



Pictured above: Ian Welsh, Rehab's Director of UK Services.

Eastbourne to Inverness... and back

AN WELSH, REHAB'S DIRECTOR

of UK Services, is a man with a lot of miles under his belt. Ian's interview with *Rehab News* took place over the phone as he made his way to TBG Learning in Clapham, South London. It began on the train and ended up on Clapham Common with Ian apologising for being slightly out of breath as he walked and talked at a fast-moving pace. Talk about a real workout!

So just how does a former deputy head teacher, chief executive of Kilmarnock football club and a member of the Scottish Parliament for Ayr, find himself working in an organisation dedicated to supporting people with disabilities and others who face social and economic exclusion?

“I have always had a keen interest in disability issues. My son is disabled and my wife had a brain injury so I had first-hand experience of life in that world and was particularly conscious of the needs of people with disabilities and how these are addressed. As a teacher, I saw very clearly the need for additional supports for people with disabilities; as a politician, I advocated on behalf of people with disabilities; and, even in Kilmarnock football club, we had a community coaching programme which encouraged disabled people to get involved. So really taking up the post with the Rehab Group in the UK was very much a natural progression of all of that.”

So, how has the organisation developed over recent years?

“In 2001, I joined what was then known as Rehab Scotland as Chief Executive. Over the years, we have worked hard to build the profile of the organisation among politicians and funders and to build partnerships with local authorities, health boards, Primary Care Trusts, and so on.

“Where initially we specialised in vocational rehabilitation in Scotland, we expanded into areas of spinal injury, learning disability and mental health, and diversified into supported employment and education and learning. These developments accelerated as we assumed responsibility for a number of organisations working in the social care and skills arenas.

“We now offer a broad array of services to a wide-ranging group of people – from those with low to high dependency needs, to those with a disability who have never had a job as well as those who have just been made redundant. Two examples of how we are now recognised as expert in what we do by the Scottish Government are the recent invitation to Momentum to co-ordinate a campaign around the protection of vulnerable adults and a separate grant and loan award of £500,000 for the purchase of our new head office.”

It must be extremely difficult to manage a diverse UK-wide organisation which stretches from Eastbourne in England to Inverness in Scotland, an organisation that has over 1,200 staff and an annual turnover of £37m?

“When I joined the Group, colleagues were relatively isolated within organisationally and geographically disparate services. Today, that has changed. We still have a wide range of services of different kinds in different locations but we now have a much greater sense of coherence and cohesion both within individual parts of the organisation and within the wider organisation. People are coming together under the umbrella of Rehab Group in the UK; they are working collectively, sharing experiences and are so much better linked in with each other. Our staff are driven and committed to excellence and know that together, we are stronger. It is important that we use this strength to deliver for the people who need us.”





In the context of the current increasingly-deteriorating economic climate, how much of an impact is this having for Rehab Group in the UK?

“Of course, our funding world is vulnerable and we face what is possibly the biggest economic challenge we have seen for the past 100 years. There are huge constraints on public spending and on charitable giving and the European funding regime is coming to an end over the next few years. We are constantly having to battle to hold onto income streams and to establish new ones and all this set against a backdrop of ever-changing funding, regulatory and contractual landscapes.

“But having said that, and it is important to recognise the difficulties that we face, we are, to some extent, bucking the prevailing trends. For example, in the Chaseley Trust in Eastbourne, Sue Wyatt and her team has recently embarked on a significant outreach project which will see the development of independent living accommodation for people with high-dependency needs in the heart of the community. In Scotland, we have a number of service developments underway with the commencement of a job introduction pilot in Haven Baillieston with

North Lanarkshire Council and the development by Momentum Skills, under Dougie Taylor, of our assistive technology centre in Glasgow city with the Glasgow Community Planning Partnership.

“Meanwhile, in TBG learning, we have opened new centres in Gillingham, Ealing Common, Southall and Birmingham, and the South London Centre has just completed a major move while still delivering terrific training outcomes. So you see, we’re not standing still at all. In fact, as a result of the greater co-ordination of the different parts of the organisation under the Rehab Group in the UK umbrella, we are now in a much better place so that when things start to pick up again, we will be very much ready and waiting to seize opportunities and to capitalise on those.”

So with all of this going on, what does Ian do when he gets the chance to draw breath? “I enjoy life with my partner, Elizabeth, spend time with sons Stuart and Sean and their partners, Nicola and Lynn, watch Kilmarnock FC and read history.”

Oh, and Ian also likes to work out on the running machines in the gym. I guess there’s no surprise there! ■