

Social Care Council Speech (CrossReach) — General Assembly 2022

Rev Thom Riddell

In October 2013 The Guardian Newspaper featured an article which led with: ‘Social Care is not a career for the faint-hearted, but while working with some of the most vulnerable members of society, in a fierce media spotlight, has never been easy, it has got a whole lot tougher over the past few years. For leaders of children's and adults' services, the stakes are unprecedentedly high’.

Although written almost a decade ago, these words certainly ring true to us today, and we would argue that the stakes have become even higher, not just for those working in social care but for those supported by it too. Alongside Health Providers, Social Care Services have borne the brunt of a global pandemic. They are working hard to recruit new people to the sector, and, as the toll of the past two years is felt across society, face increasing need for the care they provide. It has been a very stormy season for social care.

However, the staff at CrossReach, far from being faint-hearted, continue to rise to the challenge of offering love, care and support to thousands of people on a daily basis, helping them to live life to the full whatever their circumstances.

People living with a learning disability or a physical disability, or both.

People who have become frail as a result of old age.

People struggling with addiction or experiencing a dip in their mental health.

People who find themselves homeless, or caught up in the criminal justice system.

People who no longer live at home because of family breakdown, or need additional learning support because their needs are complex.

People living with dementia.

People affected by poverty, loneliness or isolation.

People at heart like you or me, for whom life has become hugely challenging because of the circumstances they were born into or the situations they have encountered along the way.

People who need a helping hand and people for whom the Church, through CrossReach is holding out hope and a future.

While the staff at CrossReach remain resolute in their commitment to provide high quality social care there is wide recognition that 'something needs to be done' to ease the pressures experienced. At the General Assembly in 2021 we reported on the Independent Review of Adult Social Care which recommended significant changes to the way in which social care services should be funded and commissioned; to the way that the staff are recognised and rewarded, and significantly to the way that those receiving support should have a greater say in the way services are provided to them.

Throughout the past year we have continued to feed into discussions about how that future might look, harnessing the voices of supported people and staff alike to contribute to that process. We have been grateful for the support of last year's Moderator Lord Wallace and to the Faith Impact Forum in helping to amplify that voice and make representation on the issues that really matter to the people tasked to make change in Parliament and in Government.

The results of those discussions will be seen shortly as the Scottish Government presents legislation to bring about a National Care Service in the next few weeks. That legislation has the potential to bring about sweeping change and we would urge you to get involved in joining with us to make your voices heard in responding to what is proposed. It may not affect you directly but it will affect those in your churches and in the communities surrounding them. We all need to play a part in ensuring that the social care services of the future will be there for all who need them, whatever their age or their circumstances. It is important that we, as a Church which is committed to the most disadvantaged in society, make our voice heard.

Whilst the legislation will take time to work through, and the system changes proposed will take even longer to introduce, the CrossReach Board have been very aware that steps need to be taken now to ensure that CrossReach can respond to current challenges, and can continue to play a vital part in the mission of a fast-changing Church.

To that end much of the past year has been taken up with thinking about the role CrossReach can play in helping to fulfil the five marks of mission, with particular emphasis on the third, that of responding to human need by loving service.

We have thought about the Christian Ethos of the organisation and how that can be nurtured and sustained through prayer and pastoral concern. We have thought about the 1600 strong workforce and are taking steps to examine the conditions under which we could become a Living Wage organisation, as well as what we need in place to ensure the wellbeing of our staff. We have also thought carefully about the services and have been dealing with the areas of greatest risk, sometimes remodelling services, and sometimes having to take the very difficult decision to withdraw them. These decisions to close services are never taken lightly as we understand the distress and upset that they cause, but we do believe them to be necessary to allow the organisation, its workforce and its supported people to thrive into the future.

We have also thought about the nature of change in the Church, and how we can draw closer to Presbyteries and individual congregations in the future, and we look forward to a time when we can discuss that more fully.

Having taken a number of initial steps we have agreed to work closely with the Assembly Trustees over the next year to determine the type of oversight and support CrossReach is likely to need for the future. The Board is grateful for their guidance and support in meeting the challenges of the past year.

Despite all of that going on in the background we are pleased to report that thousands of lives have continued to be transformed over the past year. We have heard incredibly moving stories from people like Scott who has beaten addiction with the help of our residential rehabilitation service in Glasgow, and is now reaching out to others to help them on their own journey of recovery. We have planted for the future as we have done what we can to keep the Promise for young people in our care, and we celebrated a successful community careers day at our Erskine school Campus helping the young people there to dream of a fulfilling future. We have provided a roof over the heads for many who have found themselves homeless and have watched with pride as the residents of Cunningham House in Edinburgh found ways to give back to the communities which had supported that service by offering their own time and talents. We have found ways to enhance the lives of those in their later years in our residential care homes, from Nairn to Ayr. Our successful partnership with local churches across the country led to our Heart for Art Groups launching their online gallery in April 2022 having already raised awareness of our need to care for creation through their own art.

Our recent annual survey told us that:

- 97.5% of service users believe that the service they receive enables them to live life to the best of their abilities;
- 98% felt they were supported to make choices about their own health and wellbeing;
- 99% believe that they got emotional support to manage life's experiences;
- And 99% said that they were satisfied overall with the service received.

These are just snapshots of all that has been achieved. You can learn more about the work of CrossReach in our Impact Report to which you will find the link in the Report to this General Assembly, and we hope that you find it interesting and insightful.

We acknowledge the huge efforts of the workforce in making all of that possible, despite the ups and downs of the pandemic and the constant adjusting to guidance as Covid cases have reached new peaks.

We were delighted to hold an online awards ceremony in October recognising the staff for their dedication, for the professional qualifications gained over the last year as well as making awards for long service and exceptional achievements. The awards service ran under the title 'Ohana' which in Hawaiian means 'family in which no one is left behind' and we got a little help from friends to make it all run smoothly.

But we couldn't have done it without your support. People in the congregations and communities up and down the country have helped in so many ways, giving of time talents and resources, and holding us in prayer as we have navigated through some particularly choppy seas in this unprecedented season for Social Care. On behalf of the CrossReach Board I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all.

Moderator, I present the report and move the deliverance.