

# Change is in the air

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AS I TAKE over as President of ADSW, I am aware that social work faces huge challenges over the next few years and beyond. Very significant increases in demand, high expectations of standards, personalisation and choice, and all with a backdrop of unprecedented funding constraint. David Cameron's proposals for £6 bn worth of cuts will reverberate loudly in Scotland.

In a difficult situation like this, it is tempting to batten down the hatches and protect what we are already doing. But, at all costs, we must not do that. The numbers don't stack up: we can't provide the same type of service and hope to reach more people for less money. We need a whole new approach and we must look for opportunities in this crisis.

This is the philosophy I intend to apply not just to the services that social work delivers, but also the way we as social workers appear to the world. In 2009, ADSW launched its PR campaign "Social Work Changes Lives". The campaign aims to chip away at the negative publicity that tends to surround social work. It is predicated on the assumption that if people understand who social workers are and what social workers do, they will not be so readily scapegoated in the press when things go wrong and we can begin to have the more informed and analytical debate we need to have as a society.

The campaign has taught us a lot about why social work has such a negative press. Social workers won't tell their stories because of issues of confidentiality (for the people they work with and for themselves); social workers are not confident to speak out about their profession for fear the media will portray them negatively; and social workers are busy people who don't always have time to respond to the demands of the press. In the absence of information or cooperation, the press prints what it likes.

So far, the campaign has had some great successes and a year later we know that fewer people now view social work negatively. We have had lots of success in the broadsheet press, including an in-depth piece by Peter Ross of *Scotland on Sunday* on Edinburgh's social work service, and more positive stories have been placed in the tabloids. However, tabloids tend to edit out the term "social worker", focusing understandably on the person using the service, with scant reference to those providing it.

But in May we had a real breakthrough: a positive story in *The Sun*. The story was based on statistics of the number of attacks on social workers and went along the lines of "social workers do a good job in difficult circumstances." A social worker who had been attacked was prepared to tell her



Michelle Miller: Breakthrough

story. We negotiated with the journalist a suitable quote from ADSW and the result was really quite positive and supportive.

This is a huge coup for social work and social workers should take heart that things in the press are beginning to change. In my address to the ADSW annual conference the week before the story was published, I said clearly: "More of the same won't do". Perhaps *The Sun* was listening.