

Social Care Council (CrossReach)—General Assembly 2023

Rev Thom Riddell

A broken system, a time of crisis, staff at tipping point, urgent action required - it's the stuff of nightmares if you follow the news reports on social care in Scotland. So just how worried should we be about social care in general, and about CrossReach, the Church of Scotland's own social care arm specifically, at this time?

The past year paints a mixed picture. The feedback from those who are cared for and supported by CrossReach, whether in our children's services, adult care services or older people services, would suggest there is still much to be optimistic about. The latest service user survey asked a number of questions about people's perceptions of the care delivered and how far they thought their own views were listened to and enacted.

The results were universally positive, with high levels of satisfaction on all fronts being reported.

Our latest Impact Report, released today, and with a link in your Assembly report, is brimming with positivity, capturing stories of success from a number of different service areas, and I would invite you to read it, if you have not done so already.

CrossReach is seen as an organisation making a valuable contribution to some of Scottish society's big issues:

- Playing a part in tackling Scotland's drugs deaths and attracting significant investment to increase the number of residential rehabilitation places we will be able to offer in the future. Also working in collaboration with a number of partners from within the Church to think about how we can reduce stigma around substance use so that people can ask for help more easily.
- Working to keep the promise for Scotland's children so that children, young people and their families are given the resources and support needed to help them to thrive and to reach their full potential whether at home or in another setting.
- Collaborating with different partners, including a number of churches, to ensure that people living with dementia are well supported in their communities through the growth of our much-loved Heart for Art groups.

These are good news stories for CrossReach, but they are also good news stories for the whole of the Church of Scotland as it fulfils part of its own ministry and mission in responding to human need by loving service. This positive contribution to the work of the

Church was most recently recognised by the Assembly Trustees Working Group who have been considering the relationship between CrossReach and the wider Church of Scotland, making several welcome recommendations about how we can now move forward together.

So what's the problem?

At the first run of our 'world café events', introduced in late 2022 where staff, supported people, and Board members met together to see how improvements to services might be made we heard once again about how lives had been transformed as a result of coming into contact with a CrossReach service. However, we also heard with absolute clarity how important supportive and enabling relationships are to making change possible. We listened to people tell us about how shortages of staff and inconsistencies in staffing can cut across the nature of the care and support being provided, the choices that people can make, the activities on offer and the effect on good communications between supported people and those supporting them.

It is perhaps here that we begin to understand some of the cracks in the social care system and why it is under strain. We fully understand that recruitment and retention of a skilled, qualified and experienced workforce is key to delivering good quality support, but it has never been harder. There are, of course, recruitment issues in many sectors; however, our task has been made particularly difficult by the fact that there is a recognised delay to deliver on a promise of Fair Work to the social care workforce across Scotland. While we pay the best salaries that we can afford, many experienced social care staff have left for better paid jobs in the NHS or other sectors, forced to make difficult choices between supporting the people with whom they have made strong, enabling relationships and the need to support their own families, due to the cost of living increases. As a consequence we, as a social care Provider, also have to make difficult choices about who to support, and what we can offer, often relying on expensive agency staff to meet the requirements of the contacts we operate under, which in turn affects our ability to budget and run services sustainably.

The recent supplementary report by Community Integrated Support entitled Unfair to Care, which you will see in our report highlights how far the wages of social care workers have now fallen against three critical benchmarks including those doing equivalent jobs in the NHS, those working in Local Government or other not for profit agencies, and those working in the retail sector. Our skilled, qualified experienced and dedicated staff in the voluntary sector are now at least 19% behind their counterparts in other agencies and that needs to change.

At an event on 11th May Archbishop Nolan and the Right Revd Dr Greenshields signed a declaration calling for further Government action and inviting faith leaders across the

country to get involved in effecting that change. You can see the declaration and add your own signature or encourage Faith leaders in your community to sign up on the CrossReach website.

We all have a part to play in the recruitment effort and this year we are asking Presbyteries to support us by circulating our vacancies within their own networks. Despite all of the challenges, the personal rewards are hugely fulfilling and we are hugely thankful for our dedicated and loyal workforce who do make a difference in the lives of others, every day.

Our newly introduced recruitment system makes it easier than ever to apply and you can find out more at our stall in the Martin Hall and in our impact report.

The workforce issue is not just critical to CrossReach but to the future of social care as a whole.

In a Government consultation last year people of all ages clearly said that they want more control over their own lives, and that they should be free to make the lifestyle and support choices which suit them, in order to live life to the full. We fully support these views. We also know that there are waiting lists in many areas of social care and that it is becoming more and more difficult for people to access the support that they need.

The National Care Service (Scotland) Bill, which was laid before Parliament in June 2022 was seen to be the answer. It proposes a change in the way in which social care is overseen, putting accountability directly into the hands of Government Ministers. It has at its centre a commitment to uphold human rights and enable people to thrive and fulfil their full potential by accessing the types of support which best suit them. There are, however, some challenges which have been identified with the Bill and its passage through Stage 1 has now been delayed twice. We would urge Church members to read the briefing papers which will soon be prepared by members of the Faith Action Team and CrossReach so that they can understand the purpose, potential and limitations of this important Bill, which is described as the biggest shake-up of health and social care services since the NHS, and to make representations through all the appropriate channels as it passes through Parliament in order to ensure that what follows is the best that Scotland can deliver. That the Church should take an interest in such matters is highlighted in the latest Archbishop's Commission of the Church of England where the delivery of social care is facing similar challenges. The foreword states:

Jesus Christ offers us life in all its fullness (John 10:10), and so we strive for a society in which no one is held back or disregarded, or treated as surplus and 'just a burden' because of their age or ability. We stand with the Commission in its call to rethink attitudes towards ageing and disability within every aspect of our society – including churches – recognising that

every single person has equal value and dignity, and must be treated as such.....At the heart of this report is a deeply Christian understanding of what it looks like to live together in community, with people caring for and supporting one another in relationships characterised by mutuality and inter-dependence.

So back to the question: how worried should we be? My view is that we should absolutely remain appropriately concerned about social care and its challenges, both for CrossReach and for society as a whole, but that we should put aside worry to concentrate on the many positive things that are happening and which give us, as the Social Care Council, hope for the future.

Many of the big risks which were identified five years ago by the leadership team have been dealt with and they are working through the financial factors which affect longer term sustainability, making difficult decisions where needed. Quality remains high and income, including new and welcome investment, remains strong. The Assembly Trustees task group have now finished their work and have declared CrossReach an important asset for the Church. That all gives us a very strong foundation, and will enable us to build on the supportive relationships that we have with so many individuals, congregations and organisations around the country. Our 'Share the Love' campaign which you can also read about in our Impact Report is a great way to get involved and together we can continue to make a difference to:

People like people like Hugh and Elizabeth who will be celebrating their 68th wedding anniversary in the summertime, after moving together into South Beach House, Ardrossan to get the support they both needed.

People like Philip who now has a secure job, is a loving dad and was shortlisted as a Scottish Social Services Awards finalist in the Bright Spark in Social Work Category, having worked hard to overcome his addiction and find a route out of homelessness with support from CrossReach Recovery services.

People like Jayden and Xander who were struggling at mainstream school and are now successful pupils and an inspiration to others at our Erskine School Campus.

The social care system may be under significant pressure but there is hope and signs of life, in all its fullness, within CrossReach and the wider Church of Scotland.