



## Reflections on an active year



As another year comes to an end, I would personally like to thank the engine of SWU which is the hard working, knowledgeable and skilful A&R Team who are by far the reason a lot of members join SWU and BASW. No other organisation or union can guarantee that you

will have a social worker providing advice and, if needed, representation at the highest level. More recently, I am hearing from A&R staff and members that they have been misadvised by other employees and employers that SWU is not able to represent them in work related matters. If you hear of this in your workplace could you please get in touch as this is far from the truth and we would like to be able to correct any inaccurate information about our services.

Let me say a bit about the past year. I was again elected onto the GFTU National Executive for another two-year period, reinforcing our position amongst the influential specialist unions. This year we also had the opportunity to celebrate 120 years of the GFTU at an evening event hosted in Parliament by Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell. The event was attended by a wide range of organisations and celebrated the growth of the GFTU as a pioneering and imaginative organisation with a growing membership now approaching 280,000 members. Further afield this year saw me in Palestine, Warsaw, New York City and New Jersey where I met with a number of their unions, their social work organisations and social workers themselves. I hope that during my visits some of the

discussions and the sharing of ideas may lead in due course to developments beneficial to our union.

At home James Birchall, our SWU President, has done a great job with his parliamentary meetings, so that we are building a considerable support network of sympathetic MPs who we hope we can rely on to fight our corner - as and when they have any time to discuss and once we know the political landscape. I would also like to pay tribute to Carol Reid who continues to do a brilliant job as our National Organiser. Her commitment and drive have been responsible for the recruitment of over 100 Union Contacts who are all keen to spread the word about our great union.

Our unique selling point remains with the following: SWU is the only UK trade union for, and run by, qualified and registered social workers. Therefore; SWU is the only trade union to offer representation by a qualified social worker who understands the complexities of the profession. With officers working across the UK, we provide representation at internal hearings for disciplinary and grievance procedures, and employer investigations into practice and misconduct allegations.

Have a great festive break and somewhere there will be Social Workers working hard over the festive period providing a side to Social Work that the public rarely sees or media reporting on the great work we do 24 hours, 7 days a week, 365 days of the year.

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

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

# IFSW calls on social workers to participate in worldwide research on the Working Environment of Social Workers

The International Federation of Social Workers calls on social workers to contribute to the first-ever global research project on the working conditions of social workers. The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) is leading a long-term, global campaign, working closely with member organisations, to improve the working conditions and environment of social workers.

Ruth Allen (Chief Executive, BASW) and John McGowan (General Secretary, SWU) commented: "Our excellent partnership with Bath Spa University has generated research which provides the foundation for our national campaign for better working conditions for social workers. We anticipate that the global research will help us all understand the similarities and differences in contexts, achievements and struggles of social workers by publishing data and stories. It will undoubtedly strengthen global social work solidarity and the International Federation."

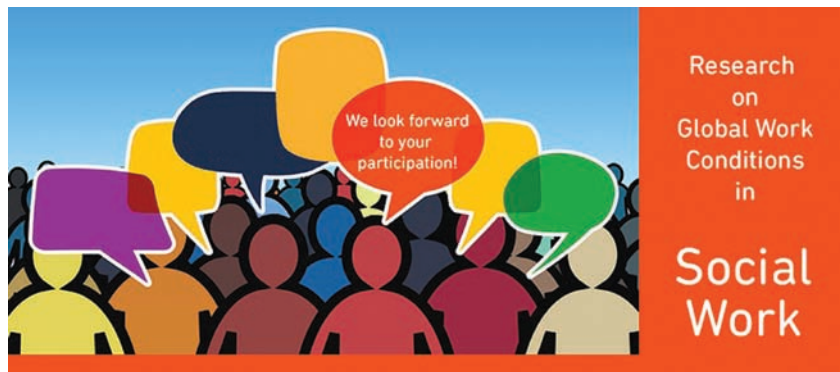
The aim of this research is to create a global understanding of the realities of the working conditions of social workers. This will be used as a resource for advocating and campaigning for better recognition and conditions for social work professionals, which are essential for developing quality services with communities.

Launching the research, IFSW President Silvana Martinez said, "It is well known that the working conditions of social workers fall well below the standard expected for such high quality, professional work that is essential to all societies. IFSW has initiated this research partnership to provide evidence to support a global campaign to correct this injustice. I call on all

social workers around the world to share their experience and support this campaign."

A core element of the campaign is research to gain the first-ever global overview of the working conditions of social workers, aiming to shine a spotlight on the everyday working environments of social workers around the world.

To learn more about the research, visit the website which includes links to the online questionnaire in several languages. <https://www.ifsw.org/ifsw-worldwide-campaign-on-working-conditions-of-social-workers/>



The research is being undertaken in a partnership between IFSW and Bath Spa University Centre for Health and Cognition (in association with Ulster

University Social Work Department). The first report will be published in 2020 and launched at the global social work conference in Calgary, Canada in July 2020.

The research team is being headed by:

Dr David N Jones, IFSW Past President, who drew the partnership together and chairs the research steering group.

Dr Jermaine M Ravalier of Bath Spa University, who has undertaken two major workforce surveys in association with the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) and the Social Workers Union (SWU) in the United Kingdom.

Dr Rory Truell, IFSW Secretary-General.

Drs Silvana Martinez, IFSW President.

Ruth Allen, Chief Executive of the British Association of Social Workers.

John McGowan General Secretary of the Social Workers Union (UK).

# Clare In The Community, and the unkindest cut of all

Harry Venning shares with SWU the success of *Clare In The Community* and the positive response Clare has received over the years, not just from press and public, but from social workers.

Over twenty years ago Dave Ramsden and I were approached by the BBC to adapt my Guardian strip cartoon *Clare In The Community* into a sitcom. We really didn't have a clue what we were doing, having no direct experience of either sitcom writing or social work, but we thought we'd give it a whirl and resolved to just keep going until someone told us to stop.

Last year someone did just that. Our twelfth series on BBC Radio 4 was to be our last.

I still don't know why they axed the show, and never saw any point in asking, but I don't believe it was down to any drop in the quality of the material, or paucity of ideas. To underline the point we worked hard to ensure the final series - broadcast in September - was one of the best ever.

Occasionally I give workshops on sitcom writing and my first piece of advice to attendees is to get a writing partner. Firstly, because it makes the whole process more fun and less lonely. Secondly, because the money you get writing for radio is so small that you hardly notice when it's split in half. Writing Clare ITC with Dave has been one of the most enjoyable experiences of my life, not least because our take on the creative process included consuming copious amounts of fried breakfasts, Harvey's Bitter, cheesy chips and, before Dave was diagnosed with diabetes, bags of Haribo jelly sweets.



I'm also delighted at the positive response Clare has received over the years, not just from press and public, but from social workers. When we started out we were concerned that the show might be seen as delivering yet another kick to a beleaguered and frequently vilified profession.

But we needn't have worried. It soon became apparent that when social workers looked at Clare they didn't recognise themselves, they recognised someone that they worked with. This remove, we found, made all the difference.

Clare will live on for all eternity as a repeat on Radio

4 Extra, and she still thrives in print and online as a strip cartoon in the Wednesday Guardian. She is also available as a 2020 calendar from [www.clareinthecommunity.co.uk](http://www.clareinthecommunity.co.uk) should you be suffering withdrawal symptoms. And, whilst I have your attention, you might like to have a look at my live drawing website [www.harryvenninglive.com](http://www.harryvenninglive.com) and book me for your conference.



Stewart Collins has over 50 years' experience in Social Work and Social Work Education and his new book is *The Positive Social Worker*. Stewart shares with SWU the aims of the books and his interest in the topic.

## The Positive Social Worker

At the present time the political and organisational context for social work is an enormously challenging one. While recognising this, it seems very important to consider ways in which we can establish and maintain positive approaches in our work. The book, *The Positive Social Worker*, arose from my interest in questions such as:

**What keeps us going in social work? What is it that sustains us?**

**What helps us to maintain positive approaches to, and obtain satisfaction from, our work?**

The book chapters are based on my own professional experiences of over fifty years in social work and social work education and the experiences of other social workers, while considering evidence-based and evidence-informed research findings. Having researched and written about pressure, stress and burnout in various aspects of social work and social work education for about fifteen years, rather like Martin Seligman's move from Learned Helplessness to Learned Optimism, I began to move away from negativity and pessimism and back towards hope and optimism. The book chapters developed from a series of articles in a variety of social work journals; the ideas and concepts are drawn from social work, social, organisational, work and positive psychology, as well as sociology literature and research.

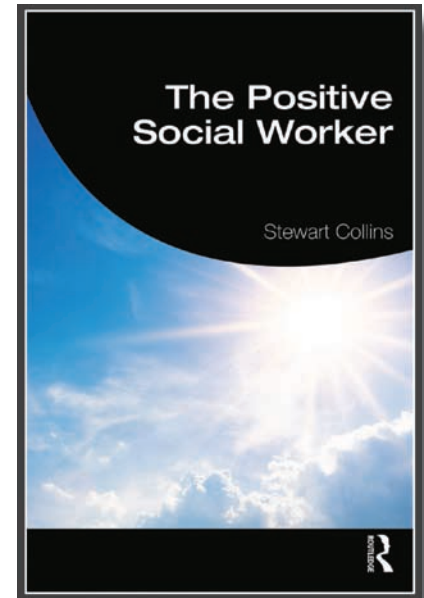
The aims of the book are to consider:

- **The knowledge, understanding and skills that can enable social workers to establish and maintain positive approaches.**
- **Ways in which social workers can establish and maintain positive approaches to themselves, their work roles and service users.**

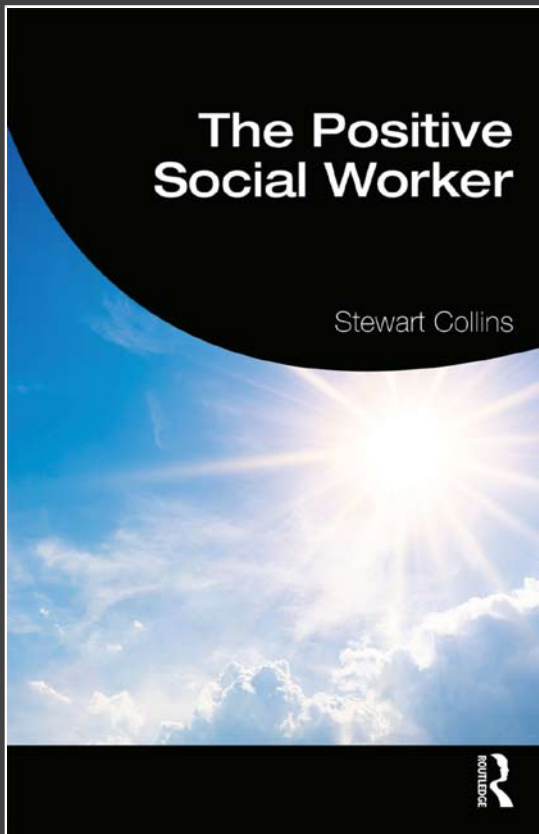
The selection of the chapter titles are seen as key concepts in maintaining positive approaches. They are clearly located within the structural, political, legislative and organisational context of social work. All the concepts are theory and research based and are linked to social work practice. They are "state like"; they can be developed through learning experiences; they are related to the behaviour and attitudes of social workers.

The chapters focus upon hope, optimism, commitment, resilience, support, coping, confidence and control. Each of these chapters are worthy of exploration in their own right, but they are particularly meaningful particularly powerful when combined together. The topics discussed in the book will clearly not mitigate the impact of poverty, social injustice and social divisions, but they can contribute to that struggle.

The book is part of a journey leading towards a better understanding of *The Positive Social Worker*. It is part of a movement towards a world in which social workers not only survive but thrive, while acting as agents for change in a challenging, provocative and demanding world of limited and limiting resources.



Stewart Collins



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# The Positive Social Worker

**Stewart Collins**

Developed from the author's own experiences in social work and social work education, this book considers alternative approaches for social workers in dealing with the extensive demands, persistent pressures, and stress that they may face in their daily working lives.

This book should be considered essential reading for social workers, graduate and post graduate social work students, practice educators and lecturers. It will also be of relevance to professionals and professionals in training in the criminal justice and health and social care fields.

The Positive Social Worker is firmly located in an individual, group, organisational, cultural, and socio-political context. It considers and celebrates concepts linked to the importance, and sources, of work-related well-being. Individual chapters describe and critically analyse the social work context, the role of hope, optimism, commitment, resilience, support, appraisals, positive emotions, and coping, self-efficacy, control, and agency. Throughout, clear links are made with social work practice. While the book concentrates on a UK context, it draws on literature from social work, social, organisational, work, and positive psychology and sociology, from the UK, the USA, Europe, Australasia, and other countries.

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# President's Christmas Message



I wish all our wonderful SWU members an enjoyable Christmas and New Year. It has been an astounding year for SWU and I would like to thank you all for your support in 2019. We are in a strong position to go forward into 2020. It has been a remarkable year in many respects. John McGowan, our General Secretary, has worked tirelessly to raise the profile of SWU. Carol Reid, Trade Union Organiser, has developed the Trade Union contacts to the point where we have 100 members registered and many of those have received initial training. Thanks to Joanne Marciano and Kevin Viney, I am pleased to say SWU has been efficiently administered, without which chaos would reign. The hard work of the SWU Executive has helped SWU to grow and develop. We are now getting close to 13,000 members and this is growing.

The highlight of my year was attending the SWU Conference, AGM and Fringe Meeting at the Mechanics Institute in Manchester in September. What an outstanding event that was. I hope you will be able to attend the SWU Conference and AGM, also at the Mechanics Institute, Manchester, in 2020 on Friday 25<sup>th</sup> September. You won't be disappointed. The Fringe Event is on the evening of 24<sup>th</sup> September. The Mechanics Institute is a fascinating building with stained glass windows and steeped in Trade Union history. The first meeting of the TUC was held here.

Also in September I was in Vienna with John McGowan for the IFSW European Conference. I delivered a presentation at a workshop on the SWU Working Conditions Campaign. I went to the cinema in October to watch Ken Loach's film *Sorry We Missed You*. SWU is in the credits and publicity for the film. What great publicity for SWU. John McGowan advised on aspects of the film. If you haven't seen it yet, I can strongly recommend it. You may remember *Cathy Come Home*, fifty years ago, *Kes* and *I, Daniel Blake*; all directed by Ken Loach.

As we are in the Festive Season, I am reminded of the famous saying; "It is easier for Donald Trump to pass through the eye of needle, than for a camel to enter the Conservative Party." Hoping 2020 will exceed your greatest expectations. Don't forget to tell your colleagues about the benefits of SWU membership.

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

## 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)



Dear fellow SWU member,

Would you let someone else decide what your career should be? Would you let them decide what jobs you apply for or what direction you want your working life to go in? Clearly, the answer for the vast majority of people is no. And yet, when it comes to our learning and our professional development, the vast majority of people tend to allow others to be in the driving seat. We allow trainers, tutors and others to have the major say in what is to be learned and how. This is despite the fact that we have known literally for decades that different people have different learning styles and therefore feel more or less comfortable with different approaches to learning,

The Avenue Professional Development Programme was set up six years ago to put its members back where they should be: in the driving seat of their own learning. In APDP, as it is affectionately known, you decide what you want to learn and how best to learn it. "But, I wouldn't know where to start," I hear you say, and that's not surprising after being used to years of other people making those decisions for you. But, one of the great strengths of APDP is that it is not just an impersonal website, it is the focal point for a supportive community of fellow learners. Members receive guidance on setting their own learning pathway in the form of two workbooks based around six learning themes and six areas of development. The first workbook is used to identify what you feel you need to learn in relation to each of the 12 sets of issues, and the second workbook can be used thereafter to review your progress. But, that's not all, there is a growing library of multimedia learning resources, an e-portfolio for you to record and consolidate your learning, a *Learning to Learn* e-course and, perhaps most valuable of all, discussion forums where you can raise issues and play a part in sustaining APDP as a supportive community of learners. Long-standing members regularly tell me how much they value this support as a basis for their learning and development.

For decades we have been talking about the importance of reflective practice, and APDP provides a flexible but structured framework for making it a reality. In these challenging times, the more opportunity we have for reflection and for supporting one another in our learning and personal growth, the better - and that is why membership of APDP is such a valuable resource.

The normal cost of being a member is £10 a month, but for some time, as part of my commitment to trade unionism and social justice, it has been available to SWU members at half price. However, at the moment, SWU members can benefit from a year's free membership - yes, that's right, totally free for a full year! This is a limited-time offer, so if you are serious about being in charge of your own learning with the support of a community of fellow learners, then now is the time to join up. Email me at [neil@avenueconsulting.co.uk](mailto:neil@avenueconsulting.co.uk) and I will let you know what you need to do to take advantage of this excellent opportunity. Don't miss out, do it now!

Best wishes,

*Neil*

**Dr Neil Thompson**

# Union Contact Scheme

**Carol Reid, National Organiser & Union Contact Scheme Manager provides us with her regular update and some dates for your diary**



Our most recent Union Contact Induction Day took place on **Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> November** at the wonderfully historic Mechanics Institute in Manchester and was another excellent opportunity to meet and share knowledge with our most recent group of SWU Union Contacts. We value and welcome our Union Contacts and are already collecting names for our next Induction Day in **March 2020**. Please don't hesitate in contacting me if you'd like to be a SWU Union Contact in your workplace, university or placement.

Student social workers often ask me "Can I join SWU?" and "Can I be a Union Contact?", and the answer to both questions is a very definite Yes! Student social workers are the social work staff of the future and we welcome their commitment and enthusiasm for trade union membership and activism. An understanding of the importance of trade unionism is a valuable element of working life and will enable students to influence others in their placements and future workplaces.

Knowledge is power!

As SWU becomes more visible and vocal, many of our Union Contacts have expressed an interest in undertaking lower-level representational work within their workplaces, and we have responded to this by developing our Phase 2 Union Contact training alongside the BASW Advice & Representation Team and the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU).

**Phase 2** training will be taking place on **6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> March 2020** and is open to Union Contacts who have already completed an initial Induction Day. If you'd like to know more or are keen to add your name to our March cohort, please let me know at your earliest opportunity.

## BASW Branches

We encourage SWU members and Union Contacts to attend BASW branch meetings whenever possible. There are BASW branches in most areas around the country, and if you find there isn't one near you, you can be involved in the process of setting one up and being part of its committee. BASW branch activities are listed on the Events page of the BASW website and provide a variety of interesting guest speakers and social gatherings. SWU members are welcome at BASW branch meetings, and Union Contacts can encourage attendees to become involved in SWU too.

## Request for articles for Newsletter

We always welcome Newsletter contributions from SWU members and Union Contacts and look forward to receiving more. You can submit a short item of a couple of paragraphs, or a lengthier article of around 500 words if you wish. The topic can be related to social work in general, or you may wish to highlight a particular issue. SWU Union Contacts may wish to write about their reasons for getting involved, and their understanding of the

importance of union membership, which often inspires new and existing members to get more involved too. It's YOUR Newsletter and we welcome your input. Please drop me an email with anything you'd like to submit.

## Social Media

We have a SWU Union Contacts Facebook Group which many of our UCs find useful for keeping in touch with SWU and with each other. It's also an excellent way to share social work articles and information about events, meetings and demonstrations which are relevant to SWU and our members, and which Union Contacts can share in their workplaces.

We also have a SWU-Updates website which provides details of events, activities, training, trade union activism and SWU's involvement with broader anti-austerity projects.

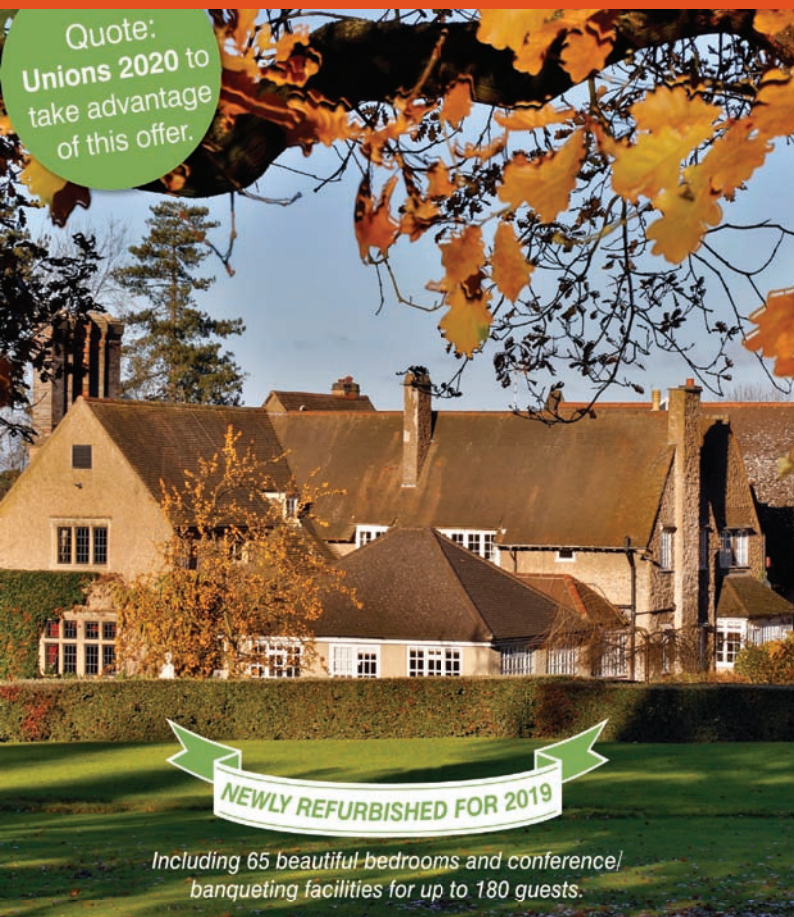
The links to the Facebook Group and SWU Updates can be found below.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2060830637577136/>

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

Thank you for your continued commitment to SWU -  
Unity is Strength.

**Carol Reid**  
**National Organiser & Union Contact**  
**Scheme Manager**  
[carol.reid@swu-union.org.uk](mailto:carol.reid@swu-union.org.uk)



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A selection of the numerous compliments the team received during the year ...

*"Thank you very much for all your support. It was really good to know that someone was there for me in case the outcome went differently. The union role was greatly appreciated and definitely reduced any stress associated with the process and outcomes. Thank you for being so accommodating and friendly too."*

*"Many, many thanks to you for your support and for understanding the emotional difficulties. You explained important things to me and you gave me the confidence to do what had to be done."*

*"I would like to thank you very much for all of your support and guidance and I really appreciated the time you put in before and afterwards to support me."*

*"I am very lucky and proud to have had the opportunity to work with you and I would hope that all social workers working with SWU feel the same."*

*"I felt supported at all times, even when I felt like giving up. I am grateful that you helped me and encouraged me to fight for what was right. Thank you for your professionalism but most of all for believing in me, particularly in all those moments when it felt as if no one else appeared to."*

*"I don't have words to emphasize how grateful I am for your advice, support and advocacy."*

*"I wish to extend my appreciation for all your support during my difficulties. Without your expertise and dedicated approach, the result could have been very different. It meant everything to me by having you know my case inside out and whilst always professional, you were extremely personable, which was greatly appreciated"*

*"I would like to add special thanks for your hard work, diligence and patience. You have inspired me to stay true to my values and stand by my ground as well as encouraging me for the future - all for which I cannot thank you enough!"*

*"I am proud of being an SWU member and will not hesitate to recommend SWU to all students studying Social Work."*

*"Thanks so much for all the support from you and the entire union. Was really nice working with you."*

*"Just wanted to put in writing my appreciation for your support through this process. It really has been invaluable and I trust that I have found the team where my social work and personal skills are appreciated, where I won't require a repeat of this in the future."*

*"Most importantly thank you for the support and your kind words throughout the time you held my case it helped me manage what was a very difficult time."*

*"You helped me achieve the best of my circumstances with your exceptional negotiating skills, prompt and experienced response and your kind approach to what it seemed a very stressful time for me."*

*"I just wanted to say thanks for today, you were knowledgeable and professional and I am glad that you are in my corner."*

*"Thank you so much for all of your support, advice and guidance you have given over the past few weeks I really am very grateful and relieved with yesterday's meeting and outcome."*

Banner Theatre Company talks to SWU about their new production which was enjoyed by all at the recent SWU AGM and Conference.

## Why we wrote *Free for All* Banner Theatre

*Free for All* is one of Banner Theatre's current touring productions and celebrates those fighting to defend the NHS from the corporate auction block.

What's the difference between the NHS and Donald Trump's American health care system? Answer: None, if Boris Johnson and his neoliberal cronies have their way!

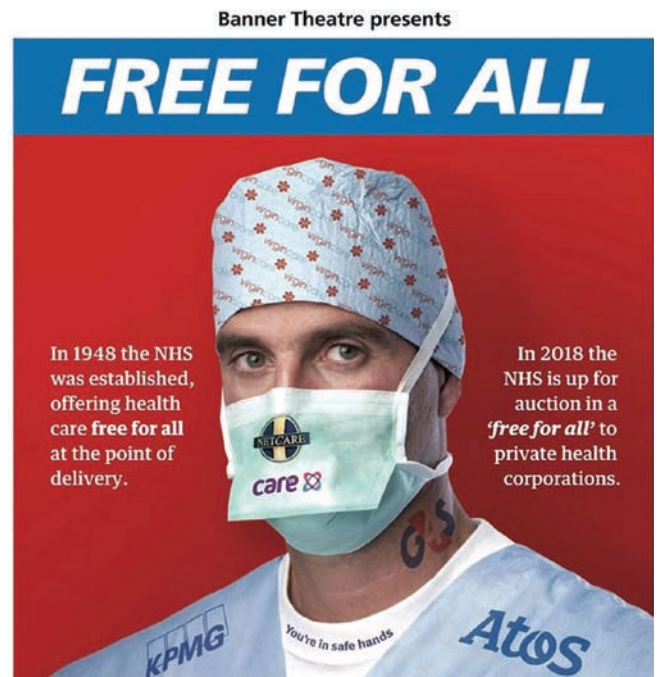
*I went down there pretty much as soon as I finished work, and the room was full. I had to sneak in one of the side doors to get in the room. What I didn't realise at that point was that there were three other rooms that were full as well, and there were more people that were quite angry out on the street who couldn't get into any rooms at all. It was really an amazing start to the campaign.*

Anita Downes, Palliative Care Nurse, on the Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign

In 2016, 20,000 people marched against the then Health Minister Jeremy Hunt's plan to close the A&E department of Lewisham Hospital. We interviewed health care workers and activists from the ultimately successful Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign. This was the inspiration for us to produce a new show in defence of the NHS - to us, a precious health care system free for all at the point of delivery, and outlining Tory plans for a "free-for-all" for private health corporations, hungry for profits to be made out of UK health care.

Our new show, *Free For All*, is based on these original interviews, supplemented by further talks with NHS workers, campaigners, academics and union activists.

In our 45-year history as a political theatre company, this is not the first time we have written shows in support of the NHS. In the 1970s,



we created a production which focused on the first severe cut-backs imposed on our health service. Later in the 1990s, we toured a piece that satirised Tony Blair's PFI agenda, designed to shackle the NHS to private capital.

But this time, our research into the context for *Free For All* uncovered for us not only the shocking ferocity of the current war against the NHS, but also the well-constructed, insidious and systematic privatisation of the NHS that had been going for a relentless 30 years.

A GP we interviewed, Dr Youssef El-Gingihy, outlined that strategy for us:

*In the late 80s, Letwin and Redwood wrote a policy paper for Thatcher's think-tank, the Centre for Policy Studies, in which they pretty much spelled out the steps for dismantling the NHS and how that would be a step-wise, gradual, insidious, piecemeal process [...] introducing a limited internal market inside the NHS, followed by public private partnerships and things like private finance initiatives, converting hospitals into businesses. They envisage the final step as a separate insurance scheme... [Basically] there was clearly some very detailed, methodical thinking about how to dismantle the NHS.*

This privatisation programme was of course to be carried out by stealth, as they knew full well that the British public would in no way willingly accept a shift to a USA-style health care system.

The impact of this programme on the ground is clear: a health care system in crisis. One of our recent interviewees, paramedic Steve Thompson, talked graphically about the winter 2017 chaos in the A&E:

*The whole of the department was just full. All the bays were full, all the corridors had trolleys on them, there were ambulance crews standing around waiting to hand over their patients, there were families standing by the beds and the trolleys...*

Steve stressed that this chaos was manufactured, describing how the massive cut-backs in social care had forced more and more people to use A&E as a solution to health problems that should have been sorted in the community. This was further emphasised when we talked to members of SWU about the pressure on social workers which had built up thanks to nine long years of government austerity programmes.

As we interviewed nurses, GPs, porters, cleaners and other ancillary workers, we were continually moved by their commitment to the NHS, to a people's health care system based on caring for everybody in our society, not just those who could afford to pay.

*I used to pride myself on this - every one of my six men would have been washed and shaved and fed and toileted, and [would] look good when their relatives came in, and they would all have had a laugh that morning. I would have walked in the bay, said something to get everybody laughing.*  
Paulette, Nurse

We also heard disturbing stories about the way the NHS was being remodeled, ready for a corporate sell-off.

*So we had a woman starting in Finance, an accountant that drove me demented. She maybe rang me ten times a day because she came from a hotel background. "We're in November. Why aren't you performing like you were last November?"... "Ok, Claire, let me explain it to you again. [In] critical care, you can't predict what's coming through the doors. Unless you want me to go and knock*



over a load of people, you can't predict what's going to happen." She couldn't get her head round it. She wanted us to run as a business. How can you run a business when ... what is it you're selling? Who wants to come into critical care? Who wants to be on a ventilator? 25% of our patients die. Who wants to be that one in four?

Antonia, Nurse

Allyson Pollock, Professor of Public Health at Newcastle University, said that we are now in the final stages of the process of moving to a US-style health care system. In this final stage, negative stories about the crisis in the NHS are rolled out by the media to generate a sense that the NHS is dysfunctional and inefficient and that, therefore, moving to an insurance-based system is the best way forward.

John McDonnell, Labour Shadow Chancellor at time of writing, also warned us of the real

dangers of US health corporations waiting in the wings, ready to pick off the most profitable parts of the NHS - especially with the prospect of a Trump/Johnson trade deal in the offing.

And so, last year, we started to perform **Free For All** to union branches, trades councils, health care professionals, campaign groups and the general public, with a tour running well into 2020, and now complemented with a CD of songs from the show and a DVD of the show itself.

The battle to save, protect and develop the NHS continues, and **Free For All** is Banner Theatre's contribution - music, song, video and drama for a genuine people's NHS.

Entertainment for a change!

To book the show contact:  
Stuart on 07891 701133  
E: bannerauto2013@gmail.com  
W: www.bannertheatre.co.uk

## Relationship Building

### Reflections on the themes of Ken Loach's films as the Austerity Action Group marches on to Boot Out Austerity

Last month I was privileged to be at the premier of the new Ken Loach film *Sorry We Missed You* all thanks to the relationship built between John McGowan, SWU's General Secretary, and Kevin Lafferty the film's script writer. A relationship kindled by Boot Out Austerity's very own Guy Shennan who approached Ken Loach whilst at a Bath City football match. This resulted in Ken writing the foreword to *Leave No Stone Unturned In The Fight Against Austerity - Campaign Action Pack*. A 'how to' get involved in the fight against austerity and based on the success of the Boot Out Austerity Campaign.

"As social workers, you are at the forefront of the struggle to give people some control over their lives, find dignity and self-respect in the most daunting circumstances."

K Loach 2017

Both SWU and John's names appeared in the credits, but what we had not

anticipated was that our blue SWU logo would be emblazoned on all the publicity material including the backdrop for the photo calls.

I had not contemplated that the film would be even more hard hitting than *I Daniel Blake* but it was! One scene in particular provoked a huge, spontaneous gasp which echoed throughout the auditorium. That scene captures the very essence of how austerity's pernicious tentacles are strangling ordinary working families. So ordinary that we've normalised their situation by calling it 'in work poverty.'

SWU, and by default the Austerity Action Group, are signed up to promote the film and of course to use its message and the medium of film to hammer home the realities of nearly a decade of austerity policies. Take a look at the poster *Opportunities for Community Screening (on page 15 following this article)*, here is your opportunity to further that relationship with Ken Loach and his sixteen films and in so doing help build a just society.

## Talking about Rebuilding Relationships

After the film, we mingled with the audience. I suddenly came face to face with a woman in a red jacket. A familiar face I thought, did we work together, you did something I admired? Then I remembered she worked in the DWP - yes that's right. She answered my thoughts I was "the nice DWP person" ..... Yes you were; and that was the name of your character in *I Daniel Blake*. Your compassionate actions in that film caused me to reflect on times past. A time when DWP staff and social work staff worked in partnership for the wellbeing of the client. When we had direct lines to each other, "Hello Ann, Hi Ang. Mr B been bothered by XXX and had his benefits taken by them, any chance of a special payment to see him through to his next pay day?" A few hours later Mr B and I would present our self for a cash payment and head off down to the post office to turn it into food and fuel credits. The following day my DWP colleague and I would then look at ways to make sure it didn't happen again.

Creeping privatisation has meant that those days have all but gone, alongside this, draconian management cultures towards both staff and customers has become the norm!

That norm was accurately depicted throughout the *I Daniel Blake* film, especially the struggle to be human as shown by 'the nice DWP person.'

Last year my response to the film was to start a little ripple in the hope that it would become a wave. 'Hug A DWP person' they are human, it's the system that is making them look otherwise. We need to rekindle the working relationship that we used to have.

I relayed this story to actress Kate Rutter and asked if I might give her a hug and promised to make sure I followed through by writing this story - I have. Do let SWU know what you have been doing to **rekindling professional relationship**.

PS

Yes you're saying, I know that face but not just *I Daniel Blake*. Yes she appeared on BBC Question Time as a member of the audience prompting some folks to take to social media and say the audience was planted. No says I, just a compassionate human being, making a point.

**Angi Naylor**  
**SWU Executive Member and Chair,**  
**Austerity Action Group**

The nice DWP person in 'I Daniel Blake'



Kate Rutter with SWU exec Angi Naylor at the premier of 'Sorry We Missed You'



### A question to Jo Swinson

**Q:** Do you regret consistently voting with the Conservatives in favour of harsh and uncaring benefit cuts?

**A:** I absolutely recognise the issue that you're raising and the bottom line is there are far too many people in our country living in poverty and life is too hard. And we did not get everything right... We had plenty of fights with the Conservatives. We won some of those fights and we lost some of those fights.

# HELP FOR COMMUNITY SCREENINGS

*Imagine showing Sorry We Missed You in your local pub, village hall or school?*

The film's distributor eOne are giving community cinemas the chance to screen *Sorry We Missed You* soon after the theatrical release, allowing community screenings to take place from 6th December 2019, when you will be able to show the film from DVD or Blu-Ray

For more details contact Troy Film Agency on: [troyfilmagency@btinternet.com](mailto:troyfilmagency@btinternet.com)

## HERE'S SOME TIPS ON SETTING UP COMMUNITY SCREENINGS:

### 1. VENUE

Ideally find an accessible venue which has all the technical requirements (sound, projector, screen) already set up. If you don't have these, ask your local film society or Cinema for All (see below) for help.

### 2. GETTING THE WORD OUT

Once you've decided on a date and venue, use posters, leaflets and social media to spread the word - remember, hairdressers and taxi drivers have their finger on the pulse!

### 3. FILM

For all public screenings of films you need to make sure you have licensed the film. Make sure you book it and receive or buy the film in good time to be able to test it before the big day.

## BE PART OF THE IMPACT CAMPAIGN:

### WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Encourage people to see the film.
- Follow and share using #SorryWeMissedYou.
- Join a trade union at [tuc.org.uk](http://tuc.org.uk) (UK) / [stuc.org.uk](http://stuc.org.uk) (Scotland).
- Register to vote at [gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://gov.uk/register-to-vote).
- Visit [SorryWeMissedYou.co.uk](http://SorryWeMissedYou.co.uk) for info on how you can help your local delivery drivers, carers and more.

## HERE ARE SOME LINKS FOR SUPPORT:

### INDEPENDENT CINEMA OFFICE

Provides training in setting up cinemas, offers ways to watch films in advance of their release and a great blog.

[independentcinemaoffice.org.uk](http://independentcinemaoffice.org.uk)

### CINEMA FOR ALL

Membership organisation that includes access to a film booking system and support over the phone.

[cinemaforall.org.uk](http://cinemaforall.org.uk)





12/11/2019  
Second meeting



The 2nd Meeting of the Austerity Action Group took place on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2019. This group is funded by SWU.

**Social Media** - Since our first meeting we have been able to clarify the situation on our social media presence and make some decisions about the ways forward. We have -

- A new **logo** which builds on the original and is there to be used.
- The **Twitter** account currently in limbo will be up and running very soon.  
Twitterers please carry on using the @Boot austerity and #bootoutausterity.

Sadly even action groups like Boot Out Austerity can fall foul of the internet scams. The www.Boot-Out-Austerity website that was set up in 2017 for the walk has been “grabbed” by A N Other and we have taken the decision not to spend money on getting it back but to use the following: -

- **BASW** website where we can be found under campaigns [www.basw/campaigns/austerity](http://www.basw/campaigns/austerity)
- **Facebook Page** - we will be setting this up asap and it will take you to links/articles
- A one page **broadsheet** each month that will appear in the SWU newsletter and on our own FACEBOOK page
- A mailing list for people who are not members of SWU
- A dedicated email address for Austerity Action Group in the meantime you can contact us via [carol.reid@swu-union.org.uk](mailto:carol.reid@swu-union.org.uk)

**Activities** - We aim to have a couple of events in the diary for the new year, similar to the once held in 2018 and 2019 and the recent SWU Fringe bringing together the arts and politics as we continue to question those in power about what they are going to do to mitigate the current austerity policies. In the pipe line we are also looking at couple of short 5 min /10 min films highlighting the work of other groups. We are also in discussion around running a workshop at a union event.

**Angi Naylor**  
**Chair - Austerity Acton Group**

## AAG and SWU report from BASW Cymru Cardiff Event *Social Work & Human Rights from International to Local*

On Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> November I attended the BASW Cymru Social Work and Human Rights Event in Cardiff.

The event was introduced by Rupert Franklin, a social worker and activist from PalUK, an organisation campaigning for Human Rights in Palestine. Guy Shennan, an anti-austerity activist and practitioner, then discussed the concept of “hope” in solution-focussed practice, and the idea of “gathering resources of hope” through collective action. With Abyd Quinn Aziz, a social work lecturer, we discussed rights-based practice, sharing knowledge and empowering service-users, which then led to a very informative presentation from Moraene Roberts.

Moraene is an anti-poverty activist from a service-user led organisation called ATD-Fourth World which delivers a social worker training project in universities and at conferences with a focus on service-user dignity and inclusion. Moraene’s presentation included some very moving recorded messages from ATD-Fourth World members and activists describing their own experiences with social workers, both negative and positive, and provided an opportunity for us to think about our relationships with service-users, the language

we use and the information we share.

Allison Hulmes, BASW Cymru National Director for Wales, gave a moving update on the Kurdish Hunger Strikers, particularly Imam Sis who is part of the Newport Kurdish community and who experienced a lengthy hunger strike in protest against the Turkish imprisonment of Abdullah Ocalan, the co-founder of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party.

A live Skype discussion from Palestine with a young woman, Ruba Awadallah, who works as an advocate and representative of child prisoners in Gaza and the West Bank, provided a heart-breaking narrative of their experiences - many of whom having been arrested in the middle of the night for something as petty as throwing a stone! Of course, we hear of these events via non-mainstream media and other sources, but to hear it “first-hand” in this way truly brought the reality of it home.

On reflection I felt that this informative and thought-provoking event helped reinforce the belief that the positives of hope can battle and emerge from the depths of despair.

**Carol Reid**

Wherever in the world you find yourself this Christmas  
SWU send warm wishes to one and all



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