cascade of bollocks...a cornucopia of bollocks. Following our inconclusive general election we are now to have another government led by Enda Kenny propped up by a gaggle of opportunist independent TDs. Thankfully the Labour Party has been punished for its rampant neoliberalism and is left with just a handful of TDs. We need a proper LEFT alternative built from the ground up!

But, for now, the sky continues to rain down bollocks. The main bollocks has to be... ‘Sure we’ve been through the bad times, but, it’s going to be grand now...The economy has turned the corner’. Yet, it was reported, in April, that the youth unemployment rate was 18%. Turning to health provision, at the end of April, the number of patients on public waiting lists has risen to more than 500,000 for the first time. According to the National Purchase Treatment Fund, there were more than 407,000 people waiting outpatient appointments, 74,000 waiting for inpatient treatment and 19,000 waiting for gastrointestinal tests. Almost 24,000 people on the outpatient waiting list have been there more than 15 months, which is supposed to be the maximum permissible waiting time (Irish Times, 7 May).

Children without Homes

In April it also became clear that the
homelessness numbers were up by almost 50% in February 2016 when compared to this time last year. There were 5,881 people in emergency accommodation and amongst them were 1,881 children – this was increase of over 100% in children located in emergency accommodation over the past 12 months.

Anyhow, we’d better move on because we don’t want to be accused of ‘talking down the economy’ now do we?

It has been forgotten about, given all the attention given to the ‘1916’ commemoration, but this year also marks the 20th anniversary of the publication of the inquiry into the death of Kelly Fitzgerald. In an important section of the report it was argued

We consider it important to recognise that no matter how effectively authorities intervene they cannot guarantee that children will not be abused or killed by their parents or carers. To suggest otherwise is tantamount to expecting that there would be no crime because of the existence of the Garda Siochana...We are anxious to ensure that this is not perceived as a rationalisation for ineffective action by health boards. On the contrary we believe that a realistic appraisal of that which can, and cannot, be achieved will lead to higher standards of practice, greater accountability and effectiveness. We do recognise, however, that there is a fundamental issue as to the extent to which health boards, politicians, the media and the public are prepared to accept that the protection of children from child abuse cannot be guaranteed in every instance.

We recognise that this comment contains a measure of truth, but it is jarring to read given it comes after page upon page outlining the systematic failures of the Western Health Board. It can be almost read, even it was not the intention of the author, as something of a ‘shit happens’ coda to an immensely disturbing report illuminating embedded institutional incompetence.

Men without Ideas

And yet there are reminders of this approach in the recent remarks by the newly anointed Tusla chief, Fred McBride, at the annual conference of Social Care Ireland. Speaking, only days after an RTE report that a young girl in foster care had been sexually abused yet other children were left in the placement, he left SWAN supporters in his audience gobsmacked. Right said Fred...

We must embrace and manage risk. Those of you who heard the media coverage over that last couple of days . . . They're not very keen on the notion of managing risk...They'd much rather we eradicate risk completely, which of course is an utterly, utterly absurd proposition...There are risks in every aspect of life. There is dignity in taking risks. We all take risks every day. Why on earth would we think the families we work with shouldn't take some risks? We take away their risks, we take away their dignity. There's a bit of education to be done with the media, certainly in Ireland, in helping them understand we're in the risk management business. We're not in the risk eradication business.

Tusla has been, argued Fred, ‘paternalistic, ‘risk averse’ and had taken power from families, focusing too much on managing budgets and services and insufficiently on ‘building resilience and wellbeing’ in families. He wants instead to work ‘confidently with families to “co-produce” solutions, overcome challenges and take risks’.

But doesn't all this stuff about embracing risk and ‘dignity in taking risks’ sound like, well, more bollocks? Especially when it is rounded-off with those vacuous notions about ‘resilience’ and ‘co-producing solutions’ with families – this might sound convincing to Tusla's hipster consultants and media spin doctors, but we're not convinced Fred. Go listen to our favourite track on ‘Never Mind the Bollocks’...it's called ‘Pretty Vacant’.

We should not be celebrating risk culture. We need to shorten the odds against risk by ensuring that all social work offices are fully staffed by qualified social workers, on permanent contracts, paid the trade union rate for the job. If you ensure this happens, children in care, will be visited regularly and be rendered safer in placements.

Anyhow, as the Frontline Editorial Collective, climbs into our beat-up red van to head to the beach, we turning on our old tape deck and the Pistols are ready. Hit the gas and track one...’Holidays in the Sun’! We wish all our readers a fine and happy summer. We hope too that you enjoy this issue of the Bulletin. Let us know what you think. AND be thinking of organising a SWAN group in your workplace or on your social work course. Remember our slogan...We organise, we win! We don't, we're toast.

THE SWAN ‘FRONTLINE’ EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE (FEC)
OPPOSING NEOLIBERAL VALUES IN SOCIAL WORK by SWAN Western Region Practice Focus Working Group

In our editorial we commented on the continuing crisis in Ireland. We have not all ‘turned the corner’. Let’s remember the 15,000 waiting for speech therapy assessments (Irish Times, 3 May). What of those still festering in direct provision? Also, what of those having to deal with the 12% increase, over the past 5 months, in the numbers sleeping on the streets of our capital city (Irish Times, 4 May)?

Below, therefore, we feature the views of four workers who are part of the SWAN Western Region Practice-Focus Working Group). One is located in child and family services and the other three are situated in intellectual disability services. All of them describe how cuts and lack of services is impacting in the various areas in which they are working and trying, against the odds, to provide a good and decent service and to oppose neoliberal values.

Child and Family Social Work

As a child protection social worker in Galway, you come face to face with the adverse effects of the housing crisis on a daily basis. This crisis is affecting the most vulnerable families in our society. There are families who have lived in Direct Provision centres for years and finally when they are granted Leave to Remain, there is nowhere for them to move on to. There are families who have experienced terrifying levels of domestic violence who move to refuges for their safety and are still there over a year later as the rent levels far exceed their rent supplement caps. There are families who live in emergency homeless accommodation and do not know where they will be from one day to the next as it depends where there is availability in the city’s tourist accommodation. Then there are those ‘lucky’ families who do have housing but may be forced to live in poor conditions in the fear that confronting landlords may result in them being evicted from their homes.

The effect that living through the housing crisis has, on these already vulnerable families, is stark. The mental strain that is put on parents who are trying to raise their children to the best of their ability can be immense. Then there is the development of the children to consider. Children thrive on stability and routine, which cannot be maintained if the roof over their head is inconsistent. Furthermore, their access to education can be hampered by constantly moving from one different geographical emergency accommodation setting to another. The effect of this on a child’s development is perturbing. As social workers it is our job to advocate for families and assist them in providing the right environment in which to give children the best opportunity to develop and reach their full potential. However, it is easy to feel hopeless when families are asking for your help but the resources are just not available.
Intellectual Disabilities

Historically, in Ireland many individuals with intellectual disabilities have faced exclusion and isolation by being housed in large residential institutions segregated from mainstream society. Contemporary legislation and policies highlight the vital importance of individuals with intellectual disabilities being offered a choice as to where they wish to live and recommendations have been suggested by policy initiatives for a shift from the group home model of care to more individualised supports such as independent living. The Disability Act (2005) seeks to promote the social inclusion of individuals with disabilities through the use of disability-specific services. It also reflects a view that individuals with disabilities are entitled to the same range of housing options equal to other citizens in Ireland. In addition The Value for Money and Policy Review of Disability Services in Ireland (Department of Health, 2012) recommended that individuals with disabilities should be fully included in the life of their community and that individualised social supports and services should be provided to ensure self-determination. Article 19 of the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities refers to independent living for individuals with disabilities and mandates ‘the equal right of all persons with disabilities to live in the community with choices equal to others’.

In modern societies today, individuals with disabilities have come to enjoy an array of living options such as independent living. Independent living is rooted in a human rights approach which makes a practical difference for individuals with disabilities. The objective of independent living for individuals with disabilities is for the person with a disability to be at the centre of the planning, implementation and evaluation process. The key feature of independent living for individuals with intellectual disabilities is that the individual is in receipt of the necessary supports to enable them to live and thrive in independent living.

Key challenges are experienced by service users who wish to live independently in the community. Many service users experience lack of appropriate supports, the danger of becoming isolated in the community, the difficulty in accessing suitable housing, the reluctance of families to embrace the concept of independent living and lack of funding and cuts to services. Housing is a huge problem availability, and the suitability and affordability of housing in Galway city is a massive challenge. The amalgamation of these obstacles results in independent living being very difficult to achieve for people with disabilities where their dream of a person-centred and individualised plan to live independently fails.

Reports including Time to Move on from Congregated Settings – A Strategy for Community Inclusion (Health Service Executive, 2011) and the Department of Health report from 2012, mentioned earlier, recommend moving towards more person-centred services with the active involvement of people with disabilities. They should be provided with more choice and control over support services and should be at the very centre of service delivery. The above reports conclude that resource allocation should also be based on individual needs as opposed to block funding of services. Another recommendation contained in these reports is that alternative forms of respite should be explored particularly community based supports.

Traditionally, short breaks were provided in residential settings, but Home Sharing has now grown and developed as a model of service provision. It provides many benefits for the person with an intellectual disability, their family, and the host family. Home-sharing offers a ‘home from home’ option for people with intellectual disabilities (Merriman and Canavan, 2007). Short breaks (respite) are considered to be the most common form of support for people with intellectual disabilities. The need for family carers of people with intellectual disabilities to have access to short breaks is widely recognised and reported. Many studies have shown the benefits of short breaks for families and carers. Respite should be responsive to the needs of the individual.
and families. In Ireland, the majority of respite care for adults and children with intellectual disabilities is funded by the state and provided by voluntary organisations.

Cuts and more Cuts...

However, in recent years, there has been a considerable reduction in health expenditure with disability services being subject to a series of budget cuts. This has had a direct impact on services and the lives of individuals and their families. With limited resources, we are expected to abide by policies and procedures in the allocation of such resources as reflected in the CORU Bye Law for Social Workers (2011: 10) Section 7(e) which states:

You have a duty to assist in the efficient and effective use of resources..., while balancing a duty of care to the individual service user, you should be aware of the wider need to use limited resources efficiently and responsibly.

This ethos coupled with the lack of adequate resources and funding can lead to services becoming crises driven and forgetting about the need and potential benefits of early intervention for individuals and families. Many individuals sit on waiting lists for far too long without any support and those deemed a 'priority' are often in crisis situations.

Opposing Rationing and Ineffective Service Provision

We must reverse this trend of crises driven responsiveness and acknowledge that a little support ‘early on’ in the form of providing short breaks can go a long way in helping individuals and families and preventing 'crises' situations in the future.

More generally, we need to be angry about this and other forms of preventable hardship. For those of us in SWAN, anger and a commitment to create meaningful social change is central to our professional and civic role.

THINKING AND ACTING GLOBALLY: SWAN AND THE CREATION OF INTERNATIONAL LINKS by Washington Marovatsanga (SWAN Galway)

In keeping with one of its aims of linking up with various social groups and non-state actors, SWAN Galway (a regional chapter of SWAN Ireland) recently demonstrated how to put this into practice. The organisation that SWAN linked with, in this instance, was Empower International from Arizona in the US.

Initial contact with Empower International was made via social media. The subsequent visit and its detailed planning highlights that, in terms of establishing alliances with like-minded groups, SWAN Ireland is not restricted to thinking locally; we also have a global outlook and perspective. We need to retain this view because neoliberalism also operates, of course, on a global scale and efforts to challenge and combat its deleterious consequences require solidarity at the local AND global levels. As the leftist academic geographer, David Harvey, has stated: The revolution has to be a movement in every sense of that world. If it cannot move within, across and through the different spheres then it will ultimately go nowhere at all. Recognising this, it becomes imperative to envision alliances between a whole range of social forces configured around the different spheres (The Empire of Capital, 2010).

Who is Empower International?

Empower International is an organisation seeking to build international bridges in the field of social work and learn about other models of practice by bringing social work students to other countries. The aim of the Galway visit was to establish and maintain collaborative links, social work education connections and to facilitate possible placements and to explore funding opportunities. The group that visited
Ireland comprised of 25 social work students from varied backgrounds, but the majority were first generation college students with a large number from migrant (predominately Mexican) families. To gain a better grasp of the social work role in Ireland, the group visited social work university programmes, local and national social work agencies and organisations around the country. To further enhance their understanding of the environment social work in Ireland was operating in, SWAN Galway members, acting together with social work academics, put in place a programme of events including a range of presentations. One of these was on what SWAN Ireland has achieved since its inception. As part of this presentation, a brief video clip of SWAN Ireland’s tremendous campaign against the attempt to introduce a ‘cheap labour scheme’ for newly qualified practitioners was explained. We outlined how this led to the state halting its so-called student ‘graduate scheme’. This, for us, illuminated for the visitors the vital importance of solidarity and collective organising.

US Organisations
Overall, discussions with the Empower International visitors were permeated with a strong sense that we need to raise the profile of social justice issues. A copy of Frontline (Dec, 2015) was provided to each attendee. Interestingly, the visitors spoke of similar organisations to SWAN developing back at home. Indeed, some of the organisations that the students spoke in Arizona, for example, may have similar aims and objectives to those of SWAN. These include:

- National Action Network - [http://nationalactionnetwork.net/about/](http://nationalactionnetwork.net/about/)
- Children's Action Alliance - [http://azchildren.org/](http://azchildren.org/)
- Arizona Community Action Association which works to end poverty - [http://azcaa.org/](http://azcaa.org/)

Building on the visit
Current projects which may result following the visit include:

- Empower International and SWAN Ireland are now connected via social media and this provides for on-going and stimulating conversations and the sharing of information.
- SWAN Ireland members with contacts with UK SWAN members are working on facilitating a social work student from the community college in Arizona, going to Nottingham, to link with local SWAN UK members.
- Stacy Moreno, the founder and director of Empower International has facilitated one of us (Galway SWAN member, Sinead) to visit Arizona and, whilst there, she will provide a lecture which will include, not only reference to her own research, but also information on SWAN Ireland.

All of these developments point to the advantages of creating global connections and forging bonds of solidarity.

THE IRISH RAPE CRISIS CENTRE CRISIS by Aoibheann McCann

In 2002 the Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland (SAVI) Report found that 42% of women and 28% men have experienced sexual violence. This confirmed what the Rape Crisis Centres (RCCs) in Ireland had been saying since the 1970s; throughout all social classes, sexual abuse and violence is widespread. Since these findings, no state funding has been made available for a
follow up study or to adequately fund RCCs. Despite this the sixteen RCCs that exist in Ireland today are now seen as a mainstream feature of Irish life. They have informed many changes in both the law and the treatment of survivors of sexual violence.

The Women’s Liberation Movement

RCCs have their roots in Irish Women’s Liberation Movement (IWLM) formed in the early seventies whose members went on to form many of the groups attributed to change for women including Council for Status of Women(CSW). However, some of the radical original collective broke off to begin feminist service provision – beginning with Dublin RCC (Connolly, 2002). RCCs, run by feminist collectives, aimed to provide a safe space for women where they could ‘break the silence’ surrounding sexual violence. Over the years, the RCCs became more mainstream as a condition of being awarded funding by local Health Boards. Indeed, the majority of RCCs are now recruiting volunteers and board members without asking them about their feminist perspectives. Though feminist theory has remained an integral part of volunteer training, the feminist structures (collectivism and non-delineation of work) within the services have mostly evaporated.

Ending collective forms of working and eroding the service

In the years following the SAVI report, Health Minister Mary Harney appointed a consultant group to review the sector. Though this resulted in increased funding, it was directly tied to increases in pay and pension contributions according to professionalization, the introduction of hierarchical forms of internal organizational structure. Unsurprisingly, this ended any semblance of more democratic and flat organisational structure. Wage increases were paid in 2009, but, like the rest of the public sector, they were cut by up to 7% the following year. From 2010 onward RCC funding was slashed annually resulting in wage cuts, reduced hours, redundancies and non-replacement policies. In the meantime, due to the wave of reports on institutional abuse and the media attention given to many high profile cases, the number of clients contacting RCCs continued to rise exponentially.

The damaging role of Tusla

In 2014 the sector’s budget allocation was transferred to the newly formed Tusla: Child and Family Agency. Other services for adult survivors of abuse, such as the National Counselling Service and One in Four, were not. In 2014, according to the Irish Independent, just €4.2 million or .03% of the Health Budget was given directly to the 16 RCCs in existence and the Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI). One of the first actions of Tusla was to completely cease funding the RCNI resulting in the loss of a national data collection and a collective voice for survivors. In the 2016 budget, despite an overall increase of €68 million in their 2016 budget, Tusla have told RCCs that only €100,000 of this will reach the 16 services directly despite seven years of cuts and freezes.

Building a service based on ‘worst-practice’?

Nationally, there is little or no connection between current funding and client numbers or even local population. Tusla say they aim to improve this by way of tendering. It is Tusla’s stated intention to change regional RCCs to ‘outreaches’ from the four larger city services through this process. It seems they have not learned from the disastrous policy decision that resulted in ‘Centres of Excellence’ for Cancer Services, which sees people travelling up to six hours for radiation treatment. And of more concern, in the UK it was G4S, a private security company, who won a government tender in 2014 to run services providing medical examinations and counselling for victims of rape and sexual assault in the West Midlands.
serious mental health issues and substance abuse among a significant number of young people who were not directly exposed to the Troubles (O’Neill et al 2014). Although this study confirmed that many people experiencing a trauma related incident were not adversely affected in the long term, it was found that young men from working class areas are more exposed to conflict related legacy issues including threats of violence and enduring paramilitary activity.

Economic Costs and Inequalities

Dorsett (2013) measured Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Northern Ireland against a non-conflicitive region to estimate the economic impact of the Troubles and found a reduction in GDP in Northern Ireland up to 10%.

Health inequalities in Northern Ireland continue to show differences between the health outcomes for those living in the most and least deprived areas (NISRA 2010) with poorer mental health scores (GHQ12) occurring for those living in areas of high deprivation. Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) highlight that the UK is one of the top ranking countries with highest levels of inequalities and these authors argue that unequal societies have high levels of mental health problems and drug use, teenage birth, violence, crime, unequal opportunities for social mobility poorer physical health and life expectancy.

Social Workers and the implementation of cuts

In Northern Ireland new policy direction around personalisation and ‘shift left’ (Transforming Your Care Policy) really means that social workers have to implement service cuts and take the ‘corporate’ line as directed by employers. Social Workers in Adult Services are concerned that they are not working to social work standards due to managing large caseloads with excessive bureaucracy, operating within a ‘resource led’ opposed to ‘needs led’ service (NIASW 2015). Older people who lose services may be at increased risk of physical injury or falls. In a similar vein, attempts to close residential homes and day care facilities were responded to by a public outcry which resulted in a ‘U turn’ in policy direction by Edwin Poots the Health Minister (at that time).
Resilience: A contested concept

Resilience is a contested concept due to concerns that this term is essentially part of the neoliberal mind-set and its associated vocabulary (Garrett, 2015). A counter argument suggested that the more socially progressive resilience literature has moved significantly from an individual psychological focus to the examination of social ecology and wider contextual factors including inequalities and structural issues. The ‘person in environment’ perspective needs to be central to resilience debates so that individual pathologies are not blamed for wider contextual challenges which confront individuals. Hart et al. (2015) argues that resilience research and practice need to come together under a social justice framework to give equal attention to individuals and wider systems. When this framework is applied to social workers in the context of their employing organisations, it could provide meaningful support to those who struggle with demands of the job by helping to better understand oppressive systems and contextual pressures.

What happened to ‘Munro’?

Social work students are trained to recognise and challenge oppression and discrimination but currently many current practitioners feel oppressed by current working conditions with limit their ability to challenge the system due to a constraining neoliberal managerial culture intent on blaming individuals. Eileen Munro (2011) highlighted these concerns and the UK government – at least rhetorically – supported her report on child protection following the death of Baby Peter Connolly. However, her important messages have not been translated into action to support front line staff to do undertake complex and challenging work with the most vulnerable.

References


Political Picture Post-May 2016 Elections

The Scottish National Party (SNP) are the driving force in the Scottish political environment. The election results of the May 2016 election confirm for any interested observers that the ‘torch’ in Scottish politics has passed form Labour to the Nationalists.

One simple set of results paints a vivid picture. In Lanarkshire, the former industrial heartland of Scotland, the SNP had a clean sweep of seats taking all five that were available – gaining three in the process. More concerning for those of us who inhabit the broad left space in Scotland is the resurgence of the Conservatives who will now form the main opposition party to the SNP in the Scottish parliament.

Social Work: Being ‘integrated’ into extinction?

Dominating the professional agenda for social work is the single issue of the integration of health and social care. The word integration hints, in fact, at where concern lies. These circulate around the dangers of social work losing its identity.

Integration as a concept requires some further exploration. Leaving aside the organisational issues involved, bringing both services together in a single integrated service has significant social and cultural implications. It is impossible to see social work as having the same symbolic power as the National Health Service (NHS). The language of health care emphasises the ‘patient’ and, despite some progress, a ‘medical model’ will always be the preferred model of service delivery. The challenge for social work is to preserve the importance of ‘social’ models of health when it enters into the integration arrangements as something of a ‘junior partner’ in terms of budgets, staffing and most importantly in public perception.

The Radical Heritage

Social work in Scotland has a proud radical history exemplified during the miners’ strike of 1984/85. Famously, Strathclyde Regional Council braved opted to provide financial support to striking miners who came close...
bringing down the savage Thatcher government. The actions of senior managers within the Council who approved this supportive practice mirrored the strength of feeling amongst social workers. Most felt strongly there was an urgent need to challenge Thatcher’s rampant neoliberalism and its attack on working class communities.

Changing Times

As a direct consequence of the neoliberal policies championed by Thatcher there is no longer such immediately recognisable cultural points that represent the working class in the same way the miners did. In place of the ‘old’ working class, a new ‘precariat’ has emerged where, because of the nature of their jobs, the defining feature of life is uncertainty about the future. The opportunities for this ‘precariat’ to emerge as a cultural and social power, similar to the miners, are very limited.

A New Social Work Radicalism?

The contemporary literature base provides some insights into a potential direction for the re-emergence of a radical social work tradition. The ‘classics’ can still be seen as valuable: Bailey and Brake’s (1975) Radical Social Work remains a key reference point for those who would see social work as an inherently political activity, but the work of Loïc Wacquant (see also Cummins, 2015; Garrett, 2015) offer an insight into how social work could re-engage with a more radical agenda which draws on politics, sociology and social theory. Doreen Massey and Stuart Hall, both recently deceased, are also significant figures who social workers should try to read and learn from (see, for example, Hall & O’Shea, 2015).

Yet significant obstacles still exist. Despite a firm commitment to social work, the Scottish government has presided over a significant and brutal series of cuts to local authorities budgets. The increased demand on social work services also falls, of course, disproportionately on the poorest and most vulnerable in society.

The spectre of managerialism haunts our profession as newer and more excessive inspection regimes result in resources being diverted from those most in need to meet ever changing organisational demands. Despite devolution, Scotland continues to have to rely on a right-wing neoconservative government in Westminster that is intent on attacking traditional bastions of working class support. For example, the current trade union legislation being considered by Westminster will significantly erode the rights and protections of Scottish workers. However, we need not be entirely downcast! Front line social work staff continues to defend the rights of those most affected by neoliberalism. In this context, the Social Work Action Network has established itself as a powerful and articulate vehicle for Scottish social work and there is evidence of it growth, reach and strength. The battle will continue, in Scotland and elsewhere.

References


VELMA’S VIEW: Speaking truth to power from a very untidy desk on social work’s frontline

Things I liked over the past few months...
The size of Gordon Jeyes’ pension.
Jeez, if I had that I’d never have to use Ryanair ever again!
Italians!! An Italian court has decided that it is no crime to steal food if you are in desperate need. The country’s highest court ruled that the theft of sausage and cheese by a homeless man did not actually constitute a crime because he was in desperate need of nourishment. Let’s keep that in mind in terms of the advice we give to some of our frequently penniless clients. We ought to be thinking of putting some manners on them greedy bastards Tesco’s too! Maybe then they’ll stop attacking the terms and conditions of their workers. Same goes for Dunnes.

Tess Asplund standing her ground, protesting against a neo-fascist scum march in Sweden on May Day. Every time I get a bit politically disenchanted, thinking about our shit new government, I look at this photo and I can feel myself getting a bit
embarrassed but also stronger. Thanks Tess. Love ya girl!

The fact that there is going to be the European Social Work Days of Solidarity with Refugees in June. About feckin’ time, I’d say!

I have to admit she’s a mate of mine and we love going clubbin together, but Muireann Ní Raghallaigh’s piece on migrant children in The Irish Times, in May, was absolutely fabulous!

Driving back from a difficult case conference in February, the beautiful deer that appeared by the Red Cow Roundabout. Maybe I just imagined it??

Ólafur Darri Ólafsson – the big lad who played the chief of police in the Icelandic drama Trapped screened on RTE a few months ago. Swoon! Are there any social work jobs going in Iceland?

**Things I didn’t like over the past few months...**

The fact that we’re all paying for Gordon Jeyes’ pension.

Donald Trump! Surely, even the Americans can’t be so stupid as to vote for pig in a wig! Still, we can’t be too smug. Remember that embarrassing performance from Michael Noonan when Trump landed at Shannon in May 2014. I was so ashamed, for the next fortnight I pretended I was Polish.

The racist thugs who attacked Naqeeb, Abdul and Fazalrahman Ahmadzai, three lads from Afghanistan, near Marley Park – not far from my place – in Dublin. Great to see the community protests against these attacks outside Nutgrove Shopping Centre the other day. Let’s hope the boys in blue go after the racist attackers with the same enthusiasm they went after those protesting against dreary Joan’s visit to Jobstown in November 2014!

The editors of that really expensive Social Work in Ireland book inviting Frances Fitzgerald to launch it at that posh boy club – the ROYAL Irish Academy – in April!! OK, about a million years ago, she was a social worker, but blueshirt Fitzer is still a gung-ho neoliberal and has failed to dismantle the direct provision system.

We hear that Fitzer failed to show up, but Profs – if you are such clever clogs and smarter than all of us – how could you issue the invitation to her??! Hope yous enjoyed the sushi, the ‘fine wines’ and the la-di-dah chitchat anyhow. As a punishment, you should all be locked in the Boole library with none of you being allowed to mention your feckin’ ‘Foucault’ or ‘discourse’ for the rest of the year. And don’t go mentioning your ‘anti-oppressive practice’ to me again or I’ll stick the book where the sun don’t shine!

So-called Fitness to Practice Hearings – Orla, one of my housemates, is a nurse and she was down at the annual INMO conference in Killarney and she says the nurses and midwives are up-in-arms because hearings are being instigated when there is no real evidence of any wrongdoing. They are just a way of keeping them in their place they say, and ensuring nobody ‘rocks the neoliberal boat’. Let’s see what happens when CORU look to develop something similar for us. Evidence from across the water should have us a bit worried. Apparently, a lad in one of them London offices was deregistered because, apparently, he was going into work with smelly socks. (Jeez when I think about our Tony’s socks!). Still, I bet its all giving them Dublin 4 types working for CORU some ideas! Incidentally, do any of you out there know what they actually do with our registration fees?? Niall, in my office, says that CORU stands for ‘Can’t ordinarily really understand’ why he has to give them any money at all. And have you seen some of them luxury cars around the Joyce House carpark on Lombard Street? It certainly has me wondering. Who am I though? Just a girl with a big caseload and – they tell me – a ‘bad attitude’. Anyhow, I got supervision now so see you’s all later then...

The Frontline Editorial Collective (FEC) do not necessarily share all of Velma’s views, but we like her enthusiasm and willingness to contribute to Frontline. Also, her Uncle owns the printing press down in Buttevant which produces our bulletin. She also bakes some gorgeous blueberry muffins and knows her Marx inside-out!
WHAT WE WANTED AND WHAT WE STILL WANT! THE SOCIAL WORK ACTION NETWORK ELECTION 2016 CHARTER

• All social work and probation vacancies must be filled;

• The salaries of newly qualified social workers to be those negotiated with the trade unions. No moves will be made to cut the salaries of new workers, neither should social work students be used to ‘fill the gaps’, acting as temporary substitutes for unfilled, paid posts. Jobsbridge and similar ‘workfare’ schemes to be immediately terminated;

• In order to prevent the continuing displacement and impoverishment of children and their families, the government should begin an immediate programme of building 40,000 social houses over its lifetime in government, as part of an overall strategy to deal with homelessness and the housing crisis.

• Quality public sector home-care services to be drastically increased to enable more elderly people to remain at home, and adequate structures to be put in place to ensure the voices of older people are central to the provision of care packages.

• The full implementation of ‘Vision for Change’ to occur with particular attention being given to the reform of manifestly inadequate addiction services, with specific emphasis on embedding interagency working with people present with multiple and complex needs;

• A nationwide 24-hour social work service, staffed by a dedicated team of practitioners, to be established. This service not be founded on social workers being compelled to fulfil a role in this service on a rota basis;

• Travellers to be recognised as a ‘minority ethnic’ population within the state;

• All prisoners to be guaranteed timely access to a social worker;

• In line with the state’s human rights obligations, emergency measures to be put in place to address the conditions amounting to institutionalised abuse, encountered by children and their families within the ‘direct provision’ system. Children to be safeguarded and protected and their rights, identified in the UN Convention, will be respected. The systemic exclusion of asylum seekers from daily life and civil society should cease.

• The Habitual Resident Condition which is punitive and has prompted hardship and distress to be scrapped;

• Immediate action will be taken to meaningfully address the global refugee crisis;

• Ratification of the UN Declaration on the Rights for People with disabilities will occur.
EUROPEAN SOCIAL WORK DAYS OF SOLIDARITY WITH REFUGEES

4-6 June 2016

Solidarity Opens Borders
11th Annual Social Work Action Network Conference


The Friends Meeting House, 173 Euston Road London, NW1 2AX. 4th June 2016.

Social Work Action Network is a radical campaigning organization of social work and social care practitioners, students, service users, carers and academics, united in our concern that social work and social care activities are being undermined by managerialism, marketization, the stigmatization of service users and welfare cuts. We believe that good social work is a worthwhile activity that can help people address the problems and difficulties in their lives.

This year’s conference is a packed one-day event, reflecting upon a year that has seen increased privatization of both social work education and practice, savage welfare cuts but also increased demands across all sectors for humane and just social policies. It will be an essential opportunity for networking, building hope and demonstrating solidarity.

Plenary 1: Race, Racism and Refugees.
Speakers include Social Work Without Borders and Michael Lavalette.

Speakers include Dr. Terry Murphy, Helen Davies (Barnet Unison) and Tom Robinson (University of Sussex)

Plenary 3: Crisis in Mental Health.
Speakers include Jeremy Weinstein, Peter Beresford and Denise McKenna (Mental Health Resistance Network)

Participants will be invited to debate and contribute to SWAN position statements on the plenary topics. This conference will also formally launch the European Social Work Day of Solidarity with Refugees – UK Convoy occurring on June 5th.

BOOK IN ADVANCE AT:
https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/social-work-action-network-conference-2016-tickets-21466241105