

Final Speech of the 5th international Carers Conference, Leeds 2010
Sunday 10 July

Given by Imelda Redmond, CEO Carers UK

Good morning conference participants and people listening into this conference live via Carers World radio. I am delighted to see so many of you here this morning looking as fresh and eager as you did when you registered on Thursday afternoon. We have had some outstanding contribution from a host of people throughout the conference and this morning's presentations from Ben Page from Ipsos Mori and professor Heinz Wolff continued to entertain and challenge us.

My job is to pull together some of the main themes of the conference, to highlight the learning and to look to the future. I will try to do justice to that task, though with 180 presenters I will only be able to skim of much of the brilliance. There has been so much learning from this event for us that it will take us sometime before we are able to assimilate it all.

So what were the big messages of this conference? For me is that around the world we are all being challenged by our changing demographics, our old solutions are no longer fit for purpose. Those old solutions, whether that is the State will provide in Nordic countries, the family with support from the State will manage as in English speaking Western countries such as UK, Australia and Ireland, or the family looks after themselves as in India and the developing world are no longer viable. Our systems are cracking under the strain of new demands and expectations. The exciting part of the conference for me was the opportunity to have conversations not only on the people with dementia but also the audience.

The live streaming of this conference on the internet has been new and exciting. In the words of one of the participants from Carers World Radio –“this has bought carer participation to a new level.” It was lovely having people who could not attend the conference. I truly enjoyed the fact that people who weren't at the conference were able to put their questions to the speakers. The people in the chat room formed friendships from across the world. During the opening session on Friday 230 people listened in and 60 people discussed the conference and the speeches in the chat room.

We have learnt so much, there is so much to think about, so much new ideas to integrate. Please keep in touch; let us know about anything you do as a result of this conference. The conference crossed boundaries, not only national but other boundaries. In the UK carers and carers issues are seen as the province of the Department of Health, they are reduced to how do we support these people, how to put a sticking plaster on by giving them a break or offering them a support group. The message from this conference has been loud and clear, carers and caring is everyone's business. We had fabulous presentations on improving the built environment, making more the environment more accessible and so increasing independence, reducing strain in families. We had presentations on technology and solutions that can aid people's quality of life; we have also shared good practice and innovation in how to support carers on the ground in practical ways.

Heinz Wolff reminded us that care is about people and contact with people and gadgets are about communication and enabling. This conference has brought together many

people from many countries that usually don't speak to each other but we have also crossed other boundaries. We have had contributions from people in design and technology, social care, researchers, people working at the coal face with carers. It is rare that we get the opportunity to spend time together and cross fertilise ideas.

We also brought together of Secretary of State and a Princess together in one place, two for the price of one!

Our delegates have come from the private sector, public sector, voluntary sector and universities all talking about the issues, seeking solutions exercising our imagination with passion, humour, enthusiasm and stamina.

I was incredibly touched by the presentations by Anup from India and Ernest from Kenya, where there is no formal system of support people and people are left to look after themselves often in very difficult circumstances. It was humbling and put some of our concerns into perspective. By that I don't mean we should expect less – no indeed in the UK we need hot up our fight for more resources to support families affected by disability, but that we can learn from each other. Hopefully India, China, and Kenya can learn from the good and the bad in Western countries and we can learn from them about support and creating meaningful communities of support that breakdown isolation. Support networks that are fit for today, not handing back to some golden age.

As we went through the conference the four main themes:

- Employment
- Health, Social Care and well being
- Funding
- Design and Technology and the built environment.

The messages from these themes became clear and stronger. We need to look at things with new eyes.

I hope this conference has provided you with an opportunity to make new connections, to see issues and solutions in a different light.

I was struck by example of France, where they are using the growth in demand for services as an opportunity to create thousands of new jobs and as part of the economic resilience strategy. Developing and increasing the care market during a recession, knocking squarely on the head the view that we hear too, there is no money for growth or development during a recession. Just because there is a recession doesn't mean that the needs of our most vulnerable citizens go away.

I have been struck by the innovation of good practice, whether that was the book your own break in Hertfordshire or Troopy Programme in Northern Territory in Australia, they provide breaks to aboriginal carers. The area they cover is 21,000 square miles and their risk assessment checks to see if there are any crocodiles!

I enjoyed hearing about the innovations in social networking and I know we are on the break of something big, next time we meet I am sure many of these will be mainstreamed.

One key question that came up again and again was how can we stop technological solutions being controlled by the few, how do we get them to the mass market and will it come soon?

Who could not have been moved by Paro our robot seal and the obvious positive impact it had on us all here in the hall and the very moving videos we saw of the calming impact it had on people with dementia.

Over the course of the last three days there have been over 180 presentations, thousands of questions asked, millions of peals of and millions of ideas sent along trillions of synapse. New friendships and collaborations have been formed and the international community that comes together to look at how we can recognise, honour and improve the lives of carers and those they care for has been strengthened.

If you could indulge me I would like to say a few thank yous.

Firstly I would like to say a big thank you to my colleagues at Carers UK, they have done a sterling job, they have really put their backs into this conference and I am extremely proud of the team and what they have achieved. I would like to single out Madeleine Starr for special thanks; Madeleine was responsible for putting the programme together and identifying such brilliant speakers from around the world. I would also like to extend my tanks to our colleagues back at the office. They have managed our anxieties and provided a huge amount of support. They will now have to listen to our stories for next few weeks, sorry!

We couldn't put together a programme like this without the advice of our international committee, Joan Hughes from Australia, Gail Hunt from USA, Rob Anderson from Eurocarers and Laurie Hilsigen from New Zealand. Thank you for your quick turn around of ideas and advice.

Thank you also all pour reviewers. Teams of people from across the world reviewed abstracts and gave us their candid views.

I would also like to thank Neil Stewarts Associate, the conference organisers with a particular thanks to Juliet and mark; you have been a pleasure to work with

And finally I would like to thank all of you for your enthusiasm, good will, engagement and imagination

Safe journey home, and for those staying in the UK for a holiday have a wonderful time