

The background is a dark blue gradient with a subtle pattern of small white dots. Overlaid on this are several circular and semi-circular elements in a lighter blue color. These include solid lines, dashed lines, and arrows pointing in various directions. A prominent feature is a large circular scale on the left side, with numerical markings from 140 to 260 in increments of 10. The scale is partially obscured by other circular patterns.

# SOCIAL WORK IN MENTAL HEALTH: OUR RADICAL RESPONSIBILITIES

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# GLOBAL DEFINITION OF THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION

- “Social work is a **practice-based profession** and an **academic discipline** that promotes **social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people**. Principles of **social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities** are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, **social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing**.
- The above definition may be **amplified at national and/or regional levels**”.
  - (IFSW 2014)

# WHO DEFINES THE PROFESSION OF SOCIAL WORK?

- Statutes and national policy
- Employers
- Supervisors
- Regulators
- The media and public
- The people we serve
- The institutions of the 'profession'
- Academics
- Ourselves
- A professional has specific/reserved knowledge and expertise, gained through a specified education and ongoing training, meeting specified standards and meeting strict codes of ethics and moral obligations (providing a public good)

# THE PROFESSIONALISM CONUNDRUM

- Schmidt: Disciplined Minds (2000) **A critical look at salaried professionals and the soul battering system that shapes their lives**
  - **He advocated for the ethical imperative of radical awareness and action amongst professionals within institutions**
- ‘The system of education and employment works to redefine who you are in the deepest sense, pushing you away from developing and acting upon your own vision and guiding ideas. Hence, if you want to stand for something and avoid vanishing as an independent force in society, you have not choice but to resist’ (p280)

# THE PROFESSIONALISM CONUNDRUM

- The pros and cons of being 'a profession'
  - Standards vs responsiveness
  - Accountability to higher authority vs accountability to service user
  - Education/training vs creative and experiential learning
  - Status vs solidarity
  - Career vs commitment

# WE ARE A PROFESSION.....

- .....driven by our own ethics, evidence, commitments, research, identity

# THE IMPORTANCE OF INDEPENDENT PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS IN SOCIAL WORK

- Part of the International Federation of Social Workers
- International codes of ethics
- Self-definition from within the profession
- Focus on rights, justice and citizen experience
- Creating a form of 'professionalism' that navigates 'insider/outsider' position
- Facilitates collective voice, peer learning, confidence, identity, international and national learning, continuity and responsive change, independence from government ideology, a focus on people, evidence, ethics.

# THE SOCIAL WORKER AS AGITATOR

- *Every social worker is almost certain to be also an agitator. If he or she learns certain facts and believes that they are due to certain causes which are beyond the power of an individual to remove, it is impossible to rest contented with the limited amount of good that can be done by following old methods ...*
- *The word 'agitator' is distasteful to many, it calls up a picture of a person who is rather unbalanced, honest perhaps, but wrong headed, possibly dishonest, troubling the waters with a view to fishing in them for his own benefit. ....Nevertheless the agitator has a most important part to play in social progress, .....The agitator of one age is recognised by the next as a prophet; our fathers may have stoned him but we whiten his sepulchre.*

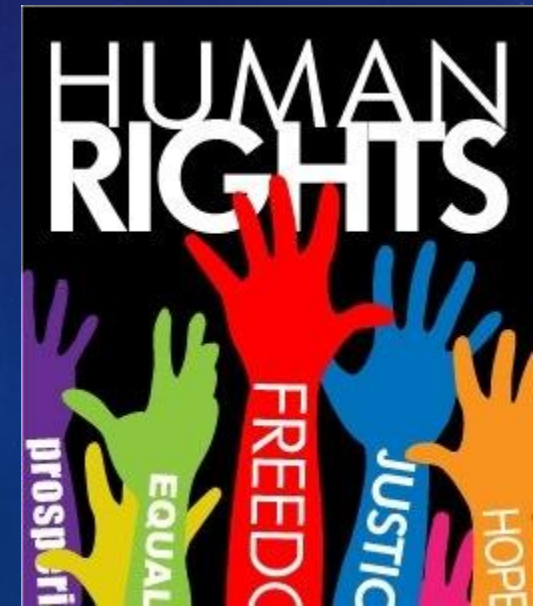
*Clement Attlee, 1920 'The Social Worker'*



# SOCIAL WORK IN MENTAL HEALTH 2021?

## Leading within the mental health system

- **Human rights and justice focus**
- **Co-production and recovery commitment**
- **Promoting social approaches, interventions and evidence**
- **Recognising, preventing and addressing trauma**
- **Tackling social determinants of poor mental health**
- **Challenging inequality, discrimination, stigma**



# WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION – GLOBAL STRATEGY 2013-2020

- Universal health coverage
- Human rights and compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- Evidence-based practice
- Life course approach
- Multisectoral approach
- Empowerment of persons with mental disorders and psychosocial disabilities

- *Equality is the best therapy*

# SOCIAL WORK IN MENTAL HEALTH: PRACTICE IMPERATIVES

- Rights practices

- Anti-stigma
- Citizenship
- Advocacy
- Equal access
- Self-determination: hope, control, opportunity
- Co-production
- Solidarity
- Legal expertise

- Social practices

- Family, group and community interventions/skills
- Systemic approaches
- Relationship focus
- Strengths /assets focus
- Anti-poverty social work
- Employment support
- Educational approaches
- Life span approach
- Trauma informed

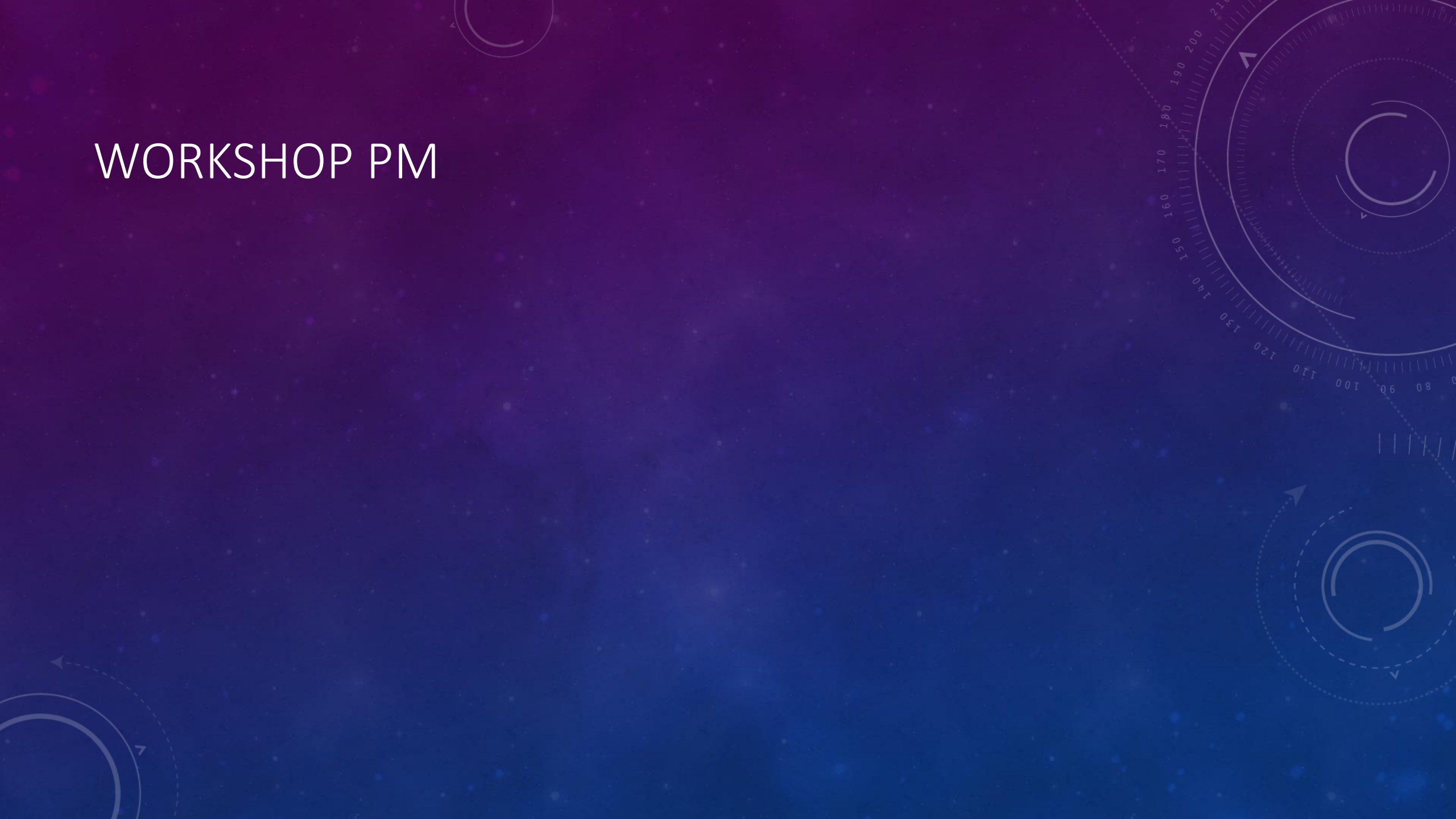
# SOCIAL WORK IN MENTAL HEALTH: RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE IMPERATIVES

- Funding for more MHSW research
- Engaging more practitioners in research and evaluation (at all levels)
- Developing and expanding methodologies
- Increasing research and evidence awareness amongst practitioners and managers/supervisors
- Promoting evidence-informed practice
- Increasing opportunities for practitioner-researcher –teacher roles (e.g. through Teaching Partnerships)
- Teaching research skills to practitioners

# SOCIAL WORK IN MENTAL HEALTH: POLICY IMPERATIVES

- **Supply and retention of social workers:** In adults and mental health social work
- **Post-qualification:** Developing and maintaining a CPD framework for mental health that includes supply of AMHPs/ASWs/MHOs (MH Act roles across UK) AND promotes rest of MH social work
- **Funding of pre- and post-qualifying training:** Diverse and unequal qualifying funding streams in England compared to rest of UK. No nationally funded PQ programme in England. Social workers in NHS not eligible for same PQ funding as other professional employees from Health Education England
- **Integration with health:** Ensuring social work remains distinctive within integrated services and resolving role of local authority vs NHS in statute
- **Mental Health Act reform England:** Underscoring role of social work and social care
- **Austerity:** Impact of on mental health wider cuts in social care, welfare system, affordable/social housing, voluntary sector, wider municipal services and employment insecurity

# WORKSHOP PM



# HOPE

ADAPTED FROM *10 ESSENTIALS SOCIAL WORKERS MUST KNOW ABOUT HOPE*,  
CLARK E.J. THE NEW SOCIAL WORKER, WINTER 2017

- Social workers facilitate and hold hope and action from hope
- Hope is a way of thinking, feeling and acting.
- Hope is based in reality, it expands perspectives and increases persistence.
- Hope is dynamic and requires reframing to find new mutual goals
- There is always something to hope for
- People define their own hopes – not the practitioner
- There can be false reassurances but not ‘false hopes’
- Professional hope is an antidote to burn out



# WE HAVE HAD TO REMIND OURSELVES OF OUR RELATIONSHIP-BASED ROOTS.....

- *Social work is essentially about relationships: first and foremost with service users; but also with social work colleagues and colleagues from other professional backgrounds – health, education, police, to name a few; with the organisational context and wider policy context of practice; and finally with ‘the self’, or oneself. These relationships do not exist in isolation from each other and are interrelated and exert influences on each other.*

From: Wilson K., Ruch G., Lymbery M. and Cooper, A. (2011) (eds) Social Work: An introduction to contemporary practice, Pearson, Harlow, pp. 7–8.

- Thank you [Ruth.allen@basw.co.uk](mailto:Ruth.allen@basw.co.uk)