



The professional association for  
social work and social workers

## Relationship-based social work – for World Social Work Day 2019



BASW exists to strengthen social work, support social workers and promote social justice.

This means social work that is rooted in relationships that make a difference; social work that is deeply human, that recognises people's potential and provides personal support as well as solidarity where there is injustice. We use our practice skills and knowledge in this relational context. We see and respond to the whole person; their past, their present and their potential for the future.

This is what makes social work unique – its emphasis on human to human encounters. We recognise and affirm people and use our capabilities to support them to change their lives for the better.

Gillian Ruch writes wonderfully about how relationships are not just the means to an end in social work but are also an end in themselves: a model and an example of how things can be different; an encounter of change and empowerment; a moment of hope.

Relationship-based social work is not new. It has always happened in the best of practice as our modern profession of social work has developed. But it has been marginalised where organisational and policy regimes have focused more on transactions or 'doing to' – processes and procedures rather than rights, potentials, creativity, solution-finding abilities and inherent value.

Inequality and division are prevalent and growing in our society. This is true across the UK although different countries are taking different approaches to tackling social issues. Austerity has hit the whole of the UK and reduced resources, 'hollowing out' community and universal sources of support, particularly in the poorest areas. This and an increasingly harsh and punitive welfare system are increasing pressure and demands on social workers.

Relationship-based social work is part of social work's new radicalism and impact. It is part of how we tackle inequalities. It is about recognising how we can most effectively get alongside the people we work with, sharing our knowledge, hearing theirs, coming up with solutions together, connecting people who may have common issues and causes, believing in the human potential for change and self-determination.

Relationship-based social work needs time and space to reflect and continuously learn. As social workers we need to stay connected with the emotional labour at the heart of what we do and attend to our own needs and support.

We must create better working conditions for effective relationship-based practice to flourish and be sustained, even when things get difficult.

We applaud those organisations that are attempting to change the culture of practice, supporting social workers to be more hopeful, resilient, thoughtful and determined – and more helpful to the children, young people and adults who need their support.

We hope many more employers will work with us and with the profession to change social work for good.

### **Our relationship-based practice campaign**

For all the reasons above, promoting relationship-based social work is one of our campaigns this year. We are focused on three areas:

**Telling the story of social work across the UK** – showcasing what social workers do and how we can help people to build public understanding and trust.

**'80:20' in England** – changing the working situation that many practitioners face, in which close to 80% of their time is spent on admin and non-practice related tasks rather than working directly with families and other valuable professional activities. We will build links and work directly with local authorities to identify how social works can be freed up to have more time for work with people.

**Social work across borders** – building relationships across borders, connecting with other social work associations across the world; valuing people who cross geographic borders as refugees and migrants; recognising our common purpose and humanity across communities, societies and cultures; promoting social work's role in protecting and creating social cohesion and tolerant societies.

#### **Our current main activities:**

- Celebrating social work stories at World Social Work Day and beyond leading up to our 50 year anniversary in 2020
- Creating tools and approaches to make more direct time with children through our 80:20 campaign
- Lobbying in parliament for working conditions to allow for relationship-based social work (see our Working Conditions campaign)
- Promoting links between BASW NI and the Irish Association of Social Workers on the island of Ireland
- Including relationship-based social work in our professional development events

**Get involved, visit our website [www.basw.co.uk](http://www.basw.co.uk)**