



Social Work Action Network (SWAN) Conference 2011

Programme

Friday 15th April

11.30: Registration open

1.00 Introduction:

Professor Sue White - University of Birmingham (Critic of social work targets)

Michael Lavalette (SWAN National Convenor)

1.15 – 2.30: Plenary: *Challenging Cameron's Big Society and fighting welfare cuts*

Speakers: Bob Holman (community campaigner), Bob Williams-Findlay (Disabled People Against Cuts), and Helen Davies (Barnet Alliance for Public Services/Unison activist)

2.35: Workshop streams

4.05: Break

4.30: Plenary: *Social work and resistance across the globe*

Speakers: Linda Smith (South Africa), Vassilis Ioakimides (Greece), and Miriyam Asfar (activist/researcher: Egypt and Arab revolutions)

5.45 – 6.45: Regional SWAN and IDYW network meetings

7.30 - late: Conference social (£5 for food & entertainment –see flyer below for details)

Saturday 16th April

10.00: SWAN AGM

11.00 Break

11.20: Plenary: *led by young people* (organized together with In Defence of Youth Work)

Speakers: Dami Benbow and Kalbir Shukra (activist/ supporter of IDYW)

12.30: Lunch

1.30: Workshop streams

2.30: Break

2.50: Plenary with breakouts: *Building Alliances to Defend Services*

2.50 – 3.10 Introduction by John McArdle (Black Triangle Campaign), Karen Reissman (Unison/NHS anti-privatisation campaigner), and Education Activist Network speaker

3.15 – 4.10 Breakout sessions

4.15 – 4.40 Reconvene to feed back

4.45: Closing comments

5.00 Conference ends

Plenary Speaker Biographies

Sue White

Sue White is Professor of Social Work (Children and Families) at the University of Birmingham. She is a registered social worker and was employed as a practitioner and manager in statutory children's services for 13 years. Her research focuses primarily on the analysis of professional decision making in child welfare practice. During 2009 Sue served on the Social Work Task Force and now sits on the Social Work Reform Board. She is Chair of the Association of Professors of Social Work and is currently serving on the Reference Group for the Munro Review of Child Protection in England.

Bob Holman

Bob Holman survived the London blitz then failed the eleven plus. However he made it to university. After being a child care officer, he was an academic for ten years. He left the chair in social policy at Bath University and, with his wife Annette, ran a project on a council estate. After a further 10 years, they moved to Easterhouse, Glasgow and, with residents, formed a locally-run project. He is the author of a book on Keir Hardie. A year ago, Annette nursed him through cancer. Now he is retired (ha ha) and helps look after two grandsons.

Bob Williams Findlay

Bob Williams-Findlay is a former Planning Officer with Birmingham Social Services and has trained social workers at the University of Birmingham as a Disability Equality and Human Rights Trainer. He shares many of the criticisms of social work practice vis-à-vis disabled people as expressed by Professor Mike Oliver.

His long association with the Disabled People's Movement includes being Chair of the national civil rights organisation – British Council of Disabled People. Most recently he helped establish Disabled People Against Cuts as a campaigning group and has been an outspoken critic of both the Blairite "Social Care" agenda and Cameron's "Big Society".

Helen Davies

Helen Davies is a social worker for London Borough of Barnet, the Chair of the local Barnet UNISON branch as well as the local Trades Council. Helen is also a leading activist in the Barnet Alliance for Public Services campaign against the cuts. Barnet is a flagship Tory controlled local authority nicknamed "easyCouncil", which is looking to privatise all of its services on top of the cuts to vital services.

Linda Smith

Linda Smith worked as a social worker for Child Welfare South Africa in the areas of community work and social action, child protection and child and family practice. Now a social work lecturer at the University of Witwatersand she has particular interests in social justice and human rights; radical social work; community work; anti colonial and critical discourse for social work; Freirian critical pedagogy and the roles of social movements in welfare and social change. Linda is currently completing her PhD on the subject of critical social work education and the imperative for social change. Linda is a trade unionist and a member of the South African Communist Party.

Vasilios Ioakimidis

Vasilios Ioakimidis teaches social work and social pedagogy at Liverpool Hope University and the University of Nicosia. His research interests include radical international social work. Along with Michael Lavalette he co-edited the book 'Social Work in Extremis: Lessons for Social Work Internationally' (Policy Press). Vasilios is a member of the SWAN National Steering Committee.

Miriyam Asfar

Miriyam Asfar is an activist and researcher. She will be speaking about the recent Egyptian and Arab revolutions.

Kalbir Shukra

Kalbir Shukra is an activist and supporter of IDYW. She has a history of youth and community work practice and teaching as well as community and union activity.

Dami Benbow

Dami Benbow is a student at Leeds University, is a former Deputy Young mayor and part of the Young Mayor network.

Karen Reissman

Karen Reissman is an elected member of Unison's national health executive and campaigner against NHS privatisation. Karen was a mental health nurse for 25 years, before being sacked by Manchester Mental Health NHS Trust for 'whistleblowing' against the effects of cuts and privatisation.

Jon McArdle

Jon McArdle is an activist with the Black Triangle Campaign in defence of disability rights in Scotland.



Workshop/Paper Abstracts

Title: 'Educate, Agitate, Organise: UNISON responses to the big society'

Presenters: Helga Pile, UNISON National Officer for Social Care, Helen Davies, Branch Chair Barnet UNISON & adult's social worker, Simon Cardy, UNISON Steward Wolverhampton Branch & children's social worker, Sharon Campion, Sandwell UNISON, social work convenor & Independent reviewing officer

The session will begin with a general overview of current issues before examining two local responses in England. First we will look at the personalisation agenda in the context of a Tory controlled flagship local authority – the so called 'easy council' in Barnett of which UNISON members have been recently balloted for strike action. Second, we will examine the privatisation of social work services and the social work practice pilots that have become a testing ground for the ideas of 'mutualism' and the government's agenda for extending the social enterprise model into social work. The workshop will discuss if these developments present opportunities for progressive services or are merely a front for cuts and privatisation.

Aims

1. Provide participants with some hard information on what is actually going on the ground
2. Provide workshop participants with some local examples of organised resistance to the big society and the cuts within social care.
3. Encourage participants to become active in their local trade union branches

Title: Service user and disabled people's organisations: exploring a future based more on direct action, new forms of campaigning and forging new and effective alliances

Presenter: Peter Beresford

All around service user and disabled people's organisations are seeing their funding cut or removed. At a time when they are facing the biggest public service cuts in living memory, their capacity to do anything about them is being restricted even further. Meanwhile all the rhetoric about co-production, user involvement, self-help, capacity-building and 'big society' increases apace.

For years service users have sought to make user involvement and consultation amount to something real that could bring about change. Now though, with diminished individual as well as collective resources, facing personal attacks as benefit scroungers and through massive cuts in social care support, the need for new tactics and strategies are increasingly being highlighted and attempted

The aim of this session, (coming from a service user and collaborative perspective), through a process of exchange and discussion, is to explore a future based much more on direct action, new forms of campaigning and forging new and effective alliances. The session will take the pain and destructiveness of present policies as given and try and help us move on to focus on what we can positively do to challenge the divisive and reactionary politics we are now living through, to keep up and build our struggles for much more inclusive and equal futures.

Title: Disabled People Against the Cuts (DPAC) – Workshop

Presenters: Linda Burnip, members of DPAC

Disabled People Against Cuts was created by the coming together of disabled people in opposition to policies designed to reduce public expenditure and alter the relationship between the state and society.

The austerity measures however need to be seen in a wider historical context. What “disability” is and how it impacts upon people with impairments’ lives. Disabled people are seen as an easy target because of the dominant views associated with defining “disability” within society.

The workshop will explore how disabled people are viewed by society and ask whether these attitudes reinforce disabled people’s oppression and inequality. DPAC believe that disabled people continue to face unequal and differential treatment resulting from systems, structures and cultures which fail to take disabled people into account.

We will also consider whether these attitudes prevent closer collaboration, in fighting against the austerity cuts faced by disabled people, and if this is the case what could be done to remove these barriers.

Title: The Neo-Liberal Assault on the Abermarle ‘Settlement’ for the Youth Service: a case study for the dismantling of the welfare state

Presenters: Bernard Davies and Tony Taylor

This workshop will argue that what happened to the Youth Service under New Labour and what is happening now under the ConDems is a case study of the dismantling of the wider post-war welfare settlement between capital and labour.

A 15-20 minute presentation will outline:

- the key recommendations of the 1960 Albemarle Report which established the core features of the Youth Service’s and youth work’s ideological, organisational and practice ‘settlement’ for the next 50 years;
- how New Labour's embrace of new managerialism with its discourse of predictable and prescribed outcomes undermined the settlement;
- how the ConDem government's current policies are wholly dismantling that settlement - ideologically, organisationally and in practice.

Workshop members will be invited to consider how far these developments are being replicated in other areas of the post-war welfare settlement.

Title: Building Alliances Under a Devolved Government: surviving the cuts in Scotland

Presenter: Alissa Ruane

As Scotland moves toward its flagship homelessness commitment that all unintentionally homeless households will be entitled to settled accommodation by the end of 2012, the voluntary sector and government are facing significant cutbacks.

Alissa Ruane (Project Worker – Edinburgh's The Rock Trust and Bethany Christian Trust) will outline the impact that these cuts are having on the partnerships/consortiums formed within the homelessness sector during the tendering process of the last three years.

One option available to the homelessness sector is to follow in the footsteps of the health/social care agencies who used the political awareness of their clients to fight for their services. Alissa Ruane will ask if it is possible to create one voice when homeless people are so isolated from the political system. Can we empower these agencies and service users to challenge the political system?

Title: Effective resistance in the workplace: strategies and tactics

Presenters: Marie Porter and Mark Baldwin

Social work values and social workers are under attack as cuts are made in the statutory and voluntary agencies where they work. Working in partnership with service users is increasingly difficult as eligibility thresholds require people's needs to be acute before they get a service. Increasing workloads means constructive work is less likely to occur particularly when preventative services are closed because of cuts to the voluntary sector. Resisting additional work is seen as obstruction or incompetence by managers, leaving social workers open to disciplinary action. Social workers working long hours become increasingly weary and less able to resist these attacks so what are the opportunities for resistance?

Marie and Mark have suggestions for resistance both individually and collectively and will use the workshop to generate discussion about what is both feasible and effective. Learning from the workshop will be written up as guidelines for social workers and placed on the SWAN website.

Title: 'You cannot drive out darkness with darkness, only light can do this' (M.L King) : Civic Engagement against Rallies of Right Wing Extremists

Presenter: Michael Helmbrecht

The talk reconstructs the history of a fight of a civic initiative against 50 Neonazi rallies within three years in the small German town Graefenberg. It analyses the dynamics of a difficult actor constellation (Civil Society, Police, Justice, Governing Authority, Neo-Nazis) which is arising in the fight against Nazi Rallies. Inspired by Saul Alinsky, the speaker, he was the chairman of the Initiative and stood because of the treatments of Neo-Nazis over two years under the protection of police, gives hints how to organize a powerful, creative and peaceful resistance movement.

Read more:

Crossland, David (2008): Sleepy German Town awakens to fight Far Right

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,514610,00.html>

Helmbrecht, Michael (2008): Kreativ demonstrieren. Aber wie? In: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. http://www.bpb.de/themen/XJ6ZHA,0,Kreativ_demonstrieren_Aber_wie.html

Bürgerforum Graefenberg: www.graefenberg-ist-bunt.de

Title: 'Forgotten Voices ?' People Living in Residential Care and their part in the Vision for Adult Social Care

Presenter: Chris Russell

The recently published Vision for Adult Social Care (Department of Health, 2010) sets out the coalition government's aim that, "people in residential care should have the same entitlement as anyone else to exercise choice and control over their care and how they live."

This is not before time. Demand for places in care homes is expected to double in the next 20 years and, for various reasons, people are entering care homes with a higher level of dependency and more complex care needs than ever before.

And yet, it is the first time that this group of potentially very vulnerable people have been offered the same benefits of personalisation as others living in the community. This workshop will explore choice and control within residential care homes, and the issues and challenges it generates.

Title: 'My People'

Presenter: Dave Stamp ASIRT

In 2010, Birmingham's cabinet member for Housing announced the Local Authority's decision to stop providing housing and support for asylum seekers, noting that in "these difficult economic times...my people have got to come first".

His words were an explicit articulation of a process of abjection by which asylum seekers and other undocumented migrants are excluded from the mainstream of welfare provision. Thousands of refused asylum seekers are left destitute as a consequence of policies which seek effectively to starve them out of the UK. Those fortunate enough to fit the UK Border Agency's restrictive criteria for support find themselves below the poverty threshold, often with no access to cash. The Government's spending review has specifically targeted asylum support rates as an expense to be cut.

This session will explore the ramifications of this position of marginalisation and impoverishment, seeking critically to examine the impacts on service users' lives of workers' collusion with systems of immigration control, arguing that welfare professionals have the power positively to help those threatened by these systems, and contributing to the debate around ways in which professionals can form alliances with undocumented migrants, moving towards the development of a radical anti-racist social work practice in which workers can make a positive and empowering contribution to their struggles.

Title: Modern Management and Children's Services

Presenter: Andrea Collins

As a former social work manager I observed that older teenagers were arguably the 'poor relation' in terms of access to statutory social work services beyond initial assessment. Many interventions involved levels of crisis management focusing on behavioural related issues, often though not always, relating to anti social and/or offending behaviours. The criteria for the decision making process is arguably ambiguous, subjective and with seemingly less priority.

I question the impact of this on young people, but also consider the moral and ethical dilemmas this raises for practitioners and managers trying to respond to need and explore how the complexity of the economic climate and current political discourse may be in conflict with social work values. The paper aims to build on a personal journey of reflection.

Title: Autistic Rights Movement

Presenters: Roderick Cobby, Russell Stronach and Adrian Whyatt

This workshop will be introduced by three short presentations. The first two will deal with the issues concerning the autistic rights movement, in particular the 'hierarchy of impairments' faced by autistic, neurodiverse people and others with invisible impairments; the continued dominance of medical model thinking and issues such as the need for Universal Design to ensure that sensory issues, communication issues and other barriers autistic people meet being part of society are lifted. The third presentation will deal with the issues concerning the Autism Strategy and the problems with it, possible demands and the right tactics for the movement. The presentations will be followed by discussion with workshop participants.

Title: Journeys from the Philippines to England: social workers' perspectives on the purpose of social work

Presenter: Jem Price

This presentation will introduce initial findings from an ongoing study looking at the perspectives of social workers who qualified in the Philippines and came to England to practise. Data was collected during a study visit to the Philippines and through interviews with Filipino social workers based in England. The presentation will be an opportunity to reflect upon the meaning and purpose of social work in the Philippines (and in England), to consider what might be learnt from Filipino approaches to practice and to engage with notions of transferability and professional culture shock. Thoughts will be shared on aspects of social work in England which could be considered more progressive and might form the foundations for a more critical social work. Drawing upon an initial analysis of the data, the session will also consider the potential for alliances with service user and carer movements and for forms of community engagement, campaigning and social action.

Title: Using Social Media to Fight Cuts

Presenter: Victoria Hart

This session is an exploration in the powerful ways that opposition can be built online through the power of social networking, social media and campaigns online.

We will look at practical tools that can be used to spread the message and to build alliances across the broader network of campaigning groups.

There will be three parts of an interactive and accessible workshop which starts with the basics.

- Using Social Media (Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, Forums, YouTube)
- Influencing and Engaging Mainstream Influencers with online tools (Media/Politicians)
- Building links with other opposition groups

I'll look at case studies of how successful opposition groups can grow and use very basic tools to create real opposition.

I want people to leave the session with practical, simple and effective ways to make their online voices heard to put pressure on the government.

Title: How can Social Work Students Learn from the Student Movement

Facilitators: Dan Morton and Sarah Bennett

Student activism is back on campus and in the popular consciousness. This began with occupations at the beginning of 2009 over Israel's assault on Gaza and then the mass demonstrations and occupations in response to the Coalition Government's fees and cuts agenda in England and Wales, which lead to the tumultuous events at Millbank Tower in November and the 'kettling' of Parliament Square in December last year.

How is this relevant to social work students? What can social work students learn from the organising and campaigning methods of student activists such as occupations, teach-ins, democratic meetings and social networking?

The workshop aims to identify how can students develop a collective voice and take radical approaches into the classroom and practice. It hopes to uncover barriers to social work students' involvement in activism.

The session will include a contribution from Claire Lister, a student at Birmingham University, involved in the recent occupation of Birmingham University in January 2011, which ended with forceful eviction by university security and the police.

Speaker: Claire Lister, Student, Birmingham University

Title: How to rebuild a Life - or - not without my social services

Presenter: Janet Tchamani and members of the Red Tent

Jan will use examples from her own roller-coaster life history to show how vital wise and effective intervention and support services are in the life of a mental health service user. She will share the platform with 2 members of The Red Tent who have themselves benefited from Jan's support and encouragement over the past 3 years. Jan will give an account of her history pre- and post-diagnosis and her 2 colleagues from The Red Tent will give their testimonies about working with her. Delegates will be given a time-line of Jan's life with key events. Following an opportunity to ask questions delegates will be asked to get into groups of 4-5 to discuss what might have happened differently (in terms of intervention and support) if Jan had received her bipolar diagnosis at various points in her life: at age 25, 30, 35, 40 and 45. Groups will be asked to feed back to the whole group with their ideas. The whole group will be asked to consider whether late diagnosis was in fact in any way a GOOD thing. And, in the light of this consideration, whether the intervention and support for mental health sufferers needs to be modified in any way. If they were feeding back to the Government on their ideas, what would they advise them to do to make service to mental health sufferers more effective?

Title: THE GOVERNMENT MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVE 'IMPROVING ACCESS TO PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPIES': A CASE OF WATERING THE WORKERS' BEER

Presenter: Jeremy Weinstein

This workshop is focusing **not** on cuts but rather at what services selected for survival tell us about the ideological imperatives of the ConDems.

IAPT is a major mental health initiative, costing an estimated £600 million p.a. with 10,000 therapists addressing depression/anxiety. Socialists should welcome access to free therapy but IAPT's motivating force is to get people off benefits and back into employment. Its reliance on cbt appeals to 'quick fix politicians' because it is 'cheap, quick and simplistic' (James, 2008) and IAPT takes resources from counselling agencies that provide more challenging, transformational, therapies. IAPT's strongly medical and reductionist orientation can be seen as complementing other tendencies within social work such as the replacement of the GSCC with the Health Professionals Council and the rebranding of Approved Social Workers as Approved Mental Health Practitioners.

Jeremy Weinstein worked as a social worker in Lambeth (when he was a member of the Case Con Collective) and Wandsworth before going to London South Bank University as a senior lecturer on the post graduate social work programme. He now works as a counsellor/psychotherapist running a low cost counselling project and in private practice. Jeremy has researched/written on social workers as trade unionists, aspects of group work and more recently on the topic of loss and bereavement. His text, 'Working with Loss, Death and Bereavement, a Guide for Social Workers' was published by Sage in 2008

This session will run alongside a discussion of capitalism and mental health by Jon McArdle from the Black Triangle Campaign.

Title: 'Suresearch'

Presenter: Duncan Purslow

A presentation about 'Suresearch', a support group in the Midlands for mental health research currently run by service users and supported by the University of Birmingham. This will include a brief history of 'Suresearch', set up over ten years ago, and in particular its time associated with the University and specifically with the Centre for Excellence in Interdisciplinary Mental Health. I shall include the aims of the group of service users and 'its allies', who are involved in research and education in the local area, and examples of projects by universities and the mental health trust in which current members have been involved. Also I shall show how to access the website, an extract from the 10 year celebratory video and from a conference report, followed by the opportunity for questions.

Title: Disability – A Different Kind of Oppression

Presenter: Roddy Slorach

Disabled people are suffering worse from the public spending cuts than perhaps any other section of society, with a range of cuts planned or in progress affecting both disability and out-of-work benefits. As a social group, disabled people are particularly dependent on public services, and are among the first to be targeted for cuts in recessions.

This is therefore as good a time as any to investigate the nature of disability discrimination. What is the root of disabled people's oppression? What are the similarities – and differences – with other oppressed groups? Is 'disablism' the same as racism or sexism or homophobia? And what role are disabled people playing in the resistance to the cuts? How can alliances be built?

The article on which this presentation is based can be found at

<http://www.isj.org.uk/index.php4?id=702&issue=129>

Title: Poverty Awareness Training: Enabling Service Users to Train Social Work Students and Practitioners about family poverty work in the UK

Presenters: Volunteers and Family members of ATD 4th World

This workshop brings social workers into dialogue with service users to discuss the 'Poverty Awareness' training module ATD Fourth World has developed to help sensitise social workers to the way poverty affects families' lives. The programme aims to improve relationships between social workers and families through mutual learning and better awareness of families' perspectives, struggles and realities, particularly as parents frightened that their children may be taken into care.

Regular members of ATD Fourth World, all of whom have had long-term contact with social services, are trained to present the model to newly-qualified social workers as part of 'service user involvement' in social work education. We aim beyond tokenistic inclusion, however, to genuine recognition and dialogue about family poverty, providing a space for self-reflection and the need to critically examine inequalities and power relationships between social workers and families. We will examine barriers to good communication and ask why families may appear resistant to social workers' interventions. We will discuss ways for social workers to tackle the underlying causes of families' difficulties, supporting and keeping families together. We would value ideas and feedback from attendees and are looking forward to making contacts with those interested in our module.

Title: Refugee children's experiences: Towards an anti-oppressive social work intervention

Presenter: Ajwang Warriar

The arrival of unaccompanied minors poses unique challenges to South Africa, raising questions about the well-being of that child. This paper explored experiences and adjustment mechanisms applied by refugee children in South Africa in light of social work practice and social justice. The study found that fundamental adolescent struggles interact significantly with xenophobia and lack of culture-based therapeutic services thus interrupting growth and development. The participants' *multiple identities* reflected survivor's guilt, resilience, legislative and institutional injustice. Craig & Lovel's (2005) emphasis on refugees' participation was found to be comparable. Social workers need to champion the rights of refugee children through advocacy and anti-oppressive practice approaches to ensure that their circumstances are prioritized. Existing policy frameworks and services should be maximally utilized. However, where such needs can't be addressed within these policies and service provision arrangements, social workers must engage in social action and social justice approaches.

Title: Seeking an Opportunity for Progressive Social Work in a Deprived Area in Hong Kong

Presenter: Kin-kwok LAI

Community development has not been the core intervention strategy in Hong Kong which claimed to be a prosperous global city in the last decade. The lump sum grant funding model and political atmosphere after 1997 confined community development which is the core element of progressive social work in historical review under social work training. However, as the seed of community development is embedded in social work profession, it can only grow under the soil of social workers' spirit in fighting against the injustice and developing community strengths. With the support outside traditional government stable resources, the Community Development Alliance (CDA) has been subsidized to run a community development project in a deprived area titled as 'City of Misery' since 2006. During the past 2 years, CDA has experienced neglect by government departments, marginalized by political and local organizations, homelessness, but it also learnt the strengths and wisdom of deprived community, the co-operation and collaboration with local NGOs and welfare sector. It has earned the appreciation of funder and government officials. This paper aims to discuss and evaluate the experience of CDA in employing progressive social work in deprived area under the neo-liberal welfare regime in Hong Kong.

Title: In the Name of Community: A Critical Review of the 'Long Term Social Welfare Planning in Hong Kong'

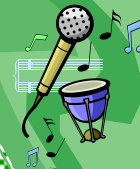
Presenter: Dr. Leung Chi-Yuen

Community is always recited and reused as a cure of social diseases by the authorities of the neo-liberal governance. And Hong Kong is no exception. This paper will trace the appropriation of the concept of 'community' and the subsequent 'community practices' funded by the government after the turnover in 1997 till now. The present consultation about the 'Long Term Social Welfare Planning in Hong Kong' has evidenced again a biased and misleading attribution of the social and financial crisis of the society. The regeneration of the self-limiting and the 'individual-oriented' community-based intervention brought the return of 'community' which is however not progressive, collective and sustainable. It is high time to differentiate the top down government-initiated community intervention from the bottom-up grassroots organization -run community practices. To recapture the real essence of 'community' maybe a first step in liberating and radicalizing the residual welfare regime.

Social Work  Action
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