

Many people have asked about what social workers do in their contribution to the COVID 19 Pandemic. I offer this reflection for your consideration:

### **Social Work, COVID 19 and Death**

A reflection.....

Death is the end of this life's journey. Some believe that is the end and there is no more, some believe that there is life after death, and some are not certain of which option to assume. What we know is that we accept each person's right to hold their belief and understanding and that belief must be treated with dignity and respect.

As a social worker, like all my colleagues, I have experienced death in my personal and professional life. Sometimes death comes naturally at the end of a long and well lived life, sometimes it comes tragically and abruptly after a disaster, by force of nature. Sometimes life is taken by another human being in murder, war or by the person themselves. As a human being we know what it feels like as we go through the stages of grief in losing someone we are close to, because death happens in all our lives. As a social worker our path is different as we journey with someone else, in the way that person needs us, as they take their own personal journey through grief. These tend to be where there is a belief that life was taken too soon.

But we may also be the person who is there when death takes place, maybe with someone who has no family or friends to hold their hand. The isolated, the homeless, the asylum seeker, the person far from home.

Years after disasters like Lockerbie, where a bomb detonated on an aircraft resulting in the deaths of 270 people, all the passengers on the plane and 11 on the ground, or the Dunblane School where 18 people were shot dead, social workers who worked with the bereaved were themselves still dealing with the aftermath of the trauma that accompanied the deaths. The trauma takes on a particular significance in that the cause of death is faceless. There are many similar accounts from around the world.

As I have described my experience of the ending of life from an individual perspective, I have been reflecting on a concept that I was introduced to in China in 2017, at the IFSW Asia Pacific Conference from colleagues steeped in indigenous knowledge about the importance of community grief, [Robyn Corrigan](#) and Shannon Pakura, Co-ordinators of the IFSW Indigenous Committee. It invited me to think about the importance of the strength of communities as they too go through grief. In this current

pandemic revising our paradigm to include community grief alongside our knowledge, skills and wisdom of individual grief may help us help the world as it recovers from the tragedy and trauma of COVID 19.

The speed with which COVID 19 has engulfed the world, has halted the global economic machinery and driven people back into national rather than global responses. It has exposed the fragility of global governance that has been determined by the small number of wealthy nations in clubs like the G8, G20 and dominated at the UN, including the Security Council.

We live in a global community and we need to deal with this global pandemic with solutions that are co-designed and co-produced beyond our national borders. We have set ourselves a vision in 2010 with our Global Agenda – defining the Role of Social Work in Social Development. In a time where we are now in a different economic environment we must reflect and rethink what kind of world will our children and grandchildren want to live in. Our part must include using our skills and knowledge, not just in what we do with others but recognise that we must not be so self-effacing that we forget self-care, so that we are fit to travel with people through the trauma of death and build strength in our communities; so that we can achieve our dreams.

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