

It could be verse – social worker's story from practice inspires poem

A social worker's moving story from practice told at a Westminster parliamentary reception has been immortalised in a poem.

The account by Eddie O'Hara, a consultant social work manager in Birmingham, aimed to highlight the emotional impact of social work and the importance of relationships.

BASW member Peter Unwin, also at the event in March to mark World Social Work Day, was so moved by Eddie's words he penned *The Big Man With the Tear in his Eye*.

"I saw this big bloke suited and booted walk up on the stage and talk with authority about systems, the destruction of services but then give a very powerful account of professional boundaries."

Eddie described a recent experience of trying to help a client struggling with the bedtime behaviour of her adopted five-year-old son.

Speaking to *PSW*, he said: "I spoke of a distressed little boy who would be hyper stimulated, who would kick, lash out, laugh in frenzy, spit and urinate on his adoptive mother.

"I described how difficult the bedtime routine was and how one night I offered to call at the home to give the female adopter some moral support. She had hurt her leg and could not contain the child and take him to bed.



Eddie O'Hara

"As a social worker for 30 years, a teacher for 17 years and a parent of three children, I joked how hard could it be?"

"How wrong I was – after 20 minutes, I was sweating, tired, upset, covered in spit, and had been hit several times. Eventually the boy ran out of steam. He asked me if I loved him and I said yes and kissed him before he fell asleep.

"Afterwards, I came down the stairs with tears in my eyes and feeling completely at a loss about what had just happened. The little lad had touched my heart and still does."

Dr Unwin, a senior lecturer in social work at the University of Worcester was also touched by the account.

"It was the juxtaposition of seeing this big authoritative guy with a big presence telling us this story. I have seen so many managers that are just systems people who have lost all that passion.

"He actually kissed this child but it was so authentic it choked me up and I thought a lot about it since. It struck me as a great inspiration that after all these years he still has got his integrity."

Asked how he felt about being the subject of the poem, Eddie said: "I was very touched that I had at least one person listening being able to convey how I felt on the night."

The Big Man with the Tear in his Eye

In London town the room fell quiet
As the Big Man took the stage
So many years in social work
He spoke of cuts and rage
Of workmates many on the dole
Now left to rot n' roll
And politicians far removed
From trouble on the streets
And managers who lost themselves
At sea in balance sheets
And then he told a story
Which all of us must heed
About a little foster boy
A child in desperate need
The Big Man helped him find a home
As he'd often done before
But this young boy stayed in his heart
He never closed the door
The Big Man got a call one night
Could he please come round?
The little boy was so upset
His mother feeling down
The Big Man did not hesitate
His heart ruled, not his head
"Who loves me?" cried the little boy
"Your Mummy does", he said
But this did not placate the boy
His tears they still did flow
"And you, Big Man, do you love me?"
He had a need to know
"Yes, I love you" said Big Man
A tear came to his eye
He kissed the child
And held the child
Before he said goodbye
The London speakers all spoke well
But there was only one who cried
All those years in social work?
Nobody asked why.

Three steps to best practice on restricting people's liberty

A GUIDE to ensure restrictive interventions in health and social care are safe, effective, person-centred, ethical and legal has been produced, with input from BASW and NIASW.

Called *Three Steps to Positive Practice* the document, published by the Royal College of

Nursing, aims to address concern that some professionals may be putting unlawful restrictions on people's liberty.

Restrictive practices are defined as practice that limit a person's movement, day-to-day activity or function delivery".

The Three Steps to Positive Practice are:

- Consider and plan – consider if the planned intervention is a restrictive practice using the definition, consider other less restrictive measures, and if the planned intervention is therapeutic in its intention
- Implement the safeguards – use a rights-based approach within professional accountability and legal frameworks to ensure any restrictive practice is in the person's best interests
- Review and reflect – ensure regular and timely reviews of the use of a restrictive practice is built into a therapeutic plan to meet the person's needs, including reduction or removing the restrictive practice as soon as possible and appropriate use of professional reflection support systems that consider its impact.



To see the guide go to
www.basw.co.uk/news/article/?id=1458