

Thom Riddell 561

Convener of the Social Care Council

Image 1 -People hugging as Thom reads through the words of the song.

Brother, sister let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you. Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.

Let me hold the Christ light for you, in the darkness of your fear, let me hold my hand out to you, speak the words you long to hear.

These words, are as relevant to us in CrossReach today as they were almost 50 years ago, when they were first written by Richard Gillard.

They speak of building relationships, journeying together, of living through the highs and the lows, and of holding on to hope.

In the past year it has been our privilege at CrossReach to journey with over 28,000 people from communities across Scotland, and support them to overcome challenges, so that they can attain the highest quality of life they are able to achieve.

There have inevitably been some dark days, but there have been many more bright moments:

Image 2 (Collage of service users) as Thom gives the examples below.

Maggie stands up at the end of our recovery volunteer graduation ceremony and with a huge smile tells us that after 35 years of struggle with problematic substance use her mind feels clear – she feels good and she believes that she has a positive future.

Pamela, an exhausted wife beams with pride on seeing the painting her husband of many years, and now living with dementia, has produced at his Heart for Art group. The image is on display at an exhibition they are visiting together. A special moment celebrating an achievement, rather than dwelling on a loss.

Luke a child with a complex disability often takes a short break at the Mallard, where he gets to take part in a range of activities, which help him to remain as independent as possible. He tells us that he has been going there for most of his life and that he sees the staff team are his extended family.

You will get an opportunity to enjoy one such moment later today as our Maketon choir, who lit up our first CrossReach carol service at Greyfriars church in December last year, join us in an act of worship as we commence business this afternoon. They are here to serve you this afternoon and we trust that you will be blessed by their performance.

Image 3-Image of the Impact Report 2024 here

I could spend the whole morning sharing stories of success like these. Stories of people just like you and me, our families and our friends. People often doing ordinary things despite their extraordinary circumstances and well supported by the people they trust.

Mindful of my limit of 15 minutes, however, I will simply remind you that you can read more of the everyday extraordinary in our impact report, available in a link in Section 1.1.7 in our report to General Assembly.

Support from people we trust is of fundamental importance to us all, but, at times, can be hard to find.

Image 4 Image of mother and child

One young woman who attended our counselling service told us about member of staff she had been supported by – she said, ‘She saw me through pregnancy, post birth and the loss of my brother. She was so kind, patient, open and honest. Her levels of compassion and effort to create a connection with me were invaluable at that time and will stay with me forever.’

The staffing problems in health and in social care have been well rehearsed over the past year. CCPS, the umbrella body for voluntary sector social care providers reported that turnover in the sector had reached 25% in 2023. As a result recruitment and retention of

staff has been a key area of investment for us and, finally, we are beginning to see signs of progress.

A move to Living Wage as the baseline for pay, a new recruitment portal, and some innovative thinking around how and where to advertise have all played a part, but there is no doubt that we have been helped in our task by the welcome collaboration with the new Presbyteries who are now regularly sharing vacancies within their own networks. We are grateful for that partnership approach and look forward to building on the foundations laid through our initial round of meetings to understand where there may be other areas of mutual benefit.

We know that one of the remaining barriers to recruiting and retaining staff is the issue of Fair Work in social care. Last year we called for Faith Leaders within the Church of Scotland, and in our ecumenical and interfaith partnerships, to join with us in highlighting this issue to Government and to call for change. There has been an incredible response with over 400 faith leaders signing a declaration highlighting this issue as a matter of justice, fairness and equality.

Image 5- Stat on Fair Pay

In the past year the Very Reverend Sally Foster Fulton, along with Archbishop Nolan, and supported by members of staff from CrossReach and the Faith Action Leadership programme have continued to engage with Scottish Government in support of other groups within the social care sector. There have been some successes of the campaign but there remains much to do. The 2023 report, *Unfair To Care*, provides evidence that the social care workforce now sits at 24% behind their NHS counterparts doing similar work, a position which is fundamentally unfair, and which needs to change.

We will be continuing to campaign on this over the next year and will provide details of how to get involved later on this summer. Once more we are grateful for the growing collaboration across the Church on this issue.

Cut to Thom for this whole section

While the issue of recruitment is challenging, more challenging still are the conditions across social care as a whole. On a regular basis we hear of funding cuts and closure of services. These cuts affect the support that CrossReach can offer as they do the services delivered by other social care providers, including local authorities.

The type of support offered by social care helps people to recognise the barriers they face to living a normal life, and to identify solutions, including putting in place the relationships needed, which will help them to thrive.

It is the type of support which helps prevent family breakdown, enables those living with dementia to continue to live in the communities which they know best, supports those living with a physical or learning disability to live in accordance with their choices and aspirations, and is there for those struggling with problematic substance use or their mental health. These services are high quality, cost effective and deliver good outcomes, and can help relieve strain on the already overloaded NHS or Scottish Prison Service.

Every day we see the need growing and every day we are turning people away.

To date within CrossReach we have been able to find solutions to keeping most of the services going and invest in areas of development. Some through the generosity of strangers, others by thinking about new ways to attract statutory or charitable funding. The Church, through CrossReach, remains responsive to the social and physical needs of the nation, as it did in 1904 when the Committee of Social Work was formed and its mission in this area remains an important part the supportive infrastructure to people in desperate situations across Scotland, people like Maggie and Pamela and Luke, but we do recognise that at times of great challenge things need to change.

As well as working hard with our partners across the sector to continue to advance the argument for investment in social care we have undertaken a significant exercise to find out what really matters to those using our services. We have involved their families, our

partners within the Church and more broadly as well as our employees. The detail is in our report, and this rich information will help us to find a way forward which continues that proud tradition of mission, but also allows us to be less reliant on support from central church funding. We will be able to update on that plan later on this year, but your prayers, financial support, volunteering and participation in our Share the Love initiative have already been such a blessing to us and will remain an important part of that future.

Sometimes in seeking to understand the best way forward it is also necessary to look back. Over the past few months we have been looking back, in order to learn lessons from the recent past as well as from longer ago. The Chief Executive has provided evidence to the Scottish Covid Inquiry and the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry. Both of these experiences were exhausting and emotional. We are indebted to the team from CrossReach and the legal services department in George Street who gave such excellent support throughout.

At the Scottish Covid Inquiry we gave testimony on behalf of the services which bore the brunt of Scottish Government management of Covid. There was a particular emphasis on residential care homes but we were able to speak to how policies affected the organisation as a whole. The Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry was different in that a number of ex pupils of the List D schools at Langlands Park, Geilsland and Ballikinrain recounted their experience of being in care and the abuse that occurred in these establishments. The Chief Executive, who had access to all of the evidence presented, gave an apology on behalf of CrossReach and the Church of Scotland for the circumstances which led to the harm of others, promised to take heed of the lessons to be learned, and highlighted that The Church of Scotland has contributed to the Scottish Government Redress Scheme as part of the collective responsibility in acknowledging the abuse from the past.

I'm pleased to say that the situation is different today. Dark moments to bright moments.

Image 6 (Collage picture of Quality Circles/World Café/Young people consultation

As we collected evidence from those using our services, part of our forward planning exercise, the top three words used were happy, safe and loved. That is a strong foundation on which to build and we will continue to listen to those using services and those supporting them so that we can make good decisions for the future.

Looking to the future I know that the way ahead can look uncertain at times, but the past year has shown us that there is much power in our partnerships as we work together to fulfil the mission of the Church at this time. There is hope, and I trust that the stories you have heard today, and which you will find more of in the impact report, speak of the presence of an active God in an active Church.

For me, as I reflect on the past 12 years on the Social Care Council and 4 as Convenor of the CrossReach Board it's those moments of hope that I will take with me. In situations that once seemed impossible I have often had the privilege to witness incredible change.

Image 7 Picture of Thom to end on.

I wish the staff and volunteers who carry out the caring work of CrossReach, and those who continue to serve on the Board, including the incoming Convener Dr Mike Cantlay every blessing in their task ahead.

Moderator, I present the report, and, as I am not a Commissioner, I would request the Principal Clerk to move the Deliverance.