

Review - National Practitioners Conference 2008

Introduction

The 3rd National Practitioners Conference was held at the Carnegie Conference Centre, Halbeath, Dunfermline, on 25 June, for social work practitioners, managers and occupational therapists from local authorities, voluntary organisations and the private sector.

The Conference agenda was designed to give delegates the opportunity to hear about and contribute to the developing work of *Changing Lives*, and in particular the personalisation agenda, one of the key themes of *Changing Lives*.

The morning session set the scene, with input on progress against the key aspirations of *Changing Lives* and the theme of personalisation in particular. The session also focused on the key challenges for all parties in delivering transformational change for social work services.

The afternoon session centred around a number of discussion workshops, where delegates were able to find out more about specific topics, engage in a wide range of debate and discussion and raise any issues important to them, and was closed with a rousing address by the President of ADSW, Alan Baird.

The Morning

The event was kicked off with a speech by the Minister for Children & Early Years, Adam Ingram, who reflected on the wider strategic objectives of the Scottish Government, the changing relationship between central government and local government and the future of *Changing Lives*, and encouraged the ownership of the *Changing Lives* agenda at a local level. A copy of this speech and a selection of other presentations from the day are available online at www.socialworkscotland.org.uk.

This was followed by a presentation on the 'Next Steps' of *Changing Lives*, by Ian Davidson, Chair of the event, and lead official from the Workforce & Capacity Issues Division in the Scottish Government. Ian's focus was primarily on the 'core products' that the *Changing Lives* programme will be producing over the next year.

'What does *Changing Lives* mean to you?' - a 'Talk to the Wall' session - offered delegates the opportunity to discuss and share with central government their views on three key questions:

- How can you make the aspirations of *Changing Lives* a reality?
- What do you think are the key messages from *Changing Lives*?
- What do you think is the single most important thing for *Changing Lives* to achieve?

Delegates posted a wide array of comments on the 'wall' that have since been made available on the National Practitioners Conference page on the website www.socialworkscotland.org.uk. They have also been shared with key Scottish Government officials, and will be sent to all local authority Directors of Social Work and Chief Social Work Officers.

As in 2007, the User and Carer Forum delivered an engaging presentation to the conference, this year on 'making the Principles real', which built on the launch of their recent publication in

conjunction with the Scottish Government, the 'Principles and Standards of Citizen Leadership'. The speakers focused on each of the 8 principles, relating personal circumstances to each one.

The morning session closed with a personalisation case study, hosted by Nigel Henderson, Chief Executive of Penumbra, and co-host of the Service Development change programme. The presentation centred around a film, 'Gavin's story', that highlighted personalisation in action.

The Afternoon

The Afternoon began with back to back workshops. There were 9 workshops, and delegates were offered the opportunity pre-event to choose their preferred options:

Workshops

Workshop 1 – Personalisation and what it means to me (*Nigel Henderson*)

This workshop provided an opportunity to discuss the key principles to emerge from the paper 'An agreed understanding of personalisation', one of the key products to emerge to date from *Changing Lives*, as well as a chance to discuss the tools and resources that practitioners will require to make personalised services a reality and the barriers that may stand in the way.

Workshop 2 – Self-directed support (*Emma Sinclair*)

This workshop focussed on Self-directed support (SDS), a key vehicle for ensuring services are tailored around the specific needs of the individual, and provided delegates with an opportunity to find out more about self-directed support and the opportunities it offers to service users and carers, as well as the opportunity to share experiences of self-directed support in action.

There was a varied response from delegates, from the welcoming of SDS as a real opportunity to empower users and carers and deliver personalised support packages, to concerns over language used and financial and resourcing implications.

Workshop 3 - Personalisation and involving users in service design and delivery (*Emma Miller and Audrey Mistry*)

This workshop gave delegates the chance to find out more about current approaches to involving users and carers in service design and delivery. There were two presentations - on user involvement & SWIA's performance inspection model, and improving outcomes for users of community care services and their unpaid carers with an overview of the user defined service evaluation toolkit (UDSET).

During the workshops, frustration was raised that inspections seemed to focus on activity/output performance, rather than performance on outcomes. Questions were also raised about how UDSET could be used when service users and carers seemed unwilling or unable to engage in personalised care planning. Delegates showed a keen interest in promoting personalisation through the UDSET – and there was an interesting query about use of UDSET in criminal justice social work.

Workshop 4 - Social Services Knowledge Scotland Portal (*Ellen Daly and Gillian Flett*)

This workshop alerted delegates to the Social Services Knowledge Scotland [SSKS] portal, developed in partnership between the Institute for Research and Innovation [IRISS], the Social Care Institute for Excellence [SCIE] and the NHS e-library as an on-line resource for the whole social services workforce. It gives access to a vast library of books and journals, enables users to network on-line with their peers, and gives access to tools and resources for their own learning and development. Though already accessible through www.SSKS.org.uk, the resource is still being developed.

The workshop generated a great deal of interest and discussion. Over the next few months the SSKS portal is going to be actively promoted with a range of outreach activities.

Workshop 5 - How to build local ownership of the *Changing Lives* agenda (Justin McNicholl and Wendy Harrington)

This workshop discussed the various factors affecting local ownership and looked in particular at Local Practitioner Fora. In order to be successful in realising the aspirations of *Changing Lives*, work at the national level needs to be supplemented by ownership of the agenda at the local level.

There was considerable discussion about membership of LPFs and the impact of membership decisions on the wider ownership of the *Changing Lives* agenda. There was a feeling that social work as a profession was facing considerable change and attention to these issues was required before widening membership. Other issues discussed included difficulties in ensuring senior management support locally and lack of resources, and the need for revised LPF guidance. The support of ADSW for LPFs was generally welcomed.

Workshop 6 - Building a culture of continuous performance improvement and the role of self-evaluation (Gerry Hart)

Changing Lives clearly articulated the need to build a culture of continuous performance improvement within social work services. This workshop provided an opportunity for delegates to hear about and comment on SWIA's work to develop effective self-evaluation in local authorities.

A number of issues were raised, including discussion of the scrutiny timetable and the need to look at joining up inspections since organisations were often overwhelmed by the amount of inspections, how resource intensive they were and the impact of inspection on staff morale. It was agreed that self-evaluation should be seen as an integral part of business and not simply as an add on and that not everyone was in the same place when it came to developing self-evaluation.

Workshop 7 - Single Outcome Agreements in practice (Alistair Gaw)

This workshop gave delegates the chance to find out more about Single Outcome Agreements (SOA), as well as the chance to learn how the Single Outcome Agreement will work in practice in one Local Authority. The Concordat between CoSLA and the Scottish Government, reductions in ring-fencing and the introduction of Single Outcome Agreements have significantly altered the relationship between local and central Government. Only a few practitioners knew that each local authority had submitted a SOA to the Scottish Government.

The workshop encouraged practitioners to go to their respective local authorities and ask if they could contribute to the SOA. It was agreed that the more links made across local partners the easier it would be to achieve the desired outcomes.

Delegates also discussed opportunities and shared concerns about the practical impact of Single Outcome Agreements for social work services, covering issues such as ring fencing being removed from specific funding streams, , personalisation of services and how outcomes in each local authority would be monitored.

Workshop 8 - Practice based on evidence (Kate Skinner)

This workshop looked at the *Changing Lives* Research and Development Strategy, which aims to develop (for everyone in the workforce) the evidence base to inform current and future practice and service design. The workshop provided an opportunity to learn more about it, how it will be progressed and what benefit it will give practitioners as well as service users and carers.

Many issues were discussed, including who sets the research agenda, how the integrity of findings can be checked, the need for evidence as back-up to arguments for money and services, where the user-led research is, how research can be carried out with reluctant users and the best way to engage people actively with research.

Key points that emerged included the need for managers to allow time for discussing research findings and their relevance, that practitioners and managers need help in finding, interpreting and using research, and that evidence-informed practice is a better approach than evidence-based practice (Evidence + practice wisdom + service users' needs = Evidence-informed practice).

Workshop 9 - Leadership for All (Cathy McCallum and Linda Anne Smith)

This workshop demonstrated and discussed (amongst the delegates) the prototype Leadership Framework, that has been developed over the past two years by the Leadership and Management change programme. *Changing Lives* stated that Social Services must develop enabling leadership for everyone and across all systems, and this framework has been developed for everyone in the workforce, to give the user access to a range of leadership tools and resources as well as allowing them to become part of a leadership network.

Closing Address

ADSW President and Director of Social Work for Dundee, Alan Baird, gave the closing address, showing a short film to remind delegates of the often unsung excellent work that goes on across the social work sector in Scotland. He encouraged local ownership of *Changing Lives* and accepted responsibility on behalf of ADSW for their involvement in picking up policy that needs to be owned by the profession and not the centre, setting out ADSW's plans for the forthcoming year.

Delegates were encouraged to give their feedback on the day via the evaluation forms, that were also made available on the website www.socialworkscotland.org post event.

For access to presentations, the 'talk to the wall' comments and video clips from the filming of the conference, please visit the National Practitioners Conference page on our website <http://www.socialworkscotland.org.uk/programmesB.php>.