charlie for the presentation and reminded attendees that the BASW UK Conference is in Edinburgh on 8 June at the.

Fulton noted that this is everyone's group and the secretariate and himself and his office have open doors and we are all happy to discuss any items that should be shared etc.

Fulton closed the meeting and thanked all attendees, presenters and secretariat and his own office staff.