

### SWU - working for you



The union continues to grow in strength and from all at SWU and the SWU Executive your ongoing support is important. As a SWU member, you will know that Employment Representation from a Qualified Social Worker who knows the

profession inside and out is important. The Trade Union A&R Team are at the forefront of this organisation and if you ever need their services then you can be assured of professionalism from a service from social workers who understand the profession. Hopefully the additional SWU benefits will also add value to the extra you pay to SWU over your BASW membership; and with a proposed increase from £20 to £25 a year (no increase for students) this is indeed continued terrific value. The GFTU training options available to members are worthy of a look as is the training provided from Dr Neil Thompson at a reduced cost for SWU members.

The planning for the AGM and Conference is almost complete and I look forward to a great line up and discussion on Working Conditions of Social Workers. This conference is great value at no cost for SWU members so please do consider attending as I would love to see as many members as possible. The travel to the conference is free for Union Contacts so this is another reason to be actively involved and part of the organisation.

Specialist unions like SWU are the right way to stand up for the Social Work profession; particularly as the big unions and the leadership of some of the major unions are dealing with hundreds of different professions. Therefore, just how much time are the big unions speaking about Social Work if they get time with elected MPs and Government Ministers? We are getting this time and part of this is that our union is run by Social Workers for Social Workers. The more specialised you are, the easier it is to campaign on a clear message as is the case with our Working Conditions campaign.

Finally, the deadline has now been reached for the recent SWU University Student Assignment competition. The completed assignments are all with markers and the standard of work has been exceptional and the difficulty will be finding four winners.

Hope you all have a lovely summer.

**John McGowan**  
**General Secretary**

[j.mcgowan@swu-union.org.uk](mailto:j.mcgowan@swu-union.org.uk)



## Getting Arrested and Being a Social Worker

As social workers, we like to think of ourselves as being law-abiding citizens who always do the right thing. Unfortunately, life sometimes has other ideas and we may find ourselves, for all sorts of reasons, facing the police having been accused of a crime we either did commit, or sometimes did not commit. Under certain circumstances, you may find that you committed the crime, but there were reasons behind it - you stole a loaf of bread to feed your child for instance. Whatever the reasons, and whether or not you committed a crime of which you have been accused, there is general advice that you need to consider if you ever find yourself being arrested by the police.

You must remember that, no matter how serious the crime, it could have an impact on your registration in your home country. Even if someone tells you that it will not, you must understand that any criminal activity that you are convicted for, no matter how minor could see you facing your regulator. You also need to understand that, because you work in a profession that requires special enhanced police disclosures, any conviction, no matter how minor could end up on a Data Barring Service check.

One area of concern we have had at the Advice and Representation Service lately is social workers accepting police cautions on the advice of the police without first getting legal advice about the implications of accepting a caution. Any police caution you accept will be examined by your registering body. They will take your acceptance of the allegation at face value, so, even if you have an 'explanation' for what happened; or you feel that the police did not capture the essence of what you were saying, you will struggle explaining that to your registering body. You also will not have any control over the report that the police send to the court or subsequently about it. This report will likely be seen by the registering body. Therefore, it is important that you take some sort of legal advice prior to accepting any cautions. You will be offered a duty solicitor; however, you are also entitled to a discount at



Morrish Solicitors <https://www.morrishsolicitors.com/> as a result of your SWU membership.

If you do make a statement with the police, please make sure that you read the statement before you sign it. Do not agree to accept responsibility for something that you genuinely did not do. We have had a number of members who have accepted responsibility for something that they did not do simply because they were afraid that they would be at the police station for a long time. Once you sign the statement, make sure that you have a copy of it. Make sure that you ring your regulator and tell your employer at the first opportunity. There is no advantage to delaying disclosure.

If you find yourself facing a disciplinary at work, ring the A&R service for advice and possible representation. Even if you aren't eligible, we can give you advice on how to handle your particular set of circumstances. Just remember that the best way to get through something like this is to be open, honest, reflective and contrite. It does not mean automatic dismissal, nor does it mean automatic de-registration. We can guide you through the process of ensuring others that your fitness to practice is not impaired as a result of this incident.

Lyse Hurd

# Financial peace of mind. Make it happen.



**Y**ou work hard for your money but is your money working hard for you? Maybe you know you should be doing something about your finances but don't know who to turn to for advice you can trust. Yet the sooner you take action, the more likely you are to achieve your financial goals.

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We are the SWU's preferred provider of financial advice and we specialise in helping people working in the public sector achieve their financial goals.

*See over for details.*



# One call or one email. Take the first step.

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- save £££s on your mortgage and guide you through the application process
- build up a nest-egg tax-efficiently, for yourself or for your children or grandchildren
- boost your pension provision, so you can enjoy a comfortable retirement
- take your pension and get the best possible income
- pay for long-term care
- pass on your wealth to your loved ones in a tax-efficient way.

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**SWU** Social  
Workers  
Union

# President's Parliamentary Update



On 11<sup>th</sup> of June I found myself back in the House of Commons. I was having three meetings with three different MPs to discuss the research project into *Working Conditions for Social Workers* undertaken by Dr Jermaine Ravalier, Reader in Psychology at Bath Spa University, on behalf of the Social Workers Union. All three MPs were very supportive of our campaign.

My first meeting was with Conor McGinn MP, Labour, St Helens North, Chair All Party Parliamentary Group for Ireland, who said he would write to the Chancellor and the three Secretaries of State for Health, Education and Housing, Communities and Local Government requesting that social work be properly funded to retain the workforce and protect vulnerable children and adults. With our help he is keen to meet social workers in his constituency to hear more about their work lives and to understand the work they do with vulnerable people. He will participate in a debate on working conditions in the House of Commons and will speak to Clive Betts MP about instigating this debate in the House of Commons. Readers may remember that Lord Roy Kennedy, Labour, had instigated a debate in the House of Lords about *Working Conditions for Social Workers*. Conor McGinn had worked for a mental health project and had a number of relatives who were Social Workers. He felt there was too much emphasis on qualifications in social work and not enough about experience. He said he would join the All Party Parliamentary Group for Social Work.

My next meeting was with Paul Sweeney MP, the Shadow Under Secretary of State for Scotland, and the MP for Glasgow North East. He will contact the Scottish Parliament. He is involved with a prison in Glasgow and is very concerned about the number of prisoners with mental health problems who are discharged at the end of their sentence without any support at all and end up back in prison.  
The mental health

system in Glasgow appears to be almost non-existent. The effect of funding cuts in Glasgow has had a dire effect on services for people with mental health problems. He is very keen to meet with social workers in his constituency. He will also send a letter to the Chancellor and the three Secretaries of State. He will add the Scottish Government ministers.

My third meeting of the day was with Julie Cooper MP Burnley, Shadow Minister for Health and Social Care. She will write a personal letter to the Chancellor and three Secretaries of State. She will raise questions in Parliament about the findings of the research project and will request a debate on this issue in Parliament. She made reference to the Green Paper on Social Care. She would be pleased to meet with social workers in her constituency of Burnley. She emphasised that she is very much on our side with this.

I was invited to attend the All Party Parliamentary Group for Social Work on *Social Workers and A New Mental Health Act. Evidence Session 2: Approved Mental Health Professionals and Best Interest Assessors* which ran from 2pm to 4 pm. Three MPs were present and two members of the House of Lords. Evidence was given by three AMHPs. Considerable concern was raised about working in multi-disciplinary teams and the absurd situation where doctors do not provide a bed. This leaves the AMPH searching for beds. Often patients are sent out of area and sometimes there are no beds available anywhere meaning the section cannot go ahead and the ridiculous situation where the AMPH will have to return another day when they have found a bed! There is clearly a very severe shortage of mental health beds. There is also a problem with AMPHs having to wait 4 hours for an ambulance. The system is dysfunctional and they are not resourced to do the job they do. Clearly the working conditions for social workers working as AMPHs is entirely unsatisfactory.

It was for me a busy but very valuable day.

**James Birchall**  
**President, SWU**

# Stress as a Trade Union Issue

Stress is unfortunately one of those topics that is commonly misunderstood and oversimplified. One aspect of this is the tendency to individualise stress and to see it as the sign of a weak or inadequate individual - captured by the 'if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen' cliché. According to this view, if you are struggling to cope with the combination of your work and home pressures, there must be something wrong with you.

Of course, this view is dangerously inaccurate and oppressive. Everyone has a limit to how much pressure they can withstand and, of course, much will depend on the extent and quality of the support we receive. Stress, when it arises, is indeed telling us that there is something wrong, but not necessarily with the individual. This is what makes it a trade union issue.

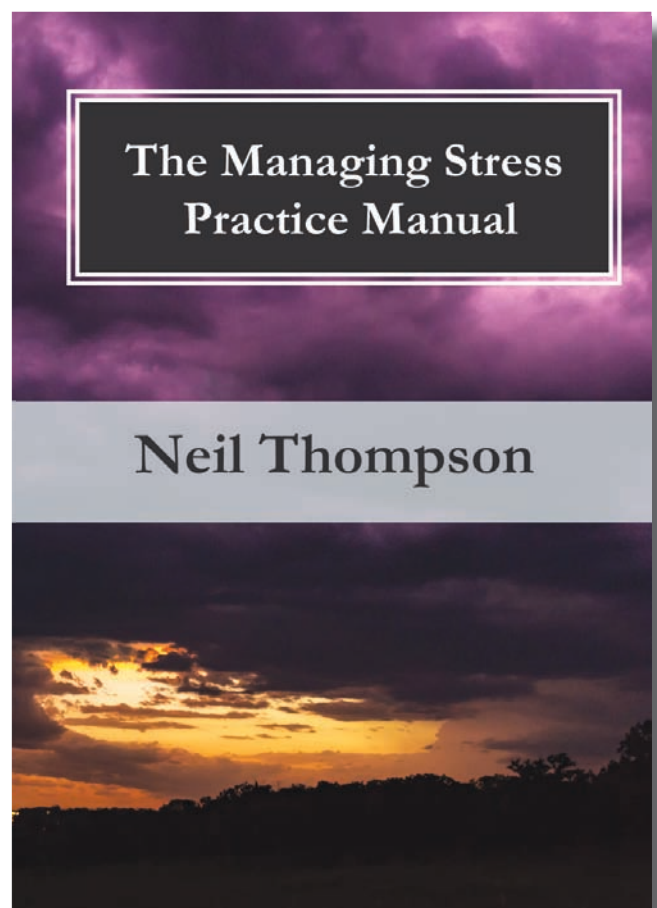
Stress is covered by the health and safety legislation which seeks to protect people from undue hazards at work. An employing organisation that allows workplace pressures to rise above a safe level and/or fail to provide adequate support is potentially in breach of their health and safety duties. The legislation is in place to reinforce the idea that people should not be harmed by their work, which is why stress comes within its ambit.

The modern workplace in general and the social work world in particular tend to be highly pressurised places, and so it is essential that proper support systems are in place. In my experience, the support on offer varies enormously. Some employing organisations seem to do a great job of creating and sustaining a positive and empowering working environment, while others leave a lot to be desired (to put it mildly). Trade unions therefore have a role to play in trying to ensure that adequate support is provided and to assist and protect members when the level of support is insufficient. SWU, of course, to its credit, has been very active in this regard.

The part I have played in this has been to produce *The Managing Stress Practice Manual*. This is not a textbook, but a practical hands-on guide to rising to the

pressures we face. It places stress in its wider organisational context and argues against the view that stress is a matter of individual failing. Of course, there is already a huge literature on stress available, but much of it has a narrow individualistic focus that has the potential to do more harm than good - for example, by making people who are experiencing stress feel guilty for doing so and come to assume that it is all their own fault. This very often leads to people who need support not asking for it, as they feel ashamed that they are letting themselves down, rather than angry that their employers are not providing sufficient protection, despite their legal responsibility to do so.

Dr Neil Thompson is a longstanding supporter of SWU and of trade unionism's role in promoting social justice. He kindly allows SWU members access to his online learning community and his range of e-learning courses at half price. Contact the SWU office for details. His latest book, *The Managing Stress Practice Manual* is available via Amazon or from: <https://www.avenuemediasolutions.com/product-category/books-training-resources/>



## Missing Voices

The University of Worcester, together with Shaping Our Lives National User Network and the Foster Care Co-operative, launched a two-year research project in 2018 aiming to encourage disabled people to come forward as potential foster carers. The project was funded by DRILL (Disability Research on Independent Living and Learning) and the Big Lottery.

Disabled people appear to be largely absent from the fostering workforce and this research project set out to find out why this is the case. Many fostering websites mention fostering disabled children but hardly any mention that disabled people (many of whom are often already parents) could become foster carers.

### Statistics

There is an estimated 8100 shortage of foster carers in the UK, with a 6,800 shortfall in England alone. In 2018 there were 55,200 children in foster care in England - a 3% increase on the previous year. Seventy-five percent of looked-after children (those accommodated by their local authority) are in foster care, 65% of these due to neglect or abuse. Just under 10% of children in foster care were reported to be disabled. Figures from the Department for Work & Pensions, Family Resources Survey (2016/17) show that twenty-two per cent (13.9 million) of people in the UK reported having a disability. A further breakdown of these figures indicates that 8% of children, 19% of working age adults and 45% of pension age adults are disabled. The Office for National Statistics, Labour Force Survey (January to March 2018) reports that disabled people are more than twice as likely to be unemployed as non-disabled people.

### Potential for Disabled people

Fostering could be a career for disabled people and an opportunity to gain employment, which would help fill the huge unemployment gap for disabled people (The All Party Parliamentary Group on Disability, 2016).



Disabled foster children could benefit from positive disabled adult role models and the provision of more diverse foster placements will mean that fewer children will remain in unsuitable settings. By not maximising the potential of disabled people to become foster carers we are missing out on sharing disabled people's lived experiences of parenting and managing daily living. Disabled foster carers can provide a wealth of peer support and practical solutions to foster carers who are caring for disabled children and for those disabled children who have been fostered. The benefits can also sometimes be less obvious - for example, a foster carer with hearing loss taught their fostered child to sign so they could communicate. The fostered child was then able to use their signing skills to communicate with another child at school who had hearing loss. It was reported that the fostered child greatly increased in confidence and self-esteem from this role as interpreter for another isolated child in his school.

## The Research

Four fostering organisations were invited to participate as pilot sites for this research project: Hampshire County Council Fostering Service, Oldham Council Fostering Service, Match Foster Care in Worcestershire and Supported Fostering Services (SFS) in Kent. Fostering staff completed a survey about disability issues and perceptions of various forms of disability. The results of the survey then informed the contents of the training programme for each of the pilot sites, designed and delivered by Becki Meakin of Shaping Our Lives. Becki commented; “Foster agency staff are very skilled in identifying the needs of children and matching these to foster carers. However, there is a lack of confidence about the nature of impairments and health conditions and the impact these may have if a disabled person wants to foster. There is also a lack of understanding about the barriers that disabled people experience and how to overcome them. This can lead to assumptions such as a foster child will be used as a carer by a disabled adult.”

Apart from raising awareness among professionals, the complex issues around benefits for disabled people who might foster has been explored, and a lack of clarity has emerged. Disabled people who receive welfare support are fearful that if they demonstrate they are capable of being a foster carer then their support will be stopped. The current government climate of taking personal assets and turning them into criteria for reducing support will inevitably lead to disabled people not wanting to take the financial risk of stepping into fostering careers.

The following quotes are from the handful of disabled foster carers who have come forward as advocates of disabled fostering:

Jane is disabled and is currently working as a foster carer but was not accepted initially by an agency, and reflects: *‘You just feel like you’re pushed aside and you’re let down because you’ve got something wrong.’*

She also points out that there is much more to fostering than logistical and manual prowess: *‘... for me fostering is not necessarily all about the physical side, helping children ... getting them washed, dressed ... walking them*

*to school. That is a good part, but most of it for me is looking after children, it’s the emotional side and the understanding of how and why the children actually behave the way they do.’* Jon commented: *‘... we have an added set of skills, finely tuned over many years of just having to get it done regardless of the difficulty.’*

Suzanne recalled a dialogue with a young person with behavioural difficulties who was in her care at the time. Suzanne asked: *‘...why is it that you haven’t had a go at me?’* The teenager’s answer was: *‘... you’re in enough pain, she said I wouldn’t want to add to that ... I’d never attack you anyway because you’re really kind to me.’*

This last cameo suggests that children and young people might adopt different ways of behaving when they live with a person they see having to overcome the challenges of disability on an everyday basis.

## Raising social worker awareness of disabled people as foster carers

The research project has so far only been able to find ten disabled foster carers who were willing to be interviewed. Their stories often included having been turned down by a number of fostering agencies before they found one willing to give equal opportunity to their application. Some instances were given when discriminatory attitudes were stark and some of the advertising material on websites eg having to be ‘fully fit’ (whatever that means!) are part of a fostering system which is largely discriminatory toward disabled people. One of the reply threads to a May 2019 Guardian article on this research <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/15/foster-carer-best-thing-disabled-people-shortage#comments>, is interesting in its take on contemporary social work pressures -

*“... throwing into the mix an assessment of the disabled parent’s condition and future prognosis is quite likely to be shyed away from. The possibility of the youngster becoming a young carer down the line isn’t going to be considered beneficial. Of course that can happen in “normal” families ... but for kids in need of stability, unconditional regard and stability because of bad experiences in earlier life, you’re going to place your bets on the most likely to succeed candidates.*

*No, that's not a reason to discount automatically disabled applicants ... but I can see that for overworked social workers, who are often damned if they do or don't, it may be just easier to turn a blind eye to the potential pool that could be out there ..."*

There is doubtless some thread of truth in the above response but the challenge to social workers is to take a lead in changing this reality and embracing disabled people as colleagues who have the potential to make your job easier by extending placement choices and using their pool of life skills to provide positive role models both for social workers and for children needing foster care. The wider string of replies to the Guardian article are interesting as they span a range of lay views about fostering from "they're only in it for the money" through to "only saints foster." What is not in doubt is that the foster system needs overhauling and it may well be that bringing disabled people on board is a major "win-win" all round - making both ethical and business sense.

For service providers to be able to make their services fully inclusive they need to understand the Social Model of Disability and how to apply this in their services. If they can remove the physical, attitudinal and prejudicial barriers in their service and staff become confident talking about disability issues, they can benefit considerably from attracting more disabled foster carers. However, Shaping Our Lives often finds that there is little awareness of the current legislation (Equality Act 2010), poor knowledge about access requirements and a fear to work with disabled people in case they get things wrong. Social workers and managers also fear that the extra support costs some disabled people would need to be successful would further drain in-house budgets, whereas often there are external means of support available which come from sources designed to include disabled people in society and in the workforce.

## Next Stages

Any social workers, disabled people or fostering organisations wishing to put their views forward is most welcome to contribute to this project. Contact is Dr Peter Unwin, University of Worcester [p.unwin@worc.ac.uk](mailto:p.unwin@worc.ac.uk)

**Dr Peter Unwin**  
**SWU Member**

## CALL FOR NOMINATIONS SWU EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

1 X NORTHERN IRELAND REPRESENTATIVE  
1 X SCOTLAND REPRESENTATIVE

The Social Workers Union (SWU) is the trade union dedicated to representing the interests of social workers and the social work profession.

SWU is now seeking nominations from members to fill vacancies on its Executive Committee.

To stand for election a candidate must meet the conditions set out in Bye Laws 1.4 and 1.5 of the SWU rules, a copy of which can be found on our website.

The Executive Committee is made up of nine members (at least one member each from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) and up to five others (UK representatives). The President of the union is elected by the executive from the UK representatives.

There are currently vacancies for a Northern Ireland Representative and a Scotland Representative. All candidates for election must be nominated by another member of the union. In the case of the National Representatives from Northern Ireland and Scotland, nomination must be by a member within the relevant nation.

SWU encourages applications from Students/Newly Qualified Social Workers and black and minority ethnic (BME) who are currently under-represented on the National Executive of SWU.

Candidates must complete a nomination form. **The closing date for receipt of nominations is Friday 2nd August 2019.** The full timetable for elections and information regarding terms of office for each vacancy can be found on our website.

Completed nomination forms must be accompanied by an election statement of no more than 500 words together with a head and shoulders colour photograph in a TIFF or JPEG format. These should be sent via email to [joanne.marciano@swu-union.org.uk](mailto:joanne.marciano@swu-union.org.uk). Please note that nominees need to provide full contact details including a telephone number and email address.

**Nomination forms and role descriptions are available from the SWU website or via email from [joanne.marciano@swu-union.org.uk](mailto:joanne.marciano@swu-union.org.uk) (0121 389 9248).**

If you have any general queries about this process please contact the SWU Administration Manager on 0121 389 9248.



[www.swu-union.org.uk](http://www.swu-union.org.uk)

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- ▶ **10%** discount for family and matrimonial law services
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or call **033 3344 9600**

## Study Visit New York City and New Jersey

Funded by BASW International Fund

*'Social work gets more dangerous every year in NYC'*

Social workers are responsible on a daily basis for making potentially life changing decisions about children and adults in the UK. Such a skilled role involves a significant investment both by the UK government and by social workers themselves both prior to qualification and through on-going training.

The opportunity to discuss the findings of the UK Working Conditions research and exchange learning, with USA qualified Social Work Professionals, the USA Social Services Union and the National Association of Social Workers in New York City and New Jersey, was an opportunity that I could not miss.



## *USA Professional Social Work Training*

*'Masters in Social Work programs tend to have a heavier focus on research and theory in the field with intensive training in the SW field'*

The time spent with staff at the offices of the National Association of Social Workers (New York City and New Jersey), officers of the Social Services Union, and a confidential discussion with four registered NYC Social Workers highlighted some similarities with the UK research. NYC and NJ Associations have similar membership when compared to BASW in that about 1/5th of registered Social Workers in NYC and NJ belong to the Association but a lot do not; with some joining a union or not registered with any organisation. Becoming a social worker begins with completion of a bachelor's degree in social work. While undergraduate degrees may be enough, some social workers pursue advanced education through graduate degree programs. In either case, social workers are required to obtain state licensure to practice in the profession. NASW NJ and NASW NYC assist with training for this process. Social workers are generally required to hold bachelor's degrees to obtain entry-level employment in the SW field. Most complete Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programs. Social workers in New York City and New Jersey are employed in schools, health care facilities and clinics or have independent practices. For some posts (Independent Practice / Licensed work) Social Workers are required to hold a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree. Compared to the Bachelor's degree programs, MSW programs tend to have a heavier focus on research and theory in the field with intensive training in the SW field.

## *Social Work Registration and jobs*

*'National Association of Social Workers is the largest organisation representing social workers in the world'*

NYC and NJ Social Workers require clinical social workers to complete either two years or 3,000 hours of supervised experience to become licensed. NYC and NJ require applicants to pass an examination. Social workers are required to renew licensure by meeting continuing education standards.

The New York City Chapter and the New Jersey Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) are large chapters that feed into the wider USA membership. NASW-NYC and NASW-NJ represents professional social workers who are working in the social work field, primarily in public and non-profit organizations. Social workers are also in private practice and in other for-profit service-related settings. Social workers in both NYC and NJ work in a variety of settings, including mental health clinics, schools, child welfare and human service agencies, hospitals, settlement houses, community development corporations, and private practices.

Nationally, NASW is the largest organisation representing social workers in the world. The national organisations, including NASW-NYC and NASW-NJ, seeks to develop and promote professional standards for social work practice along with NASW's widely recognised Code of Ethics. NASW also advocates for strengthening programs on behalf of social work members and for policies that support social workers in their professional work. Interestingly the title of Social Worker is protected in New Jersey but not in New York City.

*‘Some workers can request NYPD assistance if they foresee a problem, but the Police can't always be there’*

I was advised by both NY and NYC organisations that Clinical Supervision should be available every two weeks for registered social workers but the concern for both organisations is that ‘this does not need to be a social worker that provides the supervision and timescales can drift’. This is a real issue where a practitioner lacks the SW knowledge and then supervision can just become a bureaucratic process.

The SW Licence is provided by the ethic review board for each state however they can revoke a licence if concerns are expressed. For some Social Workers I met they highlighted that this is a real issue as practitioners can be under so much pressure to complete reports that they need to work extra hours to fulfil the legal requirements of the state timescales. Similar to the UK Working Conditions and Wellbeing study this has involved SWs often arriving in work when ill (presenteeism) to make sure they make a deadline.

*Danger on the job:*

One organisation highlighted that “Social work gets more dangerous every year.” Attacks on social workers regrettably appear to be common across New York City and around the state. NASW NJ highlighted that ‘social workers are increasingly at risk of violent assault.’ With a number of their members having received physical attacks and some actually went into work to complete work due to pressure with deadlines.

One NYC state social worker I met highlighted that he feared publicly talking about physical attacks as ‘this is not the professional thing to do and could affect his employment.’ NASW NY and NASW NYC say that because social workers face increasing threats on the job that they want a new law making it a felony to assault social workers. Some workers can request NYPD assistance if they foresee a problem, but the Police can't always be there. This means that it can be a dangerous job on your own visiting the homes of troubled families who perceive social workers as the enemy.

Similar themes came through from my discussions with social workers - in that individual case loads were just getting out of control with real pressures on state social workers to complete the work in unrealistic timescales. In addition, there seems to be unequal pay compared to other professionals with social work not seen in the same parity as say nurses or teachers. This is despite having the advanced Master of Social Work qualification that is necessary to be licensed; resulting in heavily qualified individuals but with limited recognition in the professional system.

Social workers work in a variety of roles but the Co-response teams which deal with NY and NYC state Adult Protection and Child Protection generally represent similarities with our unpopular ‘hot desking system’ with open planned shared space. I was advised by one social worker ‘that the difficulty with this is that this creates issues around confidentiality as the space is shared with a range of agencies’ and was further described as ‘non-ethical and not appropriate for social work staff’.

## *Recommendations for Improvements*

*‘We need to continue to educate funders, regulators and elected officials about the impact of poor working conditions on service delivery to clients.’*

During my trip I asked for suggestions for what NASW-NYC and NASW NJ might do to further address working conditions. ‘We need to continue to educate funders, regulators and elected officials about the impact of poor working conditions on service delivery to clients’ was a very common theme and one that both NYC and NJ appear to be active with. Professional Development and access to quality supervision was another key area with several comments highlighting that NASW NJ and NASW NYC are demanding professional development for social workers through having more senior staff serve as mentors for other staff, and as such they are providing training opportunities for social workers to have the skills to serve as supervisors.

*‘In our union, we promote the education and involvement of our members’*

Non-union clauses in some contracts mean that many licensed social workers are required to sign a written contract as a condition of employment not to have certain union membership. While this is becoming a more common business practice, such provisions can create ethical issues for the professional social worker. My discussions with the Social Services Employers Union (SSEU) by far one of the largest USA unions with a membership of 2 million but similar to the UNISON structure covers a range of occupations. The SSEU local 371 branch based in NYC exists specifically to represent social workers. They run as a union but very much function like a professional association. I really enjoyed my time at their glitzy New York Times Square office. Indeed, President Anthony Wells was very open that ‘the success of the union movement lies in the motivation of its members’. In our union, ‘we promote the education and involvement of our members.’ Similar to SWU they believe that informed, motivated and involved membership is the foundation of a strong union. Like both BASW and SWU; President Wells strongly advocates that his union needs to be the voice of social work and they need to continue to listen to their membership. In an interesting relationship, the union already provides social work members to fill some of the emergency gaps in services. This is funded by the union and accepted widely by NYC as an addition to the service the state provides.

## Positives

Similar to the UK, it was clear that many social workers enjoy their job, but they need continued support to make it better. The changes that are happening in all parts of social work at the moment appear to be incredibly unsettling and I sensed that there are more changes to come in NYC and NY, however as one social worker highlighted ‘if you work in children’s, services the job is entirely satisfying when you get a child out of an abusive situation and you see the change in them, or you get a parent the help that they need to make a difference in their lives’.

Ultimately, social workers are people who care about people, who want to make things better, who want to relieve suffering, who want their work to make a difference, but they need the right tools and support to make their work more effective. There are so many directions that a social worker can go in both NYC and NY, and it appears that social workers are burning out early. However, a number chose not to leave the profession and often change roles from perhaps child to adult services, as an example.

In addition to the knowledge gained, the trip was an excellent opportunity to share campaigning techniques for reflecting on what works and an agreed approach for sharing future training materials and podcasts between organisations.

**John McGowan**  
**General Secretary, SWU**

## Union Contact Scheme

**Carol Reid, National Organiser & Union Contact Scheme Manager provides an update on recent events and some dates for your diary**

### Union Contact Induction Day

The next Union Contact Induction Day takes place on **Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> July** at the Castlefield Hotel, Manchester, and is a great opportunity for SWU members to find out more about becoming active and helping to develop and strengthen your trade union. Our growing team of SWU Union Contacts are vital to the expansion and voice of SWU, and we value their time and energy. At the time of writing there are just **2 places** left for the July induction day, so be quick and drop me an email at the address below if you'd like to attend. This could be your first step to becoming a Union Activist!

### Durham Miners' Gala

SWU will be providing a free coach trip for our Union Contacts and wider membership to the wonderful **Durham Miners' Gala on 13<sup>th</sup> July**. We have a few places left so please let me know if you'd like to join us - being a SWU member entitles you to a free place, but they are going fast! We will be setting off from Manchester at 7am and returning early evening, so it'll be a long day, but very enjoyable.

Durham Miners' Gala (or the "Big Meeting" as it was originally called) has become a showcase for trade union solidarity, with an array of banners from all around the UK and a marvellously festive atmosphere. There are always wonderful speakers from the Labour and Trade Union world, music, food and drink. If you're not familiar with the Gala have a look at the Association's website which explains its history and more: <https://www.durhamminers.org/gala>



**It's essential that SWU develop a presence at such events as we become more visible and vocal as a respected Trade Union.** For further details and to register your place on our first trip to Durham Miners' Gala, please email me at the address below.

### BASW Branches

I'm particularly pleased to be able to say that SWU have assisted in establishing an active BASW Merseyside Branch following our initial meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> June. As you may know it's my local branch in the centre of Liverpool, so I'm pleased to be able to attend branch meetings, answer any questions about SWU, and enjoy the camaraderie of like-minded social workers. Our next meeting is scheduled for September and includes a very interesting guest speaker, so watch this space for further details.

**Branch meetings are a great place to discuss SWU union membership and activism. If you'd like to know more about BASW branch meetings or be involved in setting up a new branch in your local area, please let me know and I'll forward your details to the relevant BASW Officers.**

## BASW Conference – Belfast

We were fortunate to visit the wonderful city of Belfast for the BASW Conference in June which provided a great opportunity to meet BASW and SWU teams and members from across the UK. The interest and enthusiasm in union membership was rewarding to hear and enabled us to establish links in Northern Ireland where we are keen to develop, grow and strengthen SWU membership.

## SWU Membership in Workplaces and Universities

When I have conversations with members of SWU they sometimes ask whether SWU membership is available to Social Work students. I can't stress enough that it is, and always has been! We DO welcome social work students and in fact we have several students who are also SWU Union Contacts in their universities and placements, promoting membership and encouraging their cohort to join. Membership costs just £10.00 per annum for students (in addition to their BASW membership) and provides all of the essential securities as well as the opportunity to become Activists and be more involved in their Union. We also have student members on our Executive Committee and greatly value their input and enthusiasm. **If you are a Social Work Student and would like to know more about SWU membership and Activism, drop me an email for further details.**

## SWU AGM: 26<sup>th</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup> September

The SWU AGM is fast approaching and will include a Fringe Meeting on the evening of **Thursday 26th September** at the wonderful Mechanics Institute in Manchester. We are keen for our Union Contacts to be part of this event which will include an entertaining and thought-provoking "round table" discussion with special guest speakers, as well as free food and drink! **We are very excited about this event so watch this space for further details.**

## Request for articles for Newsletter

Please remember to contribute to this Newsletter whenever you can. The Newsletter is produced for SWU Members and we really value your input. If you have anything you'd like to share, whether it be a couple of paragraphs or a larger article, please let me know and we'll be happy to publish it.

Thank you for your continued commitment to SWU - together we are strong.

**Carol Reid**  
**National Organiser & Union Contact**  
**Scheme Manager**  
**carol.reid@swu-union.org.uk**

## Social Media

If you have not done so then please follow us on Facebook and Twitter - we are planning to post and tweet regular updates about the work and developments of the Social Workers Union.

SWU Updates: <http://swu-updates.org.uk/>

### Monthly ebulletins

Monthly ebulletins are emailed to all SWU members. If you are not receiving this then please check what email address we have.

The ebulletins are also published on the web site.

### SWU can be found on the following:

Twitter: SWU\_UK

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/socialworkersunionuk/](http://www.facebook.com/socialworkersunionuk/)

Internet: [www.swu-union.org.uk](http://www.swu-union.org.uk)

# SWU AGM and Conference

Friday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2019

## The importance of improved Working Conditions for Social Workers

The 2019 Conference and Annual General Meeting  
The Mechanics Centre, 103 Princess Street, Manchester M1 6DD

Conference registration and refreshments from 9.30am • Lunch and refreshments provided FREE to BASW/SWU Members • Non members £10 • Students, unemployed, retired £5

Please note the SWU AGM is members only

SWU AGM will take place after conference and lunch at 2pm - 4pm (Members only)

### Confirmed Speakers:

#### Emma Lewell Buck MP

As a Labour politician and former social worker, Emma is committed to building a society that works for the many, not the few. This belief fuels her work, particularly around food insecurity, something she believes is a sad indictment on the Conservative Government.

#### Colum Conway - Chief Executive, Social Work England

Colum became Chief Executive of Social Work England in September 2018. He is a registered social worker and previously led the professional regulator for social work and social care in Northern Ireland. Colum has worked in statutory family and child care services, early years policy and family systems support services.

#### Dr Neil Thompson

Dr Neil Thompson is an author and independent online tutor whose work is highly acclaimed across the people professions. He has held full or honorary professorships at four UK universities. Neil will be facilitating a conference discussion in his role as a SWU Ambassador.

#### Prof Keith Gidart

Keith is Professor of Labour and Social History at the University of Wolverhampton. He has appeared on television documentaries for the BBC. Specialising in working-class history, politics and culture from the late-Victorian period through to the 1980s - Keith will be giving an overview of trade union history and the importance of unions.



#### Banner Theatre Company - Live Theatre Show 'Free for All'

A new hard-hitting, entertaining and inspirational musical show from Banner Theatre - exposing the privatisers making big profits from our NHS. This show is a must-see for all health workers, trade unionists, social workers, health campaigners, students.

Register for Conference and AGM via  
<https://www.basw.co.uk/events/swu-conference-and-agm-2019>

Dr Jermaine Ravalier of Bath Spa University provides an update on the Working Conditions campaign, the new Wellbeing Toolkit and also his experience of marking the SWU essay Competition



## Positive changes

Over the last few months, John McGowan, James Birchall, BASW representatives, and I have been working hard to further our work on working conditions in UK social workers. As a reminder, I have worked with SWU and BASW over the last couple of years to look at working conditions for our social workers, and see what kind of impact these conditions are having on wellbeing. We subsequently found that working conditions in general across the country are at unacceptable levels, and there is ample evidence to suggest that these conditions negatively influence both physical and psychological wellbeing. Together we therefore made a pledge to fight to improve these conditions.

We have worked with politicians, organisations, and individual social workers to try and make as much of a positive change as possible. Over the past 18 months or so, we have had numerous meetings with MPs to try and have a positive change at the political level. This led to both a debate in the House of Lords and 20+ MPs signing a pledge to improve working conditions for social workers at a parliamentary event. We have also worked with individual organisations to improve working conditions, and a team led by myself has been given £235,000 funding by the Department for Work and Pensions and Department for Health and Social Care to develop a bespoke wellbeing smartphone app, toolkit, and wellbeing provision for social workers in seven local authorities.

Finally, my team and I have worked with over 30 social workers from across the country, in addition to the 3000+ survey respondents, to develop a Working Conditions and Wellbeing Toolkit for social workers. The Toolkit has been developed by social workers, for social workers, and is focused on changes and improvements that can be made by individual workers, teams and departments, and organisations more widely. Therefore, we make suggestions at all levels of the workplace - how individuals can improve their own ways of working and support others who are struggling with ill wellbeing at work, what teams and departments can do to better support their staff, and what organisations as a whole can do to support the health and wellbeing of their staff.



The toolkit will be available from the BASW and SWU websites in the coming weeks, and in order to access we will ask you to leave a few details about how you will use it, but we are confident that it will be a positive resources for all who use it.

As a very final point, I would like to say that I had the privilege of being able to read through and assess the entries for the SWU essay competition this year. Thank you to everyone who submitted - there were some really interesting pieces, and I would like to say in advance ... well done to the four winners! You, and all of those who submitted an essay, are also invited to a Health and Social Care conference, focused on health and social care employee working conditions and wellbeing, at Bath Spa University, on Friday September 13<sup>th</sup> 2019. The conference will be a fantastic opportunity to hear from world class academics and employers, and to network with a variety of individuals. SWU will be in contact with you about the conference with more information.

**Dr Jermaine Ravalier**



Friday 13  
September 2019  
9:30am – 6pm  
Bath Spa University  
Michael Tippett Centre  
Newton Park

# Health and Social Care Conference

## Creating (and sustaining) a healthy workforce

The health and wellbeing of Health and Social Care staff is an important consideration for employers and employees alike. This one-day conference will equip attendees with evidence-based resources and interventions which can be implemented into their organisations.

Hear talks from leading academics, professional organisations, and employers who have implemented successful wellbeing initiatives across the Health (NHS) and Social Care sectors.

- Dr Jermaine Ravalier, Reader in Psychology, Bath Spa University
- Prof Andrew McVicar, Professor in Physiology in Health, Anglia Ruskin University
- Dr Ruth Allen, Chief Executive of British Association of Social Work
- John McGowan, General Secretary of the Social Workers Union
- Prof Roger Smith, Professor of Social Work, Durham University
- Prof Neil Thompson, Social Work Consultant and Professional
- Geoff Ravalier, Wellbeing Lead (South London & Maudsley NHS Trust)
- TBC: Prof Jill Maben
- TBC: NHS England

Children are welcome but must be supervised at all times.  
A nursing and quiet room is available on request.



Cost: £30 (or £40 including parking) and FREE for PhD/MSc students. £70 travel bursaries available to ten PhD students displaying a poster on their wellbeing/health related research.

For more bursary information contact [J.Ravalier@bathspa.ac.uk](mailto:J.Ravalier@bathspa.ac.uk) by 13 July.

To book: [www.bathspalive.com](http://www.bathspalive.com)



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