



IASW

Irish Association of Social Workers
Cumann na hÉireann um Oibríthe Sóisialta

The Irish Social Worker

Social Workers' Perspectives

Spring Summer 2014

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Elevate your professionalism by joining IASW

IASW – The Irish Association of Social Work is the professional association for social work in the Republic of Ireland. Whatever your background or specialism, we are here to support, advise and protect you at work because we know how challenging each day can be.

IASW welcomes members from across the Social Work profession, whether you're fully qualified, new to the profession or studying for your Social Work degree.

As a member, you will receive a range of benefits that will enable you to continue your development through conferences and seminars, networking opportunities and reference materials. We provide our members with Legal Protection insurance cover and access to a helpline service.

Membership benefits include:

- *Legal Protection Cover – Disciplinary Hearing – Legal Defence*
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- *Participation in Special Interest Groups & Committees – membership of & training specific to specialism*
- *A voice in improving the standards and quality of social work*
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- *On-going training & development (CPD) – at a reduced cost*
- *Invitation to our Annual Conference & AGM*
- *Office Support Mon to Fri 8.30am – 4.30pm*

In order to join our association, please log onto www.iasw.ie and complete the online booking form. Please note that all new applications are approved by the Board of Directors, once they approve it, we will send your 'Welcome Pack', which includes our CPD folder, Code of Ethics, Code of Practice,, Contact list of Special Interest Groups & Committees, Memorandum & Articles of Association and Journal.

114-116 Pearse Street, Dublin 2, Ireland
Tel: +353 (0)1 677 4838
Email: office@iasw.ie

www.iasw.ie

*Representing Social Work in Ireland since 1971.
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EDITORIAL

By Anna Deneher, Guest Editor

In the autumn edition of the *Irish Social Worker*, the previous editor, Monica Egan, signed off her last editorial by noting that she had edited the journal since 2006 and that the time had come to hand over to others. She reflected that since social work has become a registered profession, that registered social workers should now take up the baton, and that the *Irish Social Worker* going forward should reflect that changing world. I am happy to take up the baton on this occasion and would like to take this opportunity on behalf of all members of the IASW to thank Monica for the past seven years of editing the *Irish Social Worker*, for her contribution to the Association over the years as an active member and as a past President, and to wish her all the best in her new sphere of work.

Since the last edition was published there have been further changes in the Association. At the recent AGM, several new members of the Board of Directors were elected, as well as a new Chair, Dónal O'Malley. I wish Dónal all the best in his new position and in building on the work carried out by Ineke Durville, outgoing Chair and previously President of the Association since 2008. Ineke is to be credited for her many years hard work in raising the profile of the Association, in increasing the membership and in establishing the IASW as a registered company. With the departure of Monica and Ineke, it is certainly the end of an era for the Association, but also a new beginning and a challenge as the profession moves into new and exciting times.

Change at all levels, new beginnings and challenges are integral to social work on a daily basis. And so it has been for those of us who work in the area of children and families, that 2014 heralded the beginning of a new era with the establishment of TUSLA, the new Child and Family Agency, followed by the publication of the Children First Bill, and more recently the appointment of a new Minister for Children.

In the first article of this edition Caroline McGregor examines the initial views and experiences of social workers and social care workers to the new Agency, 'the biggest systemic change in the child welfare system since the establishment of community care post the Health Act 1970'. In the survey, most respondents believed that the Agency would have an impact on improving quality, consistency, enhancing accountability, and more efficient interagency and interdisciplinary working. Hope emerged as an important theme, and while many challenges and concerns were expressed in the responses, many responses also alluded to hope for change nonetheless.

The theme of hope for change is echoed in the next article. Joseph Mooney's research focuses specifically on one area of the child and family social worker's role under Section 3 of the Child Care Act 1991; the responsibility to accept and assess retrospective reports of child sexual abuse. The findings of this research will confirm

the views of many social workers involved in this area; variations in practice, lack of guidance and standard procedures, and 'system-level failure to meet the needs of adult survivors, current children and alleged abusers alike'. All social worker participants in this research called for greater clarity in the area and further guidance from management, and this is but one of a number of challenges for the new Agency.

Following on from their article in the autumn edition, Seamus Ryan and Michael Byrne's article explores the needs and expectations of social workers regarding psychology provision in child and family services and ascertaining what additional services psychology services could provide to meet these needs. The low response rate of 10.5% to this survey has already been commented upon by Monica Egan in the previous edition, but it is worth reminding social workers of the importance of research in highlighting issues and informing the profession in relation to its practices. The finding that the vast majority of social workers would like to see a psychologist attached to their team on a full-time basis is timely given the current lack of clarity regarding the role of psychology in the new Agency.

Communication with children is an integral part of the work of social workers in the Child and Family Agency, and one such social worker, Lisa O'Reilly found the verbal interview process to be a difficult experience for children and did not feel she was gaining an adequate insight into their world to ensure their safety and protection. Following her studies for a diploma in play therapy, Lisa found that children were able to communicate their world in a child-friendly manner, and so she continued her studies for a PhD. The article published here is a summary of her thesis, the research for which was designed to investigate the role of play in supporting communication between children and social workers during child protection and welfare assessments. The conclusion of the study is that social workers need to use play skills to build relationships with children in order to gain insight into their world and to communicate with them about painful and sensitive issues to ensure their best interests are met.

The final two articles in this edition look at the role of the social worker in primary care, a comparatively new role for social workers in Ireland. Muireann Ní Raghallaigh, Suzanne Quin and Rosemary Cunniffe's article is based on an exploratory study conducted with primary care social workers in 2011-2012, aiming to gather some basic information about the role of the primary care social worker in the Irish context. The study findings offer insight into a new and evolving social work role. Many respondents related to the attractiveness of working with a wide range of clients, who were voluntarily seeking a social work service, the opportunity for preventative practice and to use a range of methodologies in their work. The primary care social workers also involved themselves in a range of community work and community development activities and 'demonstrated a true generic approach of a community-based system, much as had

been envisaged for the original community care social workers in the early 1980s'. All of which, I am sure will reverberate with many social workers as reasons why they entered the profession in the first place, whatever area they work in presently.

The final article by Alison Duggan picks up on this theme of the community development and capacity building aspect of the social work role in primary care. The article describes a small-scale social justice research project carried out with the advice and expertise of the North Dublin Primary Health Care Social Work team. The project aimed to identify the most vulnerable groups of clients and encourage social work advocacy for better resourced services and fair payments. The article reminds us of the importance of promoting social justice in practice as a role for social workers as outlined in CORU's Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics for Social Workers.

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Editor

Anna Deneher

Office Support

Danielle McGoldrick.

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Calling for Articles

Articles are always welcome and should be emailed for the attention of the editor.

Email: office@iasw.ie

Irish Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics

1. The social worker's primary focus is the needs of the people using the social work service. While respecting the social, cultural and environmental context in which they live, this focus must recognise, take account of and balance possible conflicts between their needs and the human rights of different individuals and the communities in which they share their lives. This focus must take precedence over the self-interest and personal convictions of the social worker.
2. Constraints such as poverty, inequality or discrimination may constrain service user's ability to fulfil their needs. These constraints cannot always be resolved at the level of the individual. Social workers will advocate with and on behalf of those whom society excludes and in doing so should engage with service users and facilitate them in contributing their views to such developments. In addition, social workers should use their professional association as a forum for critical debate and dialogue with other professional agencies, the government and the public at large, to advocate for and to promote positive social change.
3. Social workers in focusing on individuals, groups and communities in which they live will be aware of the potential power imbalance in the relationships that follow. Social workers will strive to use their power appropriately within such relationships and will place special emphasis on the consideration of and promotion of service users' views in all decisions that are related to the quality of their lives. Social workers will promote the participation of service users in order to maximise the potential of any service user or group for self-determination now and in the future.
4. The practice of social work operates within systems that have a regulatory function. Social workers must be cognisant of the inherent tensions between support and control that may arise. In addressing such tensions, social workers will at all times strive towards the objective of the service user maximising their own ability to make and carry out decisions affecting their quality of life.
5. Social workers must aim continuously to achieve high standards of professional practice in pursuit of which they will engage in Continuing Professional Development by undertaking further training and education on a regular basis and take active steps to ensure that they receive appropriate supervision.
6. Social workers engaged in education, training or supervision will seek to ensure that their professional relationships in these areas are constructive and non-exploitative and will foster knowledge and understanding of the social work profession and this Code.
7. In seeking to respond to the needs of individuals, groups and communities social workers will seek to involve other professionals and agencies as appropriate.
8. Social workers, having taken into account the rights of others, will provide service users with full information, including access to records pertaining to work on their behalf. Social workers should be prepared to state the reasons for their decisions and be accountable for them.
9. Social workers will respect a service user's right to confidentiality in the social worker/service user relationship. It is the duty of the social worker to ensure that the nature and limits of the privacy inherent in their relationship are clearly understood and applied. In particular, social workers must inform service users:
 - Of the circumstances in which information relating to the service user will be disclosed on a 'need-to-know' basis with other colleagues and agencies;
 - That their views regarding disclosure of any information relating to the service user will always be sought;
 - That disclosure of information against the service user's wishes will occur in clearly defined circumstances such as those required by law, or for the protection of a service user or for the protection of a third party.

Our Code of Practice is available on www.iasw.ie

