"*Grasping the thistle*"
working together for user and carer involvement in social work education

Workshop Report

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Grasping the Thistle Workshop
Perth Concert Hall, 19 March 2008

"Real voices are very powerful – service users' and carers' stories are often more effective than 'lecturing' ".
(comment from the workshop)

Whether you agree fully with the above quote, or not, it set the tone for what was a very useful and enjoyable workshop held by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) on behalf of Scottish Voices, and attended by about 80 people from across Scotland. Its aim was to create the opportunity for people who use services and carers to get involved in social work education. During the workshop we heard a lot of such "stories" which moved the audience and demonstrated the importance of hearing "real" experiences to students who will be our future social workers.

The main purpose of the "Grasping the Thistle" workshop was to show how people who use social work services, and people who are carers, contribute to training social work students in Scottish universities. It also aimed to make people more aware of the activities of Scottish Voices and what helps the good practice they offer.

A planning group organised the event which included representatives from Paisley University (now called University of West of Scotland), Edinburgh University, Robert Gordon University, Adam Smith College, The Today Group, the Scottish Social Services Learning Networks as well as Scottish Voices and the SSSC.

The morning session was a series of presentations mainly by people who use services and carers from 6 of the 8 universities, each demonstrating the wide range of activities they are now involved in including selecting students, teaching and assessing students' work. In the afternoon there were small group discussions each looking at a different important issue, such as "what are the boundaries of my involvement?" and "what kind of support can I expect from the university if I become involved?"

At the end of the workshop, people fed back their main points in the large group and these were all collected along with the notes gathered in the smaller discussion groups. These notes form the basis of this short feedback report.

Evaluation – what did you think of the workshop?

Only 21 people filled in the evaluation sheet but here is what they told us.

Question1: How would you rate the following aspects of this event?

	excellent	good	fair	poor
Pre-event information	1	12	4	2
Event content	9	12	1	
Presentations	8	12	1	
Group discussions	11	5	3	
Booking Process	5	8	2	

Question 2: Can you suggest improvements to any of the above?

- Needs to be more accessible (language/pictures) to people of **all** abilities.

- Earlier information prior to event – but this is just nit picking.

- Equal Service User/Carer and paid staff facilitation – everything still a bit tokenistic. More planning from Scottish Voices.

- While I understand the use of the cards to keep time for morning presentation, feel this was very off-putting for the individual speakers – clock/watch on lectern may have been less intrusive.

- Didn't receive questions of break-out sessions beforehand, so no choice of allocation.

Question 3: Did the event meet your expectations?

- Yes, I think exceeded the expectations I had.

- Surpassed my expectations - extremely good.

- Very good.

- Yes (5 responses).

- Gave me some ideas on how to take this forward in my particular role.

- Mostly.

- Was more inclusive of service users and carers than I thought it would be – but be clear about your target audience. Was it people working in social work education **or** service users and carers?

- I had no expectations but really enjoyed the event.

- Did not have any as I've never been to one before.

- Yes, it was very interesting to hear what the various universities have in place regarding service user/carer involvement.

- Yes, provided insight/information to help development of involvement in my organisation.

Question 4: What would you like to happen next?

- A follow up - perhaps piece of research to look at what service users/carers would like in terms of their representation.

- A report to be compiled and any relevant findings acted upon.

- To get more ARK services users and tenants involved with Scottish Voices and to get the opportunity to work with Scottish Voices in order to do so.

- Involve other groups apart from Scottish Voices who are engaged in this process already eg SUCIG (Service User & Carers Involvement Group Glasgow).

- Stirling University representation on Scottish Voices and events and good practice showing what others are about. (handwriting difficult to decipher).

- Look at doing a full 2 or 3 day conference on some of the key themes. Need to focus on students with disabilities (or other areas of need/interest) wanting to come into social care.

- Contact/working groups to meet to share good practice – possibly linked to geographical area.

- Would be interested in feedback on how this event will change the future.

- Stronger links/influence of various groups (HEIs and others) across Scotland.

- I would hope to take this forward with my team and go on to make a difference.

- Feedback.

- Revolution!

- More involvement across the board.

- I would like to get involved with Scottish Voices and maybe eventually do some work with social work students.

We also heard informally that while most people attending enjoyed the catering very much, a few found the food too "fussy" and would have preferred plainer sandwiches. The venue was popular for public transport and for those driving, although it was pointed out that there are not many trains from Edinburgh to Perth.

Feedback comments from the small group discussions

The small group feedback can be grouped into a number of themes which are all listed below with the accompanying comments as they were given on the day.

1. **Real and meaningful representation** – what does this feel like? Partnership carries responsibilities and means you have to be accountable, just as social workers should be accountable for their actions and reports. Being labelled as a service user means that there are sometimes power imbalances.

2. **Capacity building** – This can be about investment in our activities, growing confidence and expertise, building up good backup support so that experience can be handed on. It can also mean being offered personal development eg in use of technology, or other awards to try for in order to gain qualifications.

3. **Recognition** – This comes in many forms, there is no single way of being recognised and rewarded. Payment with flexible, responsive systems and in a way that acknowledges the time and resources involved in this activity would help, including statutory paid leave. The benefits system hampers this and should be targeted. Recognition can also be about being given status as a valued contributor, and being treated as an equal. Recognition is about being listened to, and not having assumptions made, particularly about individual need. Recognition also means seeing that both sides benefit from this activity.

4. **Supports – what helps?** - Feeling secure, particularly if students are visiting your home, or if you are having to travel, and having good "ground rules" from the university to refer to and be guided by. Feeling supported, someone to meet and greet you when you arrive at the university, and having a link person at the university to contact, as well as working alongside a more experienced "buddy". Using language that isn't difficult or excluding. Feeling valued by being given the status of someone with valued experience, and seeing the perspective of the person who uses services appearing in the student's practice assessments.

5. **Boundaries** – sometimes this means barriers that are put up because of finances, or the type of language and jargon used,

or lack of confidence in our abilities. Sometimes it can mean not giving or asking too much personal information when working with students – again good "ground rules" are needed. Being able to review and have feedback at the end of the session, "what difference did I make?" It is important to be honest with and about students if you have doubts about their abilities.

What happens next?

There are a number of activities going on since the workshop:

- The Scottish Social Services Council is now working with the universities to put together a "best practice" manual, building on the very good ground rules, ideas and activities going on across Scotland (and beyond). This will be made available to anyone interested.

- Scottish Voices are seeking funding support for research into identifying the benefits of those who use social work services and carers contributing to different areas of the training and education of social workers. Currently there is very little "hard" evidence, although we know that students value this very much and remember the experience for a long time.

- Scottish Voices are widening their membership to include the many notes of interest submitted at the event.

- There has been a short article about the workshop in the Scottish Practice Learning Newsletter.

- Information has also been passed to the Scottish Social Services Learning Networks to post on their websites.

- The Scottish Social Services Learning Networks are looking at how the outcomes of the workshop can be written into their work plans.

- There is ongoing activity linked to the earlier **What Are We Worth?** workshop exploring how the benefits system can better accommodate different types of reward and recognition.

- Scottish Voices are reviewing their activities in light of the national scene in order to become a more effective channel.

- Two university projects, as part of the Change Academy for Social Work, are looking collaboratively at more effective involvement of those who use social work services and carers in their activities. The outcomes of these projects will be shared across all the universities.

- Each of the Scottish Universities has received £5000 from the Scottish Government specifically to contribute to the involvement of those who use social work services and carers in their activities.

Workshop Contacts

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A guide to how those who use services contribute to social work training and education

The guide that follows shows an adaptation of a series of pictures which were put together "by service users for service users" in England, and presented as part of a report by the General Social Care Council called "Working Towards Full Participation". They are included here as they very clearly describe all the activities which now involve those who use social work services and carers in the training and education of social workers.

"WRITTEN BY SERVICE USERS FOR SERVICE USERS"

Introduction

In the new social work degree programme, people who use services and their carers need to be involved in the training process.
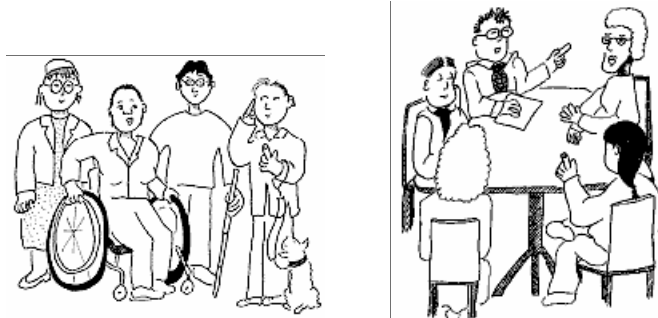
Work that people will be involved in includes:

1) Interviewing people who want to train as social workers

2) Teaching
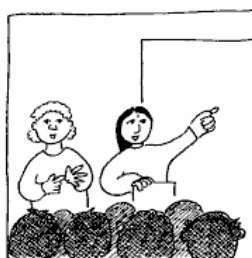
3) Assessing students work
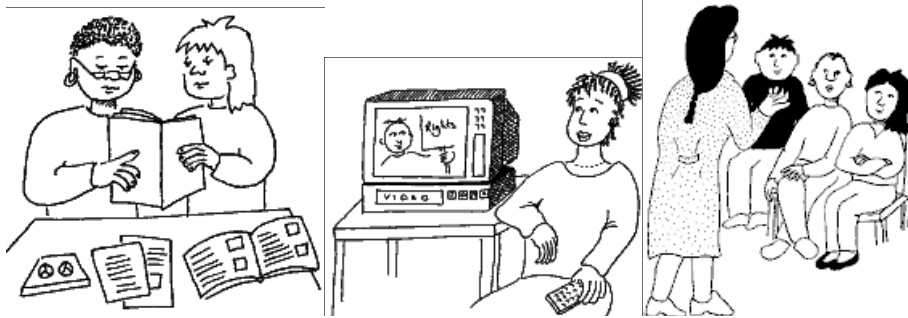
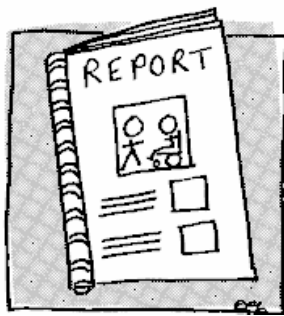## 4) Helping to develop the training

Context

There is a lot of work going on in different places.
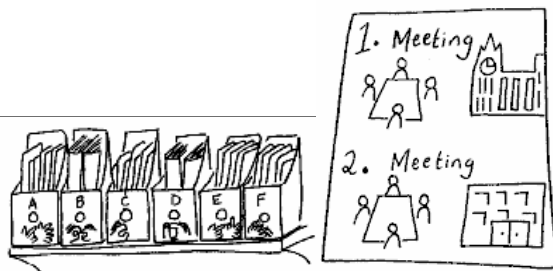
And other organisations have helped to fund and support work.

All universities will be involved and will need to report on what they have been doing.
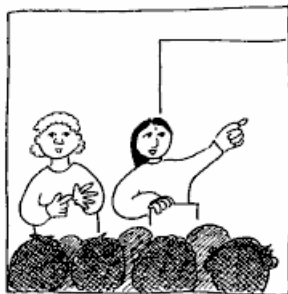
Summary of results

Lots of examples of work have been found.

Some universities have started to use people and carers in:
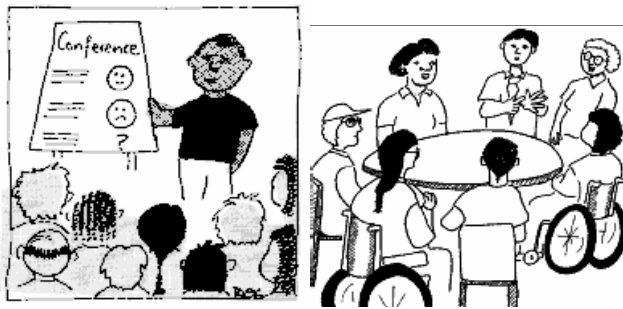
1) Interviewing
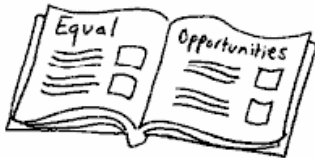
2) Teaching

3) Marking presentations and work.

4) Planning how to develop the courses further.

Many people have become involved, contacts made and 'working partnerships' developed.

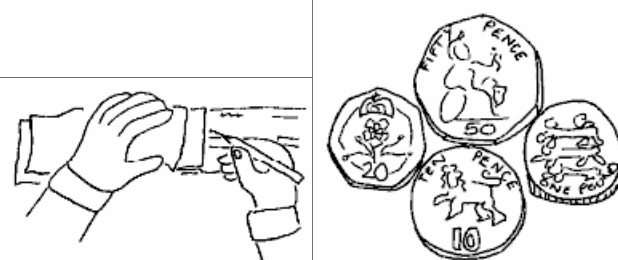**It is important that people who are involved are:**

1) Valued
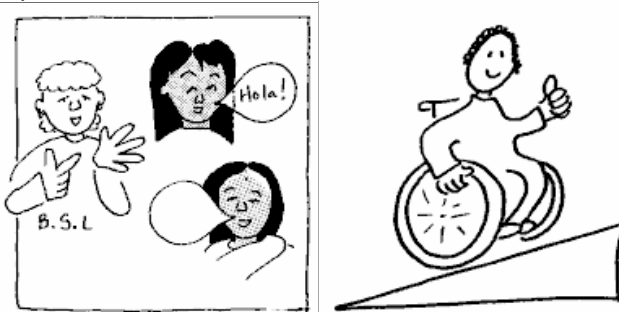

2) Receive training about being involved

3) Get paid for being involved and this does not affect their benefits.

More improvements are needed. The need to change things has been called **'Breaking down barriers'**.
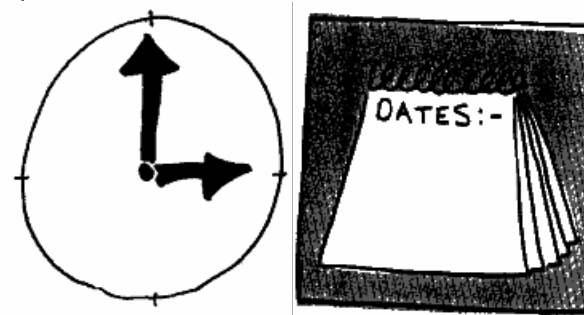
The barriers include:

1) Access

2) Communication

3) Time

4) Support

More improvements are needed. The need to change things has been called **'Breaking down barriers'**.

5) Payment

6) Funding