Shaping Our Lives Newsletter
Winter 2012 Issue 19

Shaping Our Lives takes the UK lead in European funded project looking at service user involvement in social work education.

Shaping Our Lives is pleased to announce that it is the UK lead on a Leonardo EU funded project looking at service user participation and involvement in social work education. The project is titled PowerUs: The Social Work Learning Partnership. PowerUs is an international partnership consisting of Norwegian, Swedish and British service users and university representatives with the purpose of developing service user participation in social worker education.

Empowerment of service users is, today, one of the main objectives in social policy as well as in the training of social workers. The concept is also fundamental in the international definition of social work adopted by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW).

In practice, users are mainly regarded as persons with flaws and problems. Roles are constructed...
which maintain a distance between the social workers and service users.

This project hopes to develop greater understanding and greater participation of service users to address these issues. It aims to highlight the importance of the contribution that a fully integrated and supported service user involvement, as experts by experience, can bring, to a better appreciation of what social care actually means. The group has set up a Facebook page. Search for PowerUs and join in the debate. On the PowerUs website you can access information from the participating countries.

- In Sweden there is a Rainbow Quality System (RQS) which is a quality assurance system for user-driven organizations engaged in rehabilitation for people with drug problems.
- In May 2012 a Norwegian Network to promote user involvement in Social work education was established. The network is a national branch of PowerUs. A working committee for the network was elected and a web page for the network will be established in the near future where information from different projects will be collected.

By building national and international support structures and networks we hope to overcome some of the difficulties we’ve had to find sustainable ways to finance and mainstream service user involvement in education, research and practice development of social work. We are focusing on the following issues:

- The British experience of requirements. Learning from history
- The Scandinavian experiences of integrated courses. Comparative approach
- How to deal with the devaluation of experiential knowledge.
- Mobilizing service users into the academic world.

In the last two years three more workshops have been held in Norway, Sweden and London. Work groups have developed within the network, that focus on a number of key issues.

We have a comparative approach as we develop new knowledge between countries, service users and academics in partnership.

The result of the workgroups will be presented in conferences and in written material. Within the workgroups there is a focus on good practice and we learn from each other, taking home new ideas to our everyday practice.
The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) launched changes in the way it works with service users and carers earlier this year.

SCIE is an independent charity that works to improve social care in England and Wales by developing evidence on good practice and training materials. It has a strong track record of involving service users and carers in its work and has close ties with Shaping Our Lives.

An independent evaluation of SCIE’s participation work and Partners’ Council last year recommended a move to a co-production model of participation. Co-production was first used as a term in the 1970s and is increasingly being used by government bodies such as the Department of Health and the Office for Disability Issue, and by other organisations such as the Think Local, Act Personal partnership. SCIE sees the key difference between participation and co-production being a move from service users and carers being consulted and brought into work when it is already underway to being full partners and carry out-creators.

Pete Fleishman, SCIE’s Head of Participation says “We are going to ensure that this a real change in the way SCIE works and that all staff understand this new way of working.”

SCIE is drawing up a new statement of principles and will be reviewing all aspects of its work and project management. A new Co-production Network with 30 members from organisations representing users and carers and other groups such as Black and Minority Ethnic and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community groups met for the first time in June. The members are now actively involved in much of SCIE’s work.

SCIE is launching a charter for co-production in the autumn and will be reviewing all aspects of its work and project management to ensure they meet the requirements of the charter.

New SCIE resources

SCIE’s participation team has also launched several new resources that will be particularly relevant to service users:

At a glance 50: Reimbursements and payments for service user involvement
Covers important changes to the rules around payments to service users who receive benefits

Keep in touch through http://www.scie.org.uk/topic/keyissues/participation
There can now be little question that the Coalition government’s intention is to take us even further along the neoliberal road - to radical regressive redistribution, the residualisation of state support services and greatly increased social and political inequality. And equally, there is no doubt that it is poor, old and disabled people that the Coalition cuts are hurting most. But instead of lying down and dying, many of them are finding new ways of challenging the government - to such an extent that in the end they may turn out to be the key architects of its defeat. This is epitomised by the Spartacus report, Responsible Reform, a major new challenge to the government’s welfare reform proposals. This report was entirely written, researched, funded and supported by sick and disabled people, their friends and carers. Its publication has gained high visibility and widespread support, ranging from The Guardian to the Daily Mail, which ran the headline, ‘We’re all desperate for welfare reform, Mr Cameron, but hiding the truth is not the way to achieve it’. The report has already helped in the inflicting of several Lords defeats for the government’s welfare bill.

Disabled people have been targeted in two ways - through benefits ‘reform’, and through the reduction in local authority services that many depend on. The government’s benefits ‘reform’ campaign has directly affected many disabled people and service users - in its determination to reduce the numbers on benefits through imposing ceilings and time limits, and through its increasingly arbitrary and harsh assessment and review procedures. This campaign has also backed up the need for ‘reform’ with a highly hostile and stigmatising media campaign against disabled and long-term sick benefit claimants.

Speaking for ourselves: the collectivism of disabled people and service users

Where once powerless people could at least count on having others on their side, this no longer applies. There is a strong sense among those under attack that powerful people won’t speak up for them. As one carer wrote to me: ‘As no one famous or in an official position has put their head above the parapet and told the truth about the welfare reforms - we must do it ourselves’.

In fact, though generally framed in terms of dependency by the Coalition government, disabled people and service users have a long modern history of collective action, going back as far as the late 1960s. Starting with the disabled people’s movement, we have seen the development of movements of mental health service users survivors, people with learning difficulties, older people and people living with HIV/AIDS. These have been based on the key principles of valuing people’s own first-hand experience and experiential knowledge, and speaking and acting for themselves.
Shaping Our Lives

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The social model of disability represents a rejection of the paternalistic medicalised approach on which the old welfare state rested. It distinguishes between people’s perceived physical, sensory and intellectual impairments and the negative social reaction to them, which is described as disability. From this flowed the philosophy of independent living, and an associated movement which spread rapidly through North America to the UK and Europe.

The key principle of independent living is that disabled people and other service users should have the support they need, and access to mainstream opportunities, in order to live their lives on as equal terms as possible to non-disabled people. Service users are blogging, vlogging, podcasting, tweeting and communing within their own Facebook groups. More and more they are both a physical and virtual presence, from flash mobs to pickets and demonstrations. These are not isolated instances but the vanguard of new kinds of activism and collective action. Check out Black Triangle, Carer Watch, the Broken of Britain, Diary of A Benefits Scrounger, the Hardest Hit Campaign. Then there is the Crutch Collective who picketed Atos, protesting against their Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) reviews; and People First Lambeth, a group of people with learning difficulties who recently launched a judicial review against their local council for ending their funding.

This is no cosy responding to official consultations, but engagement with the mainstream political process, and new forms of direct action. Service users and their movements are opposing this government. But they are fighting against the welfare state past, as well as a beckoning neoliberal future.

They are campaigning for something very different - a democratic society, which treats all forms of diversity with respect, including issues of age and impairment, rather than seeking to divide and rule. Such a society would be based on the values of the social model of disability and independent living, rather than one that assigns vulnerability or imposes dependence.

From,” vulnerable to vanguard: challenging the Coalition”

This is an extract and edited piece by Peter Beresford from the e book Welfare Reform .The dread of things to come.

Available to download free on the notice board at www.solnetwork.org.uk
WIAS (Women’s independent alcohol support) is a group of women who met through a research project to find out what women need as support with alcohol issues.

The most helpful part for us was discovering and sharing the things which we found distressing, and our many ways of coping with these.

Now we are setting up our own web site so that women can share their experiences – including what has been helpful for them, and what they would like to see happen for themselves and for other women in the future.

WIAS has now been commissioned to conduct a series of telephone interviews of women with alcohol issues in Devon and Cornwall, to find out what they see their needs as being, what has been particularly helpful for them, and what they would like to see happen for themselves and other women in the future. The findings, due out in spring 2013, will be made widely available and it is hoped that a variety of new ways forward will develop. These may include a telephone helpline, an interactive internet forum, and a variety of publications.

If you are interested, then email us at contact@wiaswomen.org.uk
www.wiaswomen.org.uk

Recently the government published a White Paper and Draft Bill called “Caring for our Future”. The White Paper promises to give more choice and control to service users. Shaping Our Lives has been asked by the National Skills Academy for Social Care to talk to service users and disabled people about your views.

Who should attend?
If you have experience of social care services and wish to discuss how you think service users could be better involved then please come along.

All participants will also be entered into a free prize draw to win a £50 retail voucher of your choice.

If you can’t attend the consultation
Please complete the questionnaire. All completed questionnaires received by 5pm on Friday 23rd November will be entered into a free prize draw to win a £50 retail voucher of your choice.

For more information please contact Becki Meakin:
Email: becki@shapingourlives.org.uk

Date: Wednesday 21st November 2012
Time: Arrive 11am for an Finish at 2.30pm. Lunch is included.
Venue: Room C, SCOPE, 6 Market Road, London, N7 9PW.
Older And Out

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<th><strong>Age Concern Central Lancashire’s new lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) support project ‘Older and Out’, has received funding from the Big Lottery Fund Reaching Communities to continue its pioneering work in this area for five years.</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Drew Dewing-Drake LGBT project officer for ‘Older and Out’ said; &quot;This is fantastic news for us. As a charity we are dependent on grants to maintain our very well used LGBT services. Many older LGBT people have to cope with the impact of life-long exposure to stigma. During their life span, homosexuality was defined as both a crime and a mental disorder. ‘Trans’ people still live with the stigma of ‘Gender Identity Disorder’ and experience harassment, physical and verbal abuse&quot;.”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Drew continued; ‘This year has seen an increase in the number of people contacting us for support, including many from outside Central Lancashire and having a secure grant for 5 years means that we can continue to develop and grow in line with demand.’</strong></td>
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<td><strong>‘Older and Out’ is a specialist services run by Age Concern Central Lancashire for older LGBT people, it provides a range of services, including, health promotion, anti-stigma activities, befriending and service user participation and older LGBT awareness training to service providers.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>The funding, which is to be spread over the next five years will also be used to cascade and develop its existing service throughout Lancashire.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Anyone seeking support and information or looking to volunteer for the ‘Older and Out’ project should contact LGBT project officer Drew Dewing-Drake on 01772 552862</strong></td>
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Service user controlled SVI (Sandwell Visually Impaired) in partnership with the local authority library service have pioneered the introduction of a touch typing scheme in each of their 19 libraries to enable all visitors to learn how to touch type and progress to perfect their skill.

The aim is to have at least one Azabat touch typing training CD retained and available throughout the opening hours in each library and to make available further CD copies to be loaned out as one may loan a book. Scheme costs are equally shared between the 2 partners. SVI achieves its contribution by seeking grant aid and sponsorship.

With the increasing emphasis being placed on people to become more able to use computers and to access the internet, SVI set about meeting the need of their visually impaired peers in a way that raised awareness beyond the confines and constraints of the local independent living centre (ILC) and was inclusive of the wider community. Sandwell Library Services were keen to extend the range of services they could offer and have proved to be excellent partners. The scheme is managed by SVI. It is labour intensive so implementation has been incremental. Sandwell is composed of 6 former autonomous towns which retain their differences. This made it easy to establish the service in each on a ‘one at a time’ basis. It also enabled SVI to raise the £3,000 (its half share of the total cost) to promote the scheme in each of the 6 towns.

It works like this. SVI invites interest from its members residing in the chosen locality. This normally results with between 10 and 20 responding. Volunteer buddies are paired with each learner for a 10 week programme of 1 hour sessions preceded by and ended with a half day induction and evaluation respectively. Volunteer and library space constraints limit numbers to 5 per session. Buddies are encouraged to help their paired learner for periods outside the set sessions. Library staff are also encouraged to be active participants to help promote the scheme and assist visitors use the software. Light refreshments are provided for the half day sessions and full travel costs are met for all participants.

Not surprisingly significant additional outcomes have been achieved. Several people trained in the early schemes have bought their own computers and some have opted to become buddies to new trainees. Travel costs have lowered as the sessions progress as the confidence of trainees grows, resulting with greater use being made of public transport or walking to the venue. And friendships have been forged and nourished which in part addresses the isolation faced by many disabled people.

This has proven to be an exciting awareness building enterprise, mainstreaming an opportunity to the visually impaired and sighted community on equal terms.
It avoids the silo effect of providing for a disabled community in a separate place and it is a resource that is both valuable and popular judged by the interest shown by library visitors.

Graham Price
Management Board member of SOL (Shaping Our Lives).
Management Committee member of SVI (Sandwell Visually Impaired)
October 2012

Foot Notes
SVI is a 100% service user controlled volunteer group, supported by Sandwell council with 2 seconded employees, both of whom are visually impaired. Born in 2004 with 12 members SVI has grown to number in excess of 500 today. Their website is at Sandwell Visually Impaired.org.uk

Azabat Software is a trade name (developed by Steve Crawford). More information can be obtained by visiting: http://www.azabat.co.uk/about.html
CD’s cost £30.00 each; £20 if purchased in packs of 10.
They are produced in 2 stages; initial and advanced.

SWAN conference 2013 at South Bank University

SWAN conference 2013
Friday 12th and Saturday 13th April 2013

Against the backdrop of increasing cuts and rising inequality social workers, service users, carers, care workers, social work students and educators are coming together to fight back. The Social Work Action Network (SWAN) promotes a model of social work and care practice which is rooted in the value of social justice.

The 8th SWAN National Conference will debate how we can resist cuts to social work and care services and other attacks on the welfare state including the abolition of disability living allowance, increased workfare and the closure of youth services. SWAN is delighted to announce that this year's conference will be held in London, the first time a national conference has been held in the city.

The conference will bring together activists from all parts of the UK and from around the world to discuss the fight against austerity and to develop collective, sustainable alternatives. In particular, it will provide workers, service users and carers with an opportunity to share strategies in the struggle against cuts and marketisation of services, and to challenge the hardship these create.

More information on the website:
www.socialworkfuture.org
Groupwork
Call for papers for a special issue:
The voice of service users in groupwork

This special issue will consider the service users’ perspective on involvement in social groupwork.

We are particularly interested in service user led groups and in contributions from service users themselves. We recognise that ‘service user’ is not an internationally recognised phrase. We see it as including: people who use services, people with lived experience, survivors, consumers, experts by experience, and people who are eligible to receive services.

The special issue will be co-edited by Prof Peter Beresford OBE (Centre for Citizen Participation, Brunel University and Shaping Our Lives), with regular Co-Editor Jennie Fleming (Centre for Social Action, De Montfort University). We welcome theoretical papers, case studies and critical and reflective accounts of experiences in practice. Possible topics could include:
• NEW approaches for campaigning in difficult economic and political times;
• Implications of social media for service users and groupwork;
• Groupwork and seldom heard voices;
• Collaboration between different groups of people.

If you would like to contribute an article or to discuss an idea before submission, you should contact Peter or Jennie as soon as possible. They will be happy to discuss ideas for contributions in advance. Submissions will go through the journal’s normal refereeing process. Proposals not accepted for the special issue, can be considered for inclusion in general editions of the journal, providing the work is relevant to the Journal and they meet the standard required.

Please send proposals of up to 500 words or contact Peter or Jennie by 1st December.
Peter Beresford: peter.beresford3@btopenworld.com
Jennie Fleming: jfleming@dmu.ac.uk

We are able to offer limited support for service user involvement in producing full papers, please contact Jennie for more details on the above e mail address.
Ecdp (Essex coalition of disabled people) is an Essex-based organisation run by and for disabled people with a long and well-established history of working to enhance the lives of disabled people within the Essex community.

In partnership with Jobcentre Plus and the private sector group MITIE, Ecdp is delighted to announce a ground-breaking work experience training programme designed to offer unemployed disabled individuals the opportunity to participate in meaningful work placements to give them the drive, experience and confidence needed to get into paid employment.

The programme is called ‘Essex Unite’ and is a commitment between the partners to offer bespoke training, delivered flexibly at the right pace for 18 disabled individuals. It is an 8 week programme which will include a pre-placement week offering a number of training courses such as, how to deliver good customer service, how to develop leadership skills and how to manage health and stress levels. It also includes 6 weeks of valuable work experience, with participants being matched with appropriate employers in order to gain the right level of experience to support them back into work.

Following the work placement, individuals will participate in a post programme transition week which will include CV and job interview workshops.

For three months after the programme, Ecdp will continue to support Essex Unite participants to ensure that they build on their experience and capitalize on employment opportunities.

What is unique about Essex Unite is that it is a peer to peer led programme, with disabled individuals supporting other disabled individuals to achieve their aspirations and life goals.

The success of ‘Essex Unite’ depends on developing new partnership opportunities with organisations which share our ambitions to nurture talent and provide an equal chance for all. Ecdp has already secured a number of work placement commitments from a variety of private, public and third sector stakeholders but there is more work to do to ensure the programme has a lasting legacy. With ‘Essex Unite’ the goal is to develop a new model of co-operation between the public and private sector to tackle social problems at a local level. Building on the well-established principles of corporate social responsibility, Ecdp believe this innovative and creative training programme will not only enhance the private and public sectors understanding of disability but ultimately lead to higher retention rates, greater productivity and better community relations.

www.ecdp.org.uk
Shaping Our Lives National User Network is a national user controlled, independent organisation, ‘think tank’ and network that was started in 1996. It wants to see a society that is equal and fair where all people have the same opportunities, choices, rights and responsibilities, a society where people have choice and control over the way they live and the support services they use.

What are our aims?

- to support the development of local user involvement that aims to deliver better outcomes for service users
- to give a shared voice to user controlled organisations
- to facilitate service user involvement at a national level
- to work across all user groups in an equal and accessible manner
- to improve the quality of support people receive
- to enable groups to link to other user controlled organisations
- to develop links with worldwide international user controlled organisations

This newsletter is available in different formats on request.