

Professor Andrew Rowland's Victor Neale Memorial keynote

9 May 2016

Thanks for inviting me to talk to you today. I'm going to take you on a journey. A journey that involves professionals, children and young people from around the globe. And a journey that I hope will encourage you to Travel to Learn and Return to Inspire. That journey will help you to understand how, with a few ideas, with a great deal of enthusiasm and with commitment to succeed we can all use our ideas for the benefit of the communities we serve.

By engaging with other communities be they in our own countries or around the globe and by fully involving children and young people in decisions that are made about them to become decisions that are made with them, we will better protect children and young people in the future. But we can't do that sat behind our desks – we have to engage with children and young people in an environment that they consider to be suitable to talk to us.

Child abuse and neglect has always occurred. In Roman times children were considered as chattels – items of property that their Father's could sell, use and, looking back into history, abuse. We know that 50% of one year olds are hit weekly by a parent here in the UK. We know that each week at least one child dies from cruelty and we know that sexual abuse is rife amongst communities.

Right now, right here children and young people around the world are being abused and neglected by the very communities who ought to be caring for them, ought to be helping them to develop and ought to be providing a stable environment in which they can grow up to lead the lives that they wish to.

But the stark reality of the situation is that tens of thousands of children and young people throughout the UK are suffering from abuse and neglect. So, what are we going to do about it? The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust is an amazing organisation I've had the privilege of being associated with since the latter part of 2013. A charity set up on the death of Sir Winston Churchill in 1965, you have already heard from Julia Weston how they now fund around 150 British Citizens each

year to travel abroad, gain new skills and knowledge and to return to recommend how our society can change for the better here in the UK.

Or, put more simply, as Winnie the Pooh said to Piglet, you can't stay in your corner of the forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to do to them sometimes.

On a journey that took me 35043 miles, to nine different cities in six different countries I have had the most amazing professional experiences that have, I believe, changed my career forever. In my report, Living on a Railway Line, that was launched at MediaCityUK, I've made key recommendations to turn the tide of child abuse and neglect in the UK and overseas. Recommendations that I'm really delighted have been grasped by a number of organisations and we are starting to see implementation.

It was a community, whilst I was travelling in Cambodia, that inspired the name of my report because some communities are physically living on a railway line and some communities and individuals back here in the UK are metaphorically living on that railway line never sure where the next insult to their emotional or physical integrity is going to come from.

The communities I've visited, the people I've met and the experiences I have had have very clearly taught me that we have to do something different here in the UK if we are ever going to make a difference to the lives of children and young people.

But understanding the key reasons in society WHY children are abused and neglected is the key to preventing it.

Looking critically at the themes that have been shown about the abuse and exploitation of children and young people, am I really suggesting that they are transferrable to here in the UK? Am I really suggesting that children here might be being sold?

Well, maybe not for \$300 as you have just seen. But you only have to look at some of the learning from, for example, the child sexual exploitation cases in the UK to realise that these themes are not a million miles, not a thousand miles, not even a few miles away from the parallels we have seen in cases here. I have no doubt that children and young people ARE being used as a form of currency here in the UK and that is something that our society has to put a stop to.

The learning from work overseas has been immense ever since I launched our partnership between Salford University, my NHS Trust and M'Lop Tapang a social development organisation in Cambodia. That partnership, to improve the health and social care of children and young people living on and around the streets and beaches of Southern Cambodia, continues to go from strength to strength.

When I first announced the partnership we have been developing a colleague of mine said, “well, that’s a one way partnership I suppose” seemingly indicating that knowledge transfer would be unidirectional – from the UK to Cambodia.

He couldn’t have been more wrong.

M'Lop Tapang envisions an environment where all children and young people are allowed to grow up in their families feeling safe, healthy and happy; a society where all children are respected and treated equally; a community where all children are given choices about their future.

M'Lop Tapang provides a complete range of services for children, young people and families where statutory services are absent and there is no possibility of their introduction.

I think that there are seven key steps to better protecting children and young people in the future. At the core of many of these ideas is your role as a community leader – not just a clinician – and I’ll come back to that later.

As I’m talking to you I’d like you to be thinking about what it is that you can do, either in your own communities or as professionals, to implement these seven steps to reducing abuse that I’ve formed

from my work abroad.

Taking things in no particular order, let's start with improving education.

Education is one of the most important things that we as a community can do to try and change the way that our society views children and young people.

We know that missing from education is a risk factor for child sexual exploitation, but we need to take a step back and consider in much more general terms, the impact that increased educational levels can have on decreasing adverse opinions communities may have about children and young people so that they are seen more properly as the valuable members of our community that they are.

Because education really is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.

Increasing employment in our societies is something that leads to better economic and social development of those societies and, consequently, over time less poverty and less need for children to be involved in abusive situations through no fault of their own.

And increasing employment is something the sustainable team at M'Lop Tapang in Cambodia are fully aware of. With 200 staff, of whom 197 are from Cambodia, they have introduced a new programme in the region

In the case of Cambodia it is providing employment for parents so that their children can go to school, which helps to not only increase educational levels but also reset the social norm from not being in education or employment to the future where education and employment will go hand in hand, meaning that children and young people are less likely to be in situations where they can be harmed and are more likely to have developed resilience to protect themselves from risks in the future.

Poverty isn't something that just affects children abroad,

it is at the root of dealing with the chronic neglect that exists in our societies; neglect that has to be resolved for those same societies to become safe places for children to grow up in the future.

Poverty has to be tackled to give communities the economic foundation to build a better chance of a successful future and to give the children and young people in it every chance of happiness, every chance of good health and every chance of protection from harm.

We've got to remember that to some people beaches, for example, Otress Beach in Southern Cambodia, is a place where there are calm waters, golden sand and idyllic sunsets. To others, it is their home.

I genuinely believe that if we were to decrease chronic neglect in society, and to fully recognise protecting children as a public health priority rather than child protection being a social problem, we would make a real difference.

Organisations working in the community on child abuse prevention programmes should incorporate material related to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and provide community education, to adults as well as children and young people, about recognising these ACEs and minimising them in our societies.

For it really is easier to build strong children than to repair broken adults.

Whether or not you recognise it, you all – as clinicians working on behalf of some of the most vulnerable members of society – have a key role to play as a community leader.

Whether this is undertaking community outreach work or rural clinics for people who often cannot access healthcare resources in a clinic, hospital or health centre. Here those clinics are in the jungle but the concept can apply wherever you practice.

The point being that sometimes you have to take your skills to where the community are prepared to engage with them.

It is not just your role in medicine that is important. You, as clinicians – often respected by the community – have a key role to play to change, in the future, how those communities view children and young people living within them.

Although child labour has fallen by around one third, there are still 168 million children and young people around the world forced to work. I've seen at first hand through my work in Cambodia the effects that children having to work has on them and their communities.

Throughout the world neonatal and childhood mortality is still too high. But the learning from resource-poorer communities, who don't have the facilities that we have access to here in the UK, can really teach us skills of rapid service improvement. The can-do attitude of the multi-professional staff at M'Lop Tapang is inspiring in its own right and if we could only transfer a little part of that back to here in the UK our health and social care system would be dramatically more efficient and sustainable.

The significant negative consequences of violence against children, using Cambodia as but one example, is a humanitarian disaster; but aside from the health and social consequences of such attacks on the physical and emotional integrity of some of the most vulnerable members of our society, the economic costs are staggering.

Fully recognising that those consequences will be having deleterious effects all throughout the world is a starting point to try and change the minds of those with political and financial responsibility who may be reluctant to invest new money now to better protect children and young people in the

future, instead of face the economic costs for generations to come of failing to act today.

Building a better society for the future is easier, and more successful, if the building blocks are intact than it is if we are trying to rebuild a community after it has fallen.

Respecting children and young people for the valuable citizens that they are is one of the fundamentals tenants a society must abide by if we are to make any headway into reducing the abuse and neglect that they suffer from, wherever they live in the world.

Providing children and young people with the social scaffolding and social resilience to grow up stronger, and more able to launch a defence against the physical and emotional attacks that come their way, gives an opportunity for the whole community to network together to better protect the children within it and recognising the community-specific risk factors that exist within the individual society, which place children and young people at risk of harm of all kinds, is crucial to be able to address the issues.

That requires us to take a much more local approach to the specific vulnerabilities that exist within our communities and to tackle them at a grass roots level. As my talk draws to a close I want to reflect on how some children and young people have really grasped the challenge of making a difference to our society themselves, where I work in the UK.

I want to introduce you a group of children and young people from Greater Manchester who are tackling the problem of child sexual exploitation themselves. That's Woolf and the other presenters standing next to me in the photo – and you'll hear more from them just now.

Children and Young People, being supported by adults, and demonstrating the crucial role that peer to peer education has in building a brighter future for them all.

No matter what anybody tells you, it is words and ideas, such as the words and ideas of those

children and young people, that can and will change the world.

What about making our communities safer?

Fully engaging with children and young people – so that they can co-design services aimed at them is key to helping them to protect themselves in the community in the present and the future.

There is so much we can learn from countries around the world who have introduced new schemes to protect children and young people – including the ChildSafe movement. A scheme launched in South East Asia that really gets back to basics to enable the community to better protect the children and young people who live within it.

If we could replicate that in the UK ultimately we could create so many more communities where children and young people are actively protected from forms of abuse by the community itself.

Through proper engagement, real engagement not tokenism, we can work collaboratively with children and young people to involve them in decisions that are relevant to them and, in time, as children and young people develop more resilience to the factors acting against them in society, over time, the communities in which they live and the society in which these communities are placed will, ultimately, become a safer place for those children to grow up in.

Every child should have every chance of good health, every chance of happiness and every chance of protection from harm. Recognising the role you can play is vital to make our society a healthier, safer and happier place for children and young people to grow up in the future.

But what has all of my experienced taught me personally?

I said at the start that the award of my Churchill Fellowship, and the experiences that I have had since then, have changed my professional life for the better in a way that I could never have imagined. And having returned bursting with ideas of things we can do to make our society a healthier, safer and happier place for children to grow up in

I have now founded a brand new registered charity in the North West of England. A charity that has four great trustees who are as committed as I am to making our communities, both here and in Cambodia a better place for children and young people to live and prosper.

A charity that will support us delivering outreach healthcare in Cambodia, a charity that will help us to improve the development of children with disabilities by providing sensory room facilities, a charity that will allow children and young people themselves to remind the rest of the community that they still need protection and different forms of support even when others within that community fail to recognise them as still children, and a charity that will help to draw attention to, and combat, the adverse health consequences of homelessness.

With values that are crucial to ensure we act with equity and diversity, having just launched and become registered in October 2015, I very much hope that 2016 will be a good year for all of us and that we will be looking forward to exciting fundraising times ahead. With a goal to relieve sickness and preserve health

The knowledge I've learned from abroad and applying it here in the UK can and will make a huge difference to children and young people living side by side in our communities with us. Being involved in this kind of work is vital to make our society a healthier, safer and happier place for children and young people to grow up in the future.

Because, what IS the use of living if it be not to strive for noble causes and to make this muddle world a better place for those who will live in it after we are gone?

Now as I end I want us to remember that the majority of children and young people in our communities are not abused. But what the focus of our efforts should be is to facilitate children and young people leading the lives that they wish to supported by communities and families.

Recognising the early intervention that can improve health care experiences for children... Whether that is by providing outreach support to rural communities in Cambodia, by providing clinical and educational support, such as through our monthly skype clinics that we have now set up with the team in Sianoukville, or by transferring and applying that learning from abroad to here in the UK, it is very clear to me that we can make a huge difference to the lives of children and young people in two geographically distant areas, but socially connected communities, and I know, from a very personal view, that my involvement with the team in Cambodia has developed me in a way I could never have imagined.

None of this would have been possible without the support of The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust and the Association of Paediatric Emergency.

The day may dawn when fair play, love for one's fellow human beings, respect for justice and freedom and intolerance of injustice will enable generations, in the future, to emerge from the lives that they lead and would wish to change,

Until then, it is global health work and bidirectional learning that will continue to improve the health and social care of children and young people in our communities and the global society in which they are placed.

Work that will, over time, help us to really turn the tide of child abuse and neglect in the UK and overseas, so that, in the future, in some small way, those people who are the present and the future of our global society will be able to grow up, leading the lives that **they** wish to lead, better protected and in better health.

Thank you very much.