

Help us to help you



The work undertaken by SWU and BASW on behalf of its members has been terrific over the Covid period. It is what makes SWU so unique; but let nobody be in any doubt that we face many tests over the coming months and the potential threat to the

basic working conditions of our members. It will take all of us, working together in solidarity to develop this support further. But SWU cannot make that happen on our own and we will need members support and help for that to happen. Please do get involved with SWU and help us campaign on this issue and also share any workplace issues or positive examples of good practice in the workplace.

I am pleased to report that we will soon be advertising for a SWU specific communication and engagement professional and this should help us even further to enhance our media campaigns and to reach out further. Thanks for being part of SWU and our growing membership and thanks to each of you for continuing to believe in SWU and all that we stand for.

We must be very aware of how SWU is viewed by non-members and social workers. We have a strong brand as an organisational member of BASW but at the same time, it has certain weaknesses as so many social workers have yet to hear about the

union. We want to be known for our advice and representation, our quality, and our union innovation. We need to think carefully about how we organise ourselves to ensure that we get our message across about our importance to social workers in a way that benefits all in membership. We have a fabulous model for delivering a fantastic union so please share the message to non-members.

Over the past two years Dr Jermaine Ravalier and colleagues from Bath Spa University have worked with BASW and SWU to conduct two of the largest surveys of social worker wellbeing and working conditions in the UK (*Ravalier, 2019; Ravalier et al., 2020*) which together had over 5000 respondents.

Using a methodology that had been used with other public sector professionals, the research identified where problems in working conditions impact negatively on social worker stress and wellbeing and thus created the development of a toolkit to assist social workers. Through presenting key elements of the BASW/SWU/Bath Spa University working conditions and wellbeing toolkit and illustrating how it can be used through employer-based examples; a forthcoming BASW/SWU/ Bath Spa webinar will explore how social workers, supervisors, managers and organisational leaders can use the resources to make real differences in the workplace.

Of course, we cannot do this alone with just a toolkit and webinar. This is where commonality comes into the picture, partly in terms of collegiality and camaraderie at a

team level, but especially at a national level - hence the importance of SWU and BASW in the UK and equivalent organizations in other countries. But, solidarity can be wider than that in terms of trade unionism as part of a national and international drive towards better working conditions and more worker-friendly workplaces - hence the importance of SWU offering quality advice and representation if requested from the membership.

Another framework for distilling some of the key issues we need to be aware of - and engage with - if thriving in social work is to stand any chance of being a reality in such highly pressurized circumstances is the BEYOND acronym from Thompson, N. and McGowan, J. (2020)

Best practice

'Satisficing' is the technical term for aiming simply for 'good enough', rather than going for the best outcomes possible. The term is made up of satisfactory and sacrificing. Once we reach a satisfactory level, we sacrifice doing even better. One of the features of professionalism is that we aim for optimal results, best practice, rather than satisfactory practice. Being committed to best practice will stand us in good stead for thriving.

Empowerment

If we are to be serious about thriving, not just surviving, then we need to do more than pay lip service to the concept of empowerment. It is about making sure that our actions not only contribute to the empowerment of others, but also do not play a part in disempowering ourselves. Power is a key theme in social life in general and in social work in particular. Making sure that it is being used positively and ethically is therefore essential.

Yes saying

This does not mean saying yes to too much work! It is a deeper matter than that. The philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, whose work we mentioned earlier, distinguished between yes-saying and nay-saying attitudes to life.

The former is positive and affirming, while the latter is negative and self-defeating.

As we shall see, excessive pressure tends to generate negativity, defeatism and cynicism. These have no place in any genuine commitment to thriving.

One for all and all for one

We have already emphasized the importance of solidarity for surviving, but it is also essential for thriving. Effective teamwork, skilled partnership working and a collective approach to challenges faced are all core elements of getting the best results. Giving and receiving support, making sure we communicate effectively and being empathic towards others are not optional extras if thriving is to be our aim.

Neverending learning

Sadly, many people see continuous professional development as a bureaucratic matter of keeping professional registration bodies off their back. If we are genuinely to thrive, we need to get beyond that and embrace the idea that we need to be well tuned in to learning opportunities and prepared to take advantage of them as far as possible. We need to move from a passive approach to learning to a more active, self-directed one.

Determination to succeed

Resilience is understandably an important concept in social work (albeit misused at times), and it is especially important when it comes to being determined to succeed. This is not about blind ambition, but rather a recognition that thriving depends in large part on being able to press on and do our best, despite the many discouragements, obstacles and setbacks we are likely to face, to bounce back when we encounter adversity.

Ravalier, J. M. (2019) 'Psych-Social Working Conditions and Stress in UK Social Workers', British Journal of Social Work

Thompson, N. and McGowan, J. (2020) How to Survive in Social Work, Wrexham, Avenue Media Solutions.

John McGowan
General Secretary

j.mcgowan@swu-union.org.uk

The Social Workers Union (SWU) is recruiting a Communications, Policy and Engagement Specialist to lead on our communications and social media content. The position will be home based with occasional travel to SWU HQ in Birmingham.

Social Media/Communications, Policy and Engagement Specialist

Home based - 18-month contract **Part Time** - 20 hours a week

Salary: £35,000 Full Time 37 hours (Pro rata to 20 hours £19,459)

This is an exciting time to join SWU as our membership increases and we work towards our 10th Anniversary year; you will help drive our core member and stakeholder communications.

Working with BASW and union colleagues, you will keep SWU members and key audiences abreast of social work issues and develop first class communications including SWU policy statements, that build engagement in our campaign activity and wide range of membership benefits and services.

Ideally, the postholder should have knowledge of social work or social care/union issues and work collaboratively with a range of stakeholders from across SWU and our organisational partner BASW to create timely, engaging, union relevant content for our members and stakeholders for both online and print.

The successful candidate will have good experience of working within a communications/policy environment, with solid communications planning and written communication skills, plus experience of managing multiple projects and campaigns that involve developing quality and engaging web, social media, direct mail and print content for a range of audiences.

We are looking for a talented communications professional, who is keen to join a leading specialist trade union and has a passion to make a positive impact through our communications for our members, the social work profession and external partners.

Closing date for applications is 10am Monday 16th November 2020. Please email for more information on how to apply to louise.wood@swu-union.org.uk

Shortlisted applicants will be invited to a virtual interview on Thursday 26th November 2020.

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/

Internet: www.swu-union.org.uk

Carys Phillips appointed as Social Workers Union Chair for a 2 year period

John McGowan, General Secretary of the Social Workers Union, said: "Carys's appointment is excellent news, both for trade unionism and the wider SWU membership. Carys's social work experience, activism and union insight should prove invaluable in supporting the work of the Social Workers Union Executive, as well as a real asset for the staff group."

John added "We see Carys as someone who is fully committed and educated in all aspects of social work. I am confident that Carys will prove a fantastic Chair of SWU and has a clear picture and understanding of what we require to build on all the good work and strides we have made over the last nine years as a trade union. The appointment of Carys as SWU Chair is affirming for our UK wide membership and reflects many aspects of the membership, a practicing social worker prioritising integrity at the core of interactions."

Commenting on her new position, Carys Phillips said: "I believe my rich and varied applied social work practice and the challenges therein provides an excellent platform upon which to build the Social Work Union and support the work of the Executive Committee and engagement of all its members. Supporting the General Secretary is vital and pivotal to the continued growth and success of SWU. My work/life experience is highly transferable in supporting the General Secretary, developing the strategic direction and robust risk management plans for SWU. My communication style is open, un-guarded and honest. The role will help foster collaboration within social work organisations as supportive, best practice and caring employers. SWU's Six Point Urgent Plan builds upon the BASW /SWU on-going campaign in 'Working Conditions'. It is now clear that the COVID 19 pandemic has emphasized and is deepening society's pre-existing inequalities."

SWU General Secretary, John McGowan with new SWU Chair, Carys Phillips



Below is a summary of Cary's Social Work roles over the past 20 years:

- I have worked in Management roles in several local authorities and managed direct services as well as social work teams, I have worked in commissioning and have a broad view and understanding. I have substantial experience of strategic development of Management Development and successfully introduced ALS alongside the Director of a large local authority.
- I have led safeguarding in four distinct local authorities as such chaired a variety of high-profile meetings. I was a project lead for publicly funded research in developing progressive awareness training for approaches to safeguarding
- I have been published, authored reports, designed and delivered learning workshops and given evidence to County Councillors, Inspectors and through various Court processes - liaising with press officers as appropriate.

- I have experience of working across the health and social care sector in a number of agencies and this has enabled skills of effective networking, practical skills to deliver effective solutions. I have worked and travelled widely for CPD
- I have led of workforce development, course design and collaborative pieces of work promoting best practice and strategic developments.
- I am experienced and able to prioritise work in line with agreed time-scale and demands, I am interested and self-motivated individual that offers a positive and motivating influence upon teams/ individuals.
- I have an ability to lead, question and motivate staff /individuals to empower and enable.
- I have been a UK Representative on the SWU Executive since 2018, and, throughout this time feel I have gained excellent experience, enhanced knowledge and even greater enthusiasm for the vital importance of SWU, its values and ensuring its progression.

SWU appoint James Birchall as an Honorary President for a 12-month period

Speaking of the Executive Committee award, John McGowan, General Secretary said "James's term of office came to an end after the SWU AGM; having worked extensively throughout this period alongside James, I would want to put on record his enthusiasm, commitment and hard work for SWU and in playing a central role in the development of the Union to where it stands today with almost 14,000 members."

The good news though is that it not all over for James as the Executive have appointed James in new role ...

"An invitation to become the Honorary President of the Social Workers Union is an invitation to hold the most prestigious office that SWU can award one of its members. It is a great honour for James who has not only given outstanding service to the SWU and the specialty of the union, but is a SWU activists who commands the respect of the National Executive and members of the SWU."



The Honorary President has three major roles: An advisor to the Executive; A representative of the SWU at agreed events, and an ambassador for the SWU and social work in general.

Take control of your financial wellbeing - today

2020 has proved challenging for everyone as many people's lives and circumstances have shifted on various levels, with health and financial concerns prominent. The widespread impact on our finances has vividly highlighted that you never know what's around the corner, emphasising the importance of being financially prepared for any eventuality.

In the UK, we are now seeing the end of the furlough scheme, and as a result, the threat of redundancy is unfortunately a reality for many people. This can understandably prove a very stressful and challenging time, as concerns about financial security come to the fore.

You need quality advice, now more than ever

You may already feel that you should be addressing your finances, but you might be unsure who to approach for trustworthy advice. The sooner you engage with your finances and take action, the more likely you are to achieve your financial goals.

Having a personal general financial review can help you make your money work harder - whether it's budgeting, protection needs, savings and investments, mortgages, tax planning or retirement planning (including getting your pension savings on track) - a holistic approach ticks all the boxes.

Developing a resilient financial plan

SWU has appointed Lighthouse Financial Advice to provide you with the opportunity for professional financial advice. We can help you whatever your financial circumstances. The advice we provide is practical, affordable and tailored to your individual needs.

We can help with all aspects of financial planning. A resilient, well thought out financial plan, brings peace of mind, enabling you to enjoy your life, safe in the knowledge that you've got things under control.

How we can help you

Here at Lighthouse Financial Advice we are highly experienced in providing support and advice to employees in redundancy situations. SWU members are entitled to a complimentary initial consultation with one of our professional financial advisers to explain your options clearly and help you make key decisions to lessen the impact.

As you would expect, we have responded to the current circumstances and are providing remote delivery of advice, which is proving effective, time-efficient, yet still personable and professional.

To find out how we can help, book a complimentary, no obligation initial consultation with one of our professional financial advisers.

08000 85 85 90 or email appointments@lighthousefa.co.uk

Lighthouse Financial Advice Limited is an appointed representative of Lighthouse Advisory Services Limited, which is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

Legal Update - *Emplaw*

The Social Workers Union is delighted to announce that the General Federation of Trade Unions has recently purchased a business called Emplaw on-line, which is a comprehensive, well-researched, up to date guide to UK employment law from the country's leading barristers and solicitors. SWU's Advice and Representation will have access to this great resource



Below are several Covid-19 popular questions being searched for:

Covid-19 specific- Calculation of statutory maternity and other parental payments for furloughed employees

The Maternity Allowance, Statutory Maternity Pay, Statutory Paternity Pay, Statutory Adoption Pay, Statutory Shared Parental Pay and Statutory Parental Bereavement Pay (Normal Weekly Earnings etc.) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/450) came into force on 25th April 2020. They provide for the calculation of "normal weekly earnings" for the purposes of statutory maternity pay (SMP) and other statutory parental payments where the recipient is on furlough. For example, for a woman on furlough whose pay is reduced as a result, her normal weekly earnings for the purposes of eligibility for SMP will be calculated based on the pay she would have received if she were not furloughed.

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2020/450/made>

Relaxation of rules on carrying over annual leave to support key industries during COVID-19

In March 2020, The Working Time (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 were introduced to provide that where it is not reasonably practicable for a worker to take some, or all, of the holiday to which they are entitled due to the coronavirus, they have a right to carry the 4 weeks under regulation 13 (the minimum leave in compliance with the Working Time Directive) into the next 2 leave years. An employer may only require a worker not to take such leave where the employer has good reason to do so. This will not apply to the additional 1.6 weeks leave under regulation 13A of the Working Time Regulations.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/rules-on-carrying-over-annual-leave-to-be-relaxed-to-support-key-industries-during-covid-19>

Coronavirus and sick pay

On 13th March the Statutory Sick Pay (General) (Coronavirus Amendment) Regulations 2020 came into force which extend statutory sick pay to anyone who is self-isolating to prevent the spread of Coronavirus in accordance with guidance published by Public Health England, NHS National Services Scotland or Public Health Wales. This only applies to those who cannot work because of self-isolation, so people who can continue to work from home will not be entitled to sick pay. These regulations did not alter the three "waiting days" before statutory sick pay is payable. The Coronavirus Act 2020 which received Royal Assent on 25th March 2020 provides for regulations to be made so that HMRC may fund SSP and to allow for the temporary suspension of waiting days where the illness relates to coronavirus. The provisions allow for retrospective implementation so that incapacity for work falling on or after 13th March will be covered.

The government announced in COVID-19 guidance on claiming back Statutory Sick Pay paid to employees due to coronavirus (COVID-19) that the eligibility criteria for the scheme to reclaim SSP paid for sickness absence due to COVID-19 will be as follows:

- the refund will cover up to 2 weeks' SSP per eligible employee who has been off work because of COVID-19
- employers with fewer than 250 employees will be eligible - the size of an employer will be determined by the number of people they employed as of 28th February 2020
- employers should maintain records of staff absences and payments of SSP, but employees will not need to provide a GP fit note.

The government has produced an online service so that people unable to work for more than seven days can obtain an isolation note.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/online-isolation-notes-launched-providing-proof-of-coronavirus-absence-from-work>

Book Review

SWU Member and Student Social Worker, Debbie MacAulay reviews *How to Survive in Social Work*

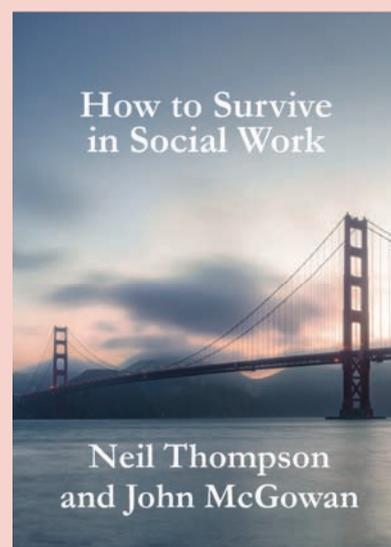
How to Survive in Social Work by Neil Thompson and John McGowan is an extremely helpful book for social workers on every step of their career path. Written and presented in an easy to read format, the book is made more pleasing to the eye with the inclusion of illustrations by Harry Venning.

The book starts with an introduction to the context in which social workers operate. The authors include a discussion about neoliberalism, managerialism and the political context that impacts upon social workers and the people we support. From here it moves to look at the work of social work and the challenges we experience in our daily working life, as well as how we are viewed by others, such as the media. The second chapter finishes with the quote:

“we can make the choice to pull together to do the best we can in difficult circumstances, rather than make the situation worse by allowing negativity, defeatism and cynicism to become the norm.”

As a student social worker, we are regularly informed about the difficult circumstances within which we operate and being encouraged that we can do this together and make things better is a welcome reminder.

The book continues to move through the challenges that social workers face but includes the message that together we can support each other to manage these difficulties. I found the book to be easy to read, with chapters that can be dipped into again in the future, when needed. As a student social worker, it is a vital resource to help keep me on track in my future career, but also keep me grounded and reminded about why I chose to be a social worker in the first place. I would recommend this book to all student and qualified social workers and will be recommending my university library stocks it as soon as possible.



How to Survive in Social Work

by
Neil Thompson and John McGowan

*with a Foreword by Ruth Allen, an Afterword by David Jones
and Illustrations by Harry Venning*

When the general secretary of a trade union and an author with a background in workplace well-being come together and they are both highly critical of austerity and the neoliberal ideology that gave rise to it, then it is perhaps inevitable that the book they decide to co-write will be on surviving in the modern workplace. When you add to this the fact that they are both highly experienced social work professionals with a strong commitment to its value, it is no surprise that the title of the book should be *How to Survive in Social Work*.

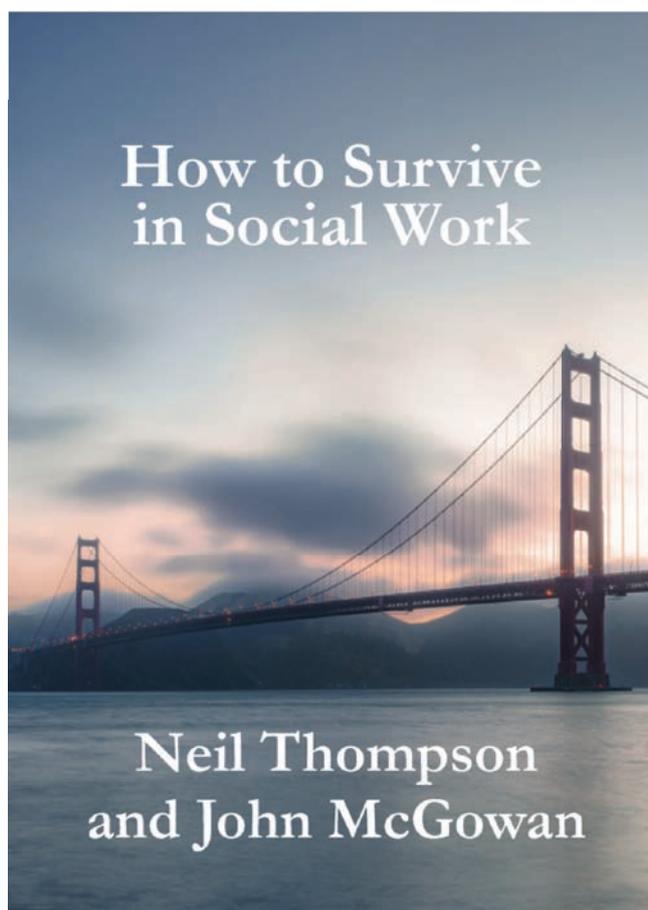
Social work by its very nature is challenging and demanding work. But, in the current social, economic and political climate, it can prove extraordinarily difficult to keep your head above water. Written by two highly experienced social work professionals, this important book explores the significance of that context, offers guidance on how to survive despite it and even to aim for thriving within it. There are no easy answers, but there is much we can do to make sure that we are able to fulfil the potential and value of social work as a force for making our society a humane one without sacrificing our own health and well-being.

Dr Neil Thompson is an independent writer, educator and adviser.
His website and Learning Zone are at:
www.NeilThompson.info.

John McGowan is the General Secretary of the Social Workers Union and also works with the Open University in Scotland.

Their book, *How to Survive in Social Work*, is published by Avenue Media Solutions. It is available at £15.99 directly from the publisher:
<https://bit.ly/3hyyyWk>
or via Amazon Books.

<https://www.avenuemediasolutions.com/product/how-to-survive-in-social-work/>



Union Contact Scheme

Carol Reid, SWU National Organiser & Union Contact Manager responds to some of the questions she's been asked when developing the growing Union Contacts Team



Why do we need Union Contacts?

Traditionally, larger trade unions have workplace reps and shop stewards who are on hand to deal with any workplace issues, particularly around

health and safety, which may arise. There are positives and negatives to this - on the one hand the union rep is on-site, a familiar face, usually understands the staff structure and hierarchy, but there might also be questions around impartiality and the dynamics of relationships with managers (we all know that some managers can be very intimidating and manipulative!) It's important too to acknowledge that onsite reps from larger multi-professional unions may not have insight or understanding of the complexities of specific professions such as social work.

SWU follows a different model of representation. We have a team of full time Advice & Representation Officers (A&R) who are all qualified and experienced social workers. Again, there are positives and negatives to this. The A&R Officer is completely objective and impartial, only attending a workplace for the purpose of negotiations and having no connections to staff or managers. Essentially too, they fully understand and have experience of the social work role. This is all hugely positive for SWU members but ironically a negative for SWU as a growing trade union, as we had no consistent presence in workplaces, on the "shop floor" promoting SWU, sharing information, encouraging membership and activism.

A union is only as strong, as active, and as vocal as its members, and SWU are keen to support our members in strengthening and growing their Union - and developing their passion for trade unionism.

What do Union Contacts do?

Primarily, Union Contacts give SWU a visibility and voice in workplaces. There's strength in numbers and the focus is on encouraging social work colleagues (and student social workers) to join SWU. Importantly too, Union Contacts share information about Activism and Campaigning and provide feedback to and from members. They receive all relevant resources, guidance, and training, from both SWU and the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU). Union Contacts can develop their Activism by assisting at recruitment stalls and meetings, attending marches and rallies, being part of our Austerity Action Group or sit on the SWU Executive, and importantly they will promote and be involved in SWU Campaigns.

What is a Phase 2 Union Contact?

The Union Contact role has recently been developed for those wishing to be more involved after several Union Contacts asked whether they can take on a more conventional workplace rep role. This coincided with SWU having discussions with the Advice & Representation Team as to how Union Contacts can provide additional support by attending Sickness/Absence Meetings, Short Notice, and Investigation Meetings. This smaller team of Union Contacts will assist in delivering lower level trade union support, and importantly will develop SWU's presence in workplaces and beyond.

Where are SWU Union branches?

Traditionally, union members attend regular local branch meetings, and Union Contacts often ask me where SWU branch meetings take place. We don't currently have specific SWU branches because, as BASW members, we are able to attend local BASW branches.

Branch meetings are a great way of interacting with likeminded people and encouraging membership and activism. Not all BASW members are SWU members too, so branch activism is a good opportunity to have discussions around trade unionism and the importance of joining a union run by social workers, for social workers.

What about Activism and Campaigning?

It's YOUR Union, get involved, share ideas, be Active. The Union isn't detached from you - you ARE the Union. Activism comes in many forms, including being a trade unionist.

SWU oversees the Austerity Action Group which focuses on co-production with service users who are activists with lived experiences of mental health and disability, and recent SWU campaigning around working conditions during the pandemic reached a broad audience in the national media, with SWU members and Union Contacts getting involved and contributing to this ongoing campaign.

I'm interested!! How do I become a Union Contact?

Contact me! You will be invited to a SWU Union Contact Induction Day (usually face-to-face but we are currently in talks about developing this online). Following your Induction you will sign an agreement, receive an ID badge, receive paperwork and merchandise to share with colleagues (or amongst your student cohort), and you will receive ongoing support from SWU via updates, our private Union Contact Facebook Group, GFTU training and mentoring.

If you'd like to become a SWU Union Contact or have any questions or comments, please contact carol.reid@swu-union.org.uk

**Carol Reid
National Organiser &
Union Contact Scheme Manager**

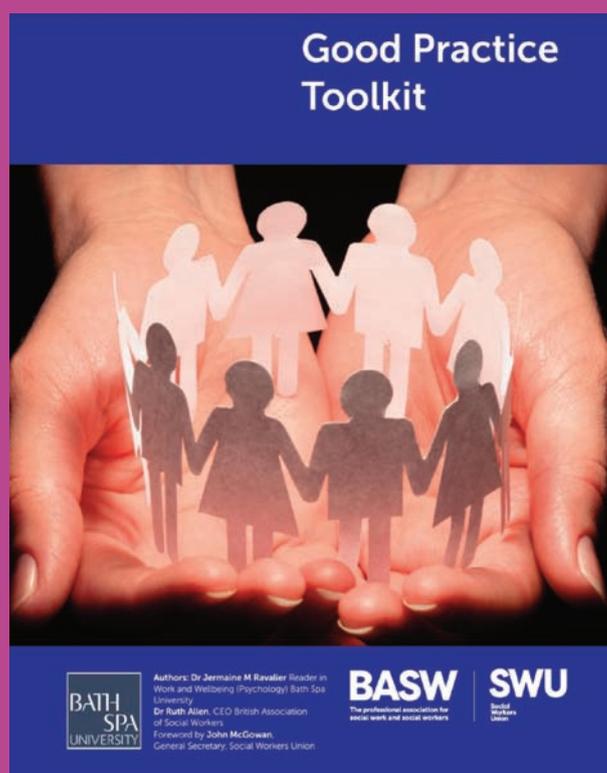
Creating Better Working Conditions for Social Work: using the SWU and BASW working conditions and wellbeing toolkit in your organisation

Through presenting key elements of the BASW/SWU/Bath Spa University working conditions and wellbeing toolkit and illustrating how it can be used through employer-based examples, this webinar will explore how social workers, supervisors, managers and organisational leaders can use the resources to make real differences in the workplace.

The session will be facilitated by toolkit authors, Dr Ruth Allen and Dr Jermaine Ravalier, the General Secretary of the Social Workers Union, John McGowan, Head of BASW's Advice and Representation service Lien Watts and other colleagues using the toolkit. Register here (SWU Members Free):

<https://www.basw.co.uk/civicrm/event/info?reset=1&id=989>

**When: 19th November 2020
12:30 PM - 1:30 PM**



Meryl Williams provides an update on the Swansea Working Conditions and Wellbeing Toolkit Pilot

For the past few months, we here at BASW Cymru have been working together with the City and County of Swansea child and family services around the essential topic of worker well-being. Partnering with Nick Andrews from Swansea University's *Developing Evidence Enriched Practice (DEEP)* Programme and Sian Jones, an early career social work researcher undertaking her PhD on vicarious trauma in social workers has been important and rewarding.

It has been a privilege to work with dedicated and committed practitioners, even more so during the difficult and changing times we have been living in. Dedicated and committed - two essential qualities of being a social worker and working in social care. They are so important characteristics that social workers need and this is clearly evident through our sessions so far.

To date we have held three sessions, one with managers, another with social workers and the third with social care staff in different child and family settings. There are further sessions ahead.

What we have been focussing on clearly is well-being, but what we know is that well-being isn't something that is static. What it means for me today might be very different by tomorrow. So, we have been starting our sessions asking all participants in one word to identify what well-being means for them at that particular time. We were then able to explore these words with participants. This gives each of us the opportunity to stop and reflect not only on these words, but on ourselves, on how we were feeling.

The sessions have given us the opportunity to reflect - something that should be central to our profession, but at this Covid mad time, our usual ways of reflecting have gone out the window. The opportunities to do this in between travelling to meetings, or at the end of the day driving home have all but disappeared. So,

we need to be more creative and kinder to ourselves and make time during the day (our working day!) to give us space to reflect. By so doing, we will be looking after our well-being as well as becoming more responsive, sensitive and empathetic practitioners.

So, we have explored and reflected on well-being, on our well-being; our peer's well-being, our employees well-being. We briefly considered the two types of well-being - Hedonic - short term pleasures and Eudaimonic well-being long term satisfaction.

We have considered and explored two questions. What sustains us in our roles and how has the pandemic affected us. In the beginning of the year, we wouldn't have even thought of exploring this second question. Life was different; Covid was just something that was happening in China. Not one of us could have imagined what has transpired over the last 8 months or so.

During our time together we couldn't have ignored Covid. As social workers we work in crisis situations constantly; our training and our practice should have equipped us to do this, but this current crisis that we are experiencing is totally outside all of our experiences. Some of the responses to these questions have been heart-warming and encouraging. Many participants seeing the positives in the new way we have had to adapt as well as honestly sharing the struggles they have (and continue to) experience.

A quote which resonates with me was shared during one of these sessions. It's from a renowned psychiatrist and neurologist Victor Frankl, who was a holocaust survivor. He said, "*Those who have a "why" to live for, can manage the how*". Purpose for each one of us is very important. In the context of our sessions, considering what it is that sustains us in our roles is inexorably linked to this sense of purpose we feel about our profession and the work that we do.

We are still at the early stages of our collaborative work, but the early indications are positive. Social workers and social care workers are passionate about their work and the children and families they support. Well-being is high on the agenda for The City and County of Swansea. The need to care for

ourselves and each other is vital to our ability to provide the support needed for the most vulnerable in our society.

Meryl Williams
Professional Officer
BASW Cymru
meryl.williams@basw.co.uk

Working River

General Federation of Trade Unions release CD of 21 songs and music celebrating the lives of working people on the River Thames

Exactly fifty years ago this month on October 15 1970 The Cambria, the last working Thames barge trading under sail alone and captained by the singing bargeman Bob Roberts, loaded her cargo at Tilbury for the last time before being laid up. This is a good enough anniversary as any to release 21 songs about the life of working people along the Thames over the centuries. In fact three of the songs celebrate the barge trade, *A Bargeman's Year*, *The Last Barge* and *Stormy Weather*, a version of which was once sung by Bob Roberts himself on his battered old melodeon.

This celebration of working life on what was once called "the hardest working river in the world" is a collaboration between the General Federation of Trade Unions Educational Trust and Folktree Recordings. They felt that while the deeds of the rich and powerful are often celebrated on this so-called Royal River, the stories of the lives of the millions of workers that toiled, played and died around the river are too often being lost with the turning of each tide.

The river's position as a major maritime route has put it at the centre of many events of national significance, leading the early trade unionist



and historian John Burns to describe it as 'liquid history'. As a result, the Thames runs deep in the national psyche and forms a fundamental part of our identity. It would explain why monarchs and rulers have always sought to be associated with the Thames as a symbol of power and authority.

In his book *Sacred River* Peter Ackroyd describes when Handel's Water Music, perhaps the most famous piece of music associated with the Thames, was first performed on the river in 1717 to celebrate the first British monarch of the House of Hanover George 1 coming to the throne.

Ackroyd muses that this loud musical display was also performed in order to drown out the “vulgar abuse of the Thames watermen and their egalitarian sentiments hallowed by tradition on the river”.

Working River seeks to rejoice in these ‘vulgar’ voices and their ‘egalitarian sentiments’ because it is clear that the Thames has another history, one of toil, migration, rebellion, mutiny, smuggling, mud-larking and even snatches of simple pleasure on this eternally changing river.

It is not widely known that one of the most successful naval mutinies in British history took place at the mouth of the Thames on the Nore sandbank in 1797. This significant event, which saw the flying of the red flag for the first time, terrified the Admiralty and led to vast improvements in conditions. Nevertheless the ‘president’ of the mutiny Richard Parker was hanged from the yardarm of HMS Sandwich.

There is a wonderful song here celebrating him sung by Anne Dearman, *The Death of Parker*. Another *Goldspring*, written and performed by the talented MG Boulter, tells the tale of the press-ganged Goldspring Thompson who witnessed the mutiny before escaping.

There are songs like *Strike for Better Wages*, celebrating the Great London Dock Strike of 1889 against dreadful conditions which resulted in a victory for the 100,000 strikers and established strong trade unions amongst London’s hitherto unorganised workers.

What is less widely known is that the dock strike was heavily influenced by a successful Match Girls strike the previous year by over 1,400 young women between 12 and 20 years old. This is celebrated in a tune collected by renowned folklorist Roy Palmer. The subject of love is a recurring theme including local folk singer Kitti Theobald’s personal love letter to the Thames, *My River*, recorded live here at a local singaround.

Essex singer Jolene’s astonishing version of Ewan

McColl’s *Sweet Thames Flows Softly*, following the fortunes of two lovers as they journey down the river, is also a stand out track. The group Potiphars Apprentices also deliver *The Fisherman*, collected by Ralph Vaughan Williams back in 1904.

Class is also a recurring theme as we may expect, no more so than on the haunting *The Wreck of the Princess Alice*, a poem put to music by Crafting for Foes dealing about the sinking of the pleasure ship Princess Alice with the loss of 700 men, women and children, the largest loss of life ever on the Thames. It is widely believed that this disaster is largely forgotten for the simple reason that all the victims were workers not worthy of remembrance.

The Hoy Shanty Crew sing of happier times with *Day Trip to Southend* which describes the experiences of Londoners coming down for the day only to discover the tide was out. Other songs to discover deal with female smugglers, mudlarkers scavenging on the shore, desperate fishermen that row to London to sell their wares and a joyful Calypso song from Windrush after it docked at Tilbury in 1948 to bring workers from the West Indies written by the king of Calypso Lord Kitchener.

This collection suitably ends with Essex singer and writer Jack Forbes and friends belting out a live version of his classic *Rolling Down the River* about working the container ships along the Thames which is now sung around the world.

Brian Denny
Working River Curator

The added bonus of buying this CD is that proceeds will go to the GFTU Educational Trust to support its provision of free trade union education.

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For more information on Working River or to buy a copy go to gftu.org.uk



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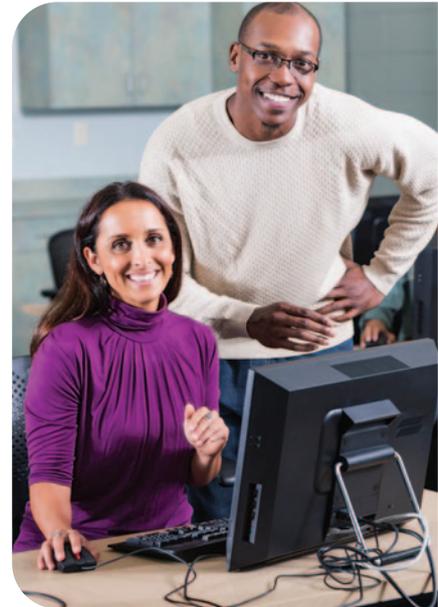
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