

Reflecting times

SDSS Members, friends and colleagues

Change is in the air and, as some of you may already know, I will leave LCiL and SDSS at the end of March 2021. Both organisations are ready for the change and the new opportunities it brings. For SDSS, after a transition period that, thanks to the remaining staff, saw the smooth continuation of its activities during the entire summer period, including the publication of the important and timely 'My Support, My Choice' report, co-produced with the ALLIANCE, the organisation can now move forward with a complete and strong staff team. In addition to this, Angela Mullen has accepted to chair the organisation before the position is more permanently filled. As for LCiL, Lyn Pornaro, currently SDS Development Programme Co-ordinator and Deputy CEO, will become the full time CEO on 1 March 2021.

Emerging new times offer us an opportunity to reflect on the past and recognise that it has taken the commitment of many people, the trust of organisations, and the vision of a fair number of us, to make SDSS the essential organisation it is today.

Our organisation experienced two critical periods before entering an exciting new one at present. Back in 2006-07, SDCPSO was in disarray and had no real direction (nor management) to offer to the information officer supposed to work with member-organisations. Already true to itself, however, the then smaller membership was clearly articulating their needs as independent and user-led organisations supporting disabled people wanting more control over their care and support.



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These member-organisations, meeting on 8 November 2007, wanted a national organisation able to support them and help them build their capacity to deliver and influence locally, while also placing that organisation in a position to work at policy level, nationally. They had a clear message.

As the SDCPSO constitution was not yet ratified, and enough individuals from a number of Disabled People Organisations (DPOs) got together to transform this message into a vision, SDSS was born. It was solidly rooted in the Independent Living Movement and very keen to engage fully with the emerging SDS agenda, keeping it focused on Independent Living, and on the rights of disabled people to live a decent life, in the communities of their choice.

This first phase, the solid base from which SDSS could fully grow in the future, would not have been possible without the time, focus and energy of the management committee and the staff (which grew from one to two!). It would not have happened either, without the ear, as well as the money, of the Scottish Executive. It would not have been worth the overtime and heavy workload if it wasn't for the keen participation of member-organisations in structured and precious capacity building events that SDSS was offering.

In February 2012, as this first period was closing, SDSS organised its first major conference, already cheekily asking in its title 'Are you being served?!' Most importantly, as Michael Mathieson, Minister for Public Health attended, participants from all sectors, were asked to think about and suggest:

- How independent support organisations can support/improve 'the system' through offering information, training, reflective practice to individuals, to staff or to other stakeholders?



- At what point should people be referred to support organisations or services?
- How disabled people support organisations, such as members of SDSS, can be key assets to your organisation's strategies and plans?

Nine years ago, before the Act, SDSS was already eager to engage in a collaborative approach, to bring to reality the vision that SDS could only work if DPOs, local authorities and other organisations organised themselves and their systems around the needs of the people using care/support.

As the two members of staff who had achieved so much left, and with increased visibility, proven credibility and the trust (as well as more funding) of Scottish Government, now actively working towards the SDS legislation, SDSS was ready to take off fully and blossom into the even more professional and far-reaching organisation that it has become today.

During the Spring of 2012, recognising the need to encourage and support community groups and emerging organisations, to communicate effectively with a wider range of stakeholders, while bringing to the heart of SDS policy-making the voice of Disabled People Support Organisations, SDSS recruited a brand new team of four staff. Moving together in one office, the staff team (with some staff changes on the way) strengthened and developed further the vision, the reach and the influence of our organisation, to be continued today. So much could be written about this, so much has been achieved and how proud and privileged I am to have been part of this journey right from the beginning.

To conclude and to illustrate the quality of this journey I must mention the birth of ILF-Scotland.



You will remember that in 2014, the UK Government decided to allocate to each of the four British nations their proportion of the Independent Living Fund (ILF), to be managed, more or less, as they wished. Scottish Government decided to consult on the future management of the Fund.

For the Independent Living Movement it was crucial to demonstrate:

- the value and well thought wishes of disabled people and carers (i.e. fund remaining independent and within original aims)
- its capacity to co-produce this significant change in a close working partnership with Government and co-ordinated involvement of all stakeholders.

Fully aware of the importance of the times, and continuously liaising within the Independent Living Movement, SDSS suggested an action plan. Collaborating with DPOs and other stakeholders, it led local consultations towards coherent responses. As the voice of the people became loud and clear, a future possible model of an independent ILF in Scotland was visibly emerging. To the joy of thousands of people, the Scottish Government decided to listen and agreed to set up an independent ILF. Not only this, it suggested that SDSS hosts, and I would co-manage, the Project Manager setting it up. The Scottish Government demonstrated a genuine commitment to co-producing this new organisation and I was invited to co-chair, with Maureen Bruce, Scottish Government Deputy Director, the steering group finalising the scope/status, and recruit senior staff to the new organisation, before it took its own path.

ILF-Scotland was set up successfully and on time and represents today a model and an important reference in the ways of managing social care.



Today SDSS has so much more to offer and contribute. As many of us are currently dissecting and understanding the recently published Review of Adult Social Care report, I know that SDSS is one of the organisations best placed to support a real change, to convey the voice of the people and their organisations and to co-create the ideas, policies, changes that can enable the right environment for people to live their best lives. I'm just happy to have been part of this beginning, and I would like to thank all of you who have been part of my journey. I am grateful for your support, friendship and infectious desire to build a better society.

Florence Garabedian (departing!)

Chair of SDSS

Chief Executive of LCiL

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