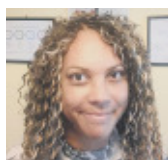


FRIENDS OF THE SCOTSMAN /

Looking for a rewarding career? How about caring for vulnerable youngsters

Working with a care provider who provides support, encouragement and management to develop is incredibly fulfilling, says **Nathalie Antonucci**



As a registered manager supporting vulnerable young people in Scotland, it is a privilege and an honour to be a part of their positive journey, delivering the best quality of care to those we support.

Working in accordance with 'The Promise', ensuring those children and young people within the care system are at the forefront of everything we do, is incredibly rewarding.

With this huge responsibility however comes a number of challenges in many forms. Organisationally we are nothing without our staff team, the people at the very foundation and heart of our care for young people. For my staff this is not a job, it is a vocation, where they are passionate in safeguarding all young people, giving them positive life choices and opportunities to be able to live their life they want to live safely.

Staff recruitment and retention is a major issue in the sector, particularly when we are living in a world of Covid-19, a cost-of-living crisis, Brexit and other factors. This has led to a recognised nationwide shortage of staff in the care service, but I would encourage those with an interest to explore the rewarding opportunities available to work in this sector.

With the pressures and responsibilities of being a manager, it is important to look after the whole mental, emotional health and wellbeing of all staff, remembering to look after yourself as well. It's also important to promote a positive working culture with a good work-life balance to maximise the best productivity from my staff team. We are nothing without our staff and our expectations are high for the rewarding role they are completing.

When managing a service, with the staff being the young person's corporate parents, it can be challenging getting the staff team on board with some ways of work-

ing. Changing from old ways of working is always a challenge, often being met with resistance and differences of opinion. With robust training, mentoring, guiding, support and encouragement this can however be successfully achieved.

Reflection is a great tool I use when managing a service, asking myself several questions. Have I done enough? Have we done enough? Have we made a positive difference? It can be challenging ensuring that the staff team receive up-to-date training, arming them with the necessary skills and knowledge to feel confident in their job role.

We work collaboratively with multi-agencies positively in the 'Team Around the Child' approach, which ensures that children and families who might need a little extra support from professionals receive it. This can be a challenge in terms of following our own policies and procedures in line with other organisations' views and opinions. To achieve this, we build and maintain positive multi-agency working relationships with other professionals, working together to get the best outcome for the young person.

I'm fortunate to have the opportunity and autonomy to manage an established service with full support from my manager and the management team. And I know that there is the opportunity for all staff to develop skills and knowledge further with robust in-house training. There is also the opportunity to acquire further knowledge through access to external training, colleges and universities.

Working with the right care provider, who provides the support, encouragement and management to develop is incredibly rewarding, providing the opportunity to grow professionally with an identifiable career pathway. **Nathalie Antonucci, Residential Manager for Spark of Genius, a member of the Scottish Children's Services Coalition.**

Think again about

Evidence shows that mental disorders are often present with gender dysphoria, write **Dr Anthony Latham, Dr Anne Williams, Dr Calum MacKellar and Dr Angus McKellar**

Unfortunately, the Stage 1 Report on the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill, which was published by the Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee of the Scottish Parliament on the 6 October 2022, has not sufficiently considered the evidence of mental disorders which are often present with gender dysphoria. As a result, the recommendations given by the majority of MSPs preparing the report are unsafe and should be rejected.

Up until now, transgender individuals were given the possibility of changing their birth gender under the UK Gender Recognition Act 2004. To do this, persons must obtain a certificate from a Gender Recognition Panel after having been medically diagnosed with significant dysphoria and lived successfully, for at least two years, in the opposite gender.

However, the majority view on the Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee is now proposing to change the present legislation by removing the requirement for applicants to provide a medical opinion stating that they are affected by gender dysphoria. In addition, it wants to reduce the minimum age of applicants from 18 to 16 years old as well as the period during which they must have lived in their acquired gender before applying from two years to three months. Finally, it wants to abolish the Gender Recognition Panel with applications just being sent to the Registrar General for Scotland. In other words, it would enable individuals to legally change their birth gender without any medical or other evidence.

However, this is unreasonable since gender dysphoria is a medical diag-

nosis and must therefore be associated to biological realities. Moreover, Scottish NHS doctors have a key role in caring for, and supporting, individuals with gender dysphoria since many have coexisting mental disorders. For example, the latest and most comprehensive studies to date (2022) shows that a high prevalence of gender dysphoria/incongruence exists in persons with autism spectrum disorder traits. Moreover, research shows that many children with gender dysphoria have significant psychological and psychosocial vulnerabilities.

Thus, without a medical appraisal, it is very likely that many young persons may embark on risky life-changing procedures which they do not understand. This is all the more concerning since follow-up studies indicate that, overall, the distress experienced by young people affected by gender dysphoria disappears in about 85 per cent of cases either before or early in puberty, though the rates in studies vary widely.

The majority of MSPs on the Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee believe that the new proposals will be more humane and less intrusive, but we would take issue with the implication that current interactions between individuals and their GPs are in any way inhumane and intrusive. It is also very concerning that the Stage 1 Report from the Committee often only mentioned the 40 witnesses (of which only one seemed to be actively involved in medical practice), who were selected (on what basis?) to give oral evidence. This is surprising since the written submissions, which did address the biomedical evidence, was extensive.

In summary, the majority posi-



tion in the report from the Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee is unworthy of the high expectations of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish people since it is unreasonable, unprofessional, and does not sufficiently address the biomedical evidence. Moreover, if the Scottish Parliament does accept the majority view of the Committee in removing the requirement of a medical opinion before gender transitioning takes

gender reform

place, this will certainly lead to some young persons being harmed.

Dr Anthony Latham (Retired GP), Chair of the of Scottish Council on Human Bioethics, Dr Anne Williams (GP), Vice-Chair of the Scottish Council on Human Bioethics, Dr Calum MacKellar (Biomedical Ethicist), Director of Research of the Scottish Council on Human Bioethics and Dr Angus McKellar (GP)

↑ Holyrood's proposals would enable individuals to legally change their birth gender without any medical or other evidence



range of sports, including gymnastics, trampolining, swimming, diving, tennis, football, and climbing, at any time throughout the year. With the opening of the new Meadowbank Sports Centre and the introduction of athletics coaching, children can also now take their first steps on the running track and follow in the footsteps of Tokyo 2020 Olympians Josh Kerr and Jake Wightman who started their journey there.

Carly's five-year-old daughter Zara goes to Entry Level Gymnastics coaching at Drumbrae Leisure Centre, having started Gym Nippers there when she was at nursery.

"Zara always looks forward to a Thursday when she can go to her gymnastics class. She loves learning new skills like doing forward rolls. She's always very proud of her achievements and enjoys coming home to show us

what she's learned in class. It's very important to me that my children can enjoy an active childhood. As well as the obvious benefits to their physical health, there are so many other positives that come with being active.

"Going along to gymnastics has boosted Zara's confidence, helped her to learn new skills, improved her ability to listen and follow instructions, and helped her to form friendships."

We are proud to help children like Zara keep active over the win-



Radical solutions to change our nation for the better

From promoting stable families to protecting civil liberties, we need a vibrant vision to inform policy-making in Scotland, writes **Stuart Weir**



"Is this working for you?!" This fraught, rhetorical question was addressed to a cantankerous press room by the character CJ Cregg in an episode of US series *The West Wing*. It's not unlike the question some in Scottish society are expressing today, given the shape of our nation. Few would describe today's Scotland as a place of flourishing—a nation that is working exactly as it should be. Allow me with broad brush strokes to tease out radical changes that could affect Scotland for the better.

First, imagine a Scotland where human life is truly cherished. Whether a human being is not yet born or barely able to function as an adult, they belong. Because of the inherent dignity we all have as human beings created in the image of God, it matters not whether we are single or attached, what our politics are like, or if we have lived our whole lives in a single place. And contrary to the views of some throughout history, those who are vulnerable are of special significance. Societies that care for and cherish the weak are blessed by God.

Imagine a nation that is made up of stable families. Scotland needs an increase of families that stick together and are committed to one another. We all know our families aren't perfect. Currently, however, Scotland is beset with widespread family breakdown. This results in various other negative consequences. What if there was a renewed sense that commitment is paramount? What if people took their marriages or partnerships so seriously that they worked tooth and nail to protect them? Children would be especially helped by this.

Thirdly, imagine a Scotland where justice is truly served and the oppressed are truly set free from

oppression. A just society will thoroughly address what is dark and wrong. Justice is only justice when humans view one another as dignified and precious, rather than commodities. In this alternative Scotland, police strategy and Procurators Fiscal would do more to entrap those who seek to enslave humans for the purposes of exploitation. And they would place these aggressors behind bars, deterring any tempted by such a dark endeavour.

Fourthly, imagine a society that truly values women. A culture that teaches men to consider women as equals and not just as sexual objects. It goes without saying that pornography is undermining good and healthy relationships and compounding existing problems.

Finally, imagine a Scotland that defends civil liberties—where there is no soft totalitarianism being imposed through various measures. There will always be unpopular opinions, but they should be allowed to exist. All views need to be debated and probed. So-called 'cancel-culture' helps nobody.

Societal flourishing will only truly be manifested in Scotland when each person is leading their life well, when the circumstances of people's lives are genuinely good, and when life also feels good—in other words, when people are joyful. Working towards the objectives outlined above at a government and grassroots level can bring us closer to this brighter picture. A vibrant vision can inform policy making, which in turn will lead to new laws and customs, enshrining positive change. Ultimately, this can only come about through a fresh encounter with heaven.

Stuart Weir is National Director for Christian charity CARE for Scotland



HOW TO BECOME A FRIEND

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Help your children to stay active during the winter months

Taking part in sport boosts health and supports a child's personal growth, says **Angela McCowan**

As the days get shorter, the leaves on the trees turn golden, and we dig our woolly jumpers out from the back of the wardrobe, our natural instinct can be to retreat to our sofas to watch the telly with a cup of tea. As tempting as it is to go into hibernation, it's important that we keep ourselves and our children moving throughout the winter months.

Being active is part of getting the best start in life. If children find an activity they love, whether that's kicking a ball about in the park, riding their bike at weekends or attending a local dance class, the more likely they are to grow up to become happy, healthy and active teenagers.

But taking part in sport and physical activity doesn't just protect their health and wellbeing. Spending time

with other children, challenging themselves in a safe space, and channelling their energy into something positive can all support personal growth at an important stage in a child's life. It can boost their confidence, increase resilience, teach them to work in teams and share, and even help them to become more focused and productive learners.

Edinburgh Leisure is a charity committed to creating opportunities for everyone in Edinburgh to keep active and well. Even when the weather is typically Scottish, we offer plenty of fun ways for children to get active, such as soft play, Clip 'n Climb at the Edinburgh International Climbing Arena, our adult and baby classes, holidays clubs, and sports coaching.

Our sports coaching programme offers opportunities for babies, toddler and children to get involved in a