

# Revisiting Social Models of Mental Health Social Work

This article is a key points summary of evidence given to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Work on 9th December 2014<sup>1</sup>. The APPG inquiry into mental health social work was called because of strong concerns among social workers mental health services, particularly social work.

The social perspective on mental health has a tradition going back many years. It is a perspective that locates an understanding of mental health within the social contexts within which people exist and uses practice and evidence to work with communities and individuals to help prevent mental health problems and to help with their recovery. The social model recognises other perspectives such as a biological one, but believes that prevention and recovery are best achieved in a holistic way. Social work has contributed greatly to the development of mental health services but in recent years its place and the social perspective has tended to become marginalised. This is to the detriment of people with mental health problems and the well-being of us all.

*"If society opts for a wider social model, which social workers can do, it is cheaper and more effective."*

Alleyne Wilson, Chair, Board of Trustees, Social Perspectives Network

*"It costs far more to deal with everything down the line. All the evidence says that early intervention works."*

Dr. Jerry Tew, Reader in Mental Health Social Work, Birmingham University

## Service user perspective

**“** Social work is in a good position to consider the whole person, rather than the dominant medical model, when it came to mental health social work; the physical, mental and social well-being of people. Social work looks at the person's history, not just their behaviour and medication, and can help service users think beyond the medical model. Currently, people's experience of the system is very chaotic; if an individual is feeling their life and thoughts are chaotic it is harmful for people to enter that chaotic system. Relationship based work is an important role of social work, and social workers are well-placed to support people through a system. **”**

Sarah Carr  
Co-Vice Chair, National Survivor User Network  
of National Survivor User Network (NSUN)



## The social workers' perspective

"Social work is potentially a wonderful job, being able to be able to walk the journey with service users". But she added that "whilst social work training is good, not all the skills of social workers are valued. Social work has become more about care co-ordination, moving people through the system, which was never the intention. Some social workers have been marginalised, and with it their ability to challenge."

Faye Wilson, social worker and chair of BASW's mental health reference group

**"We should recognise that with the Care Act coming into effect, and with a lot of stress on integration, the rest of the social care system is looking to mental health to see how integration is working. What makes a difference is good leadership"**

A. Social Worker

*"It is a car crash. I am doing six assessments in an evening back to back. By the time you deal with the sixth one your ability to deal with risk, knowing the nearest bed is 300 miles away, is completely out the window. Yet I am the one who is going to be dragged up in front of the judges. The medical model is driving treatment by pushing pharmacological solutions, but with drugs the more you take the worse you get."*

Daisy Bogg, social worker and Chair of the Social Perspectives Network

## **“ Can we bring mental health back into being central to social work? ”**

Bridget Robb, Chief Executive, BASW

**"The amount of work is unbelievable and there are no extra resources... you just don't have the time and it feels exhausting"**

A. Social Worker

*"Mental health is important to all of social work, silos are not helpful, social workers should be able to move between adults and children's services as experienced social workers"*

A. Social Worker

**"The Care Act has personalisation at its centre, there is potential therefore to strive to achieve this in mental health."**

Mark Godfrey, Chair of the Principal Social Workers Adult's Group

*"There is a need to give consideration to the roles of Clinical Commissioning Groups and Health and Well Being Boards as possible opportunities to shape the future of the social in mental health."*

Terry Bamford, SPN Trustee

## The view from the politicians

*"Many articulate people don't think they need social workers or have mental health problems. They think it is others who have social workers; we have therapists. They are wrong."*

Sir Peter Bottomley, MP

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**It is very important that social workers find a voice.**

Mike Wood MP

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**"We are in a mess. Patently a lot of that relates to a lack of resources. As much as we keep hearing we no longer want it [mental health] to be the Cinderella service, if we keep constraining and reducing the resources that is what it will be."**

John Woodcock MP

The meeting ended the following proposals that the APPG should further examine, via a Mental Health Inquiry, the following:

- 1 Organisational setting is less important than the model. After the next election the organisation of mental health services may be very different. There are very real threats with all the problems and potential changes but we have to make it an opportunity
- 2 Service user co-production is powerful way of developing services and campaigning
- 3 We do know what good integration is in mental health and this should be highlighted to other sectors
- 4 To look at and get evidence of the positive impact of the social model and early intervention and give examples of good practice and things that might show value for money.