



The professional association for  
social work and social workers

## **BASW Position Statement on Social Work with Transgender People**

**Date of adoption of statement: June 28<sup>th</sup> 2021**

**Review date: By June 30 2022**

**Statement owner: Policy Ethics and Human Rights Committee**

### **Why are we putting this statement out?**

BASW supports social workers and enables people who need social work support to receive ethical, expert help.

Effective social work with trans<sup>1</sup> people - and people of all ages considering changes to their gender identity - is an important and emergent area of social work practice requiring more guidance and professional support.

This is BASW's first statement on trans rights and issues and provides:

- a statement of principles underscoring our commitment to uphold the human rights of trans people in line with our overall approach to ethics and human rights for all.
- an update on our commitment to develop further professional guidance and policy positions in this field of practice and rights.

BASW will develop and publish further policy and practice statements and guidance on trans issues in co-production with trans people, social workers and others with expertise to ensure BASW promotes effective social work practice in this field underpinned by human rights, social justice, good use of evidence and sound ethics. This work will be led by the Policy, Ethics and Human Rights Committee, the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Advisory group and the EDI lead staff member with responsibility for this area of equalities.

### **BASW statement on upholding the rights of trans people.**

BASW recognises and stands in opposition to the stigma, discrimination, oppression, stereotyping and abuse that many trans people experience. Taking this position is entirely in line with our [Code of Ethics](#) which is the starting point for all our statements of human rights, ethics and good practice.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Trans' is the current, most commonly cited preferred term for people who self-identify as transgender women or men, who may or may not have undergone formal gender reassignment and who live with a gender identity different to which they were assigned at birth born or in which they were initially raised.

Much of the Code of Ethics is relevant to this statement, but in particular the following sections:

### **Background**

*In its various forms, social work addresses the multiple, complex interactions between human beings, their social situation and their environment. Its mission is to enable all people to develop their full potential, enrich their lives, and safeguard people who may be at risk of harm. Social workers work in partnership with others to find solutions and achieve positive change. As such, social workers are change agents in social and civil society as well as in the lives of the individuals, families and communities they serve (p4)*

### **2.1 Human Rights**

#### **Upholding and promoting human dignity and well-being**

*Social workers should respect, uphold and defend each person's physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual integrity and well-being. They should work towards promoting the best interests of individuals and groups in society and the avoidance of harm.*

#### **Respecting the right to self-determination**

*Social workers should respect, promote and support people's dignity and rights to make their own choices and decisions, irrespective of their values and life choices, provided this does not threaten the rights, safety and legitimate interests of others. Social workers ensure that any limitations on a person's rights are necessary and proportionate and are for a legitimate purpose.*

#### **Promoting the right to participation**

*Social workers should promote the full involvement and participation of people using their services in ways that enable them to be empowered in all aspects of decisions and actions affecting their lives.*

#### **Working holistically**

*Social workers should be concerned with the whole person, recognising the biological, psychological, social and spiritual dimensions of people's lives. They should seek to engage with the person and their wider social systems such as family, community, societal and natural environments.*

#### **Identifying and developing strengths**

*Social workers should focus on the capacity and strengths of all individuals, groups and communities and thus aim to challenge stigma and promote empowerment. (p6)*

### **3. Social Justice**

#### **Challenging oppression**

*Social workers have a responsibility to challenge oppression on any basis, including (but not limited to) age, capacity, civil status, class, culture, disability, ethnicity, family structure, gender, gender identity, language, nationality (or lack of), political beliefs, poverty, race, relationship status, religion, sex, sexual orientation or spiritual beliefs.*

#### **Respecting diversity**

*Social workers should recognise and respect the diversity of the communities in which they practise, taking into account individual, family, group and community differences. Social workers should identify and question their own prejudices and consider how these could be experienced as oppressive by the people with whom they are working. Social workers should demonstrate a clear commitment to anti-oppressive practice such as pro-active anti-racism and promoting the rights of all people experiencing discrimination, structural inequality and marginalisation (p7).*

## Turning ethics into practice

As in any specific field of practice, social workers are expected to address their ongoing learning needs in relation to trans peoples' rights, requirements and expectations of services. This should include (but is not limited) to:

- Upholding the dignity of trans people and demonstrating professional understanding in speech and behaviour
- Advocating for the rights of trans people in the context of widespread discrimination
- Incorporating into risk assessments an understanding of the impact of physical, verbal and systemic violence against trans people
- Personalising practice to take account of the lived experience of trans people.
- Understanding and integrating into practice intersectional identities and how these affect people's life experiences, opportunities and risks (e.g. being a trans person of colour or from another minoritized ethnic, racial or cultural group, or a disabled trans person)
- Seeking out the best information and sources of support for trans people
- Understanding how gender identity and transitioning issues affect people at different life stages and in different contexts, and understanding the role and responsibilities of social workers in dealing with the decision making and rights dilemmas that can arise (e.g., for a child/young person considering their gender or sex and their parents/guardians, or for an adult with impaired mental capacity)
- Seeking supervisory or other informed support and opportunities to safely discuss practice and ethical issues that may arise. This may include where a social worker or others need to address contentious issues or differing views about matters such as definitions of sex and gender, the ethics of gender change for young people, the application of equalities legislation and differing beliefs about sex and gender.
- BASW members who hold positions of responsibility for practice quality or standards within their organisations should ensure that their colleagues are able to practice in accordance with the principles in this statement and have access to safe spaces for open discussion and reflection.

## Next steps

At our Annual General Meeting in 2020, members passed a motion for BASW to provide social workers and students with more resources and practice guidance to develop capability and promote ethical, rights-based approaches.

BASW is developing practice guidance to be released in several stages, relating to different priority areas of practice, over the coming 12 months. This will be available for members and non-members through written and audio-visual resources and online and other courses/events.

This guidance will help social workers to act with more confidence and evidence-informed skills within the ethical, human rights and good practice principles laid out in this and subsequent statements/documents.

*Members can send comments on this statement to [comms@basw.co.uk](mailto:comms@basw.co.uk)*