

# Real Lives; Real Difference: Service User and Carer Involvement in Professional Education



National Conference of the:  
**Scottish Social Work Service Users and Carers Inter-University Network**  
4<sup>th</sup> June 2013  
Conference Summary Report

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**Keynote Lecture:** “Strengthening something precious: The future of user and carer involvement in professional education”, Professor Peter Beresford, Brunel University and Shaping Our Lives

**Poetry Recitations:** “Am I”, “Stigma” and “Great, Great Uncle Albert”, written and read by Glenn Merrilees, Falkirk and District Association for Mental Health

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**Research Presentation:** “Recruitment of service users in social work education in Scotland: a study of the views of service users and social work academics”, Mo McPhail, Open University in Scotland

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of June 2013, eight Scottish universities involved in the Scottish Inter-University Social Work Service User and Carers' Network, supported by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS), collaborated to produce the first national service user and carer conference aimed at highlighting the importance of involving people who have experience of using Social Work and/or health services in the education of Social Workers and other professionals. The day was deemed "interesting, informative and successful" and involved approximately 45 people delivering presentations and workshops to just over 100 conference delegates. The one-day conference included a keynote speaker and a research presentation delivered by leading academics in Social Work education, poetry recitations delivered by a Social Work service user and workshops delivered by Social Work and Nursing academics, Service Users and carers and social work students. Participants were enthusiastic and suggested that the conference was:

*"well organised with a good range of speakers, participants and workshops..."*

*...[included] interesting and thought provoking speakers...*

*[with a] general enabling attitude to disability and impairment"*

*(excerpts from conference evaluations)*

The key theme emerging from the conference was the fundamental importance of Service User and Carer involvement in Social Work (and other professional) education and the need for this to continue. This involvement is fundamental for students, service users and carers and academics alike. And, "involvement" does not only mean that service users and carers share their stories with students, though that, too, is a necessary contribution. Service users and carers must be involved in all aspects of student learning – from developing teaching and learning resources to supporting student placements.

Whilst the conference attempted to broaden its reach to professional education beyond Social Work and Social Care, it is important to acknowledge that contributors and delegates were predominantly involved with Social Work education. Our recommendations therefore should be read with this in mind although it would appear that the messages are transferable to the education of allied Health Professionals.

Based on the information presented on the day and feedback from conference participants, we recommend the following course(s) of action to ensure that meaningful Service User and Carer involvement continues in Scottish Social Work education:

1. Ensure Scottish Universities continue to work together to raise awareness, problem-solve and share good practice in relation to service user and carer involvement in Social Work education through the Inter University Social Work Service User and Carer Network;
2. Develop stronger inter-professional alliances to allow all helping professionals to become closer through shared experience in involving service users and carers in all aspects of education and training.
3. Ensure all voices are heard, even those from under-represented and seldom heard groups;
4. Seek ring-fenced financial support to both ensure continued good practice in involving service users and carers in professional education and to expand our work in this area to involve other professional education programmes.



## INTRODUCTION – WHAT WE SET OUT TO DO

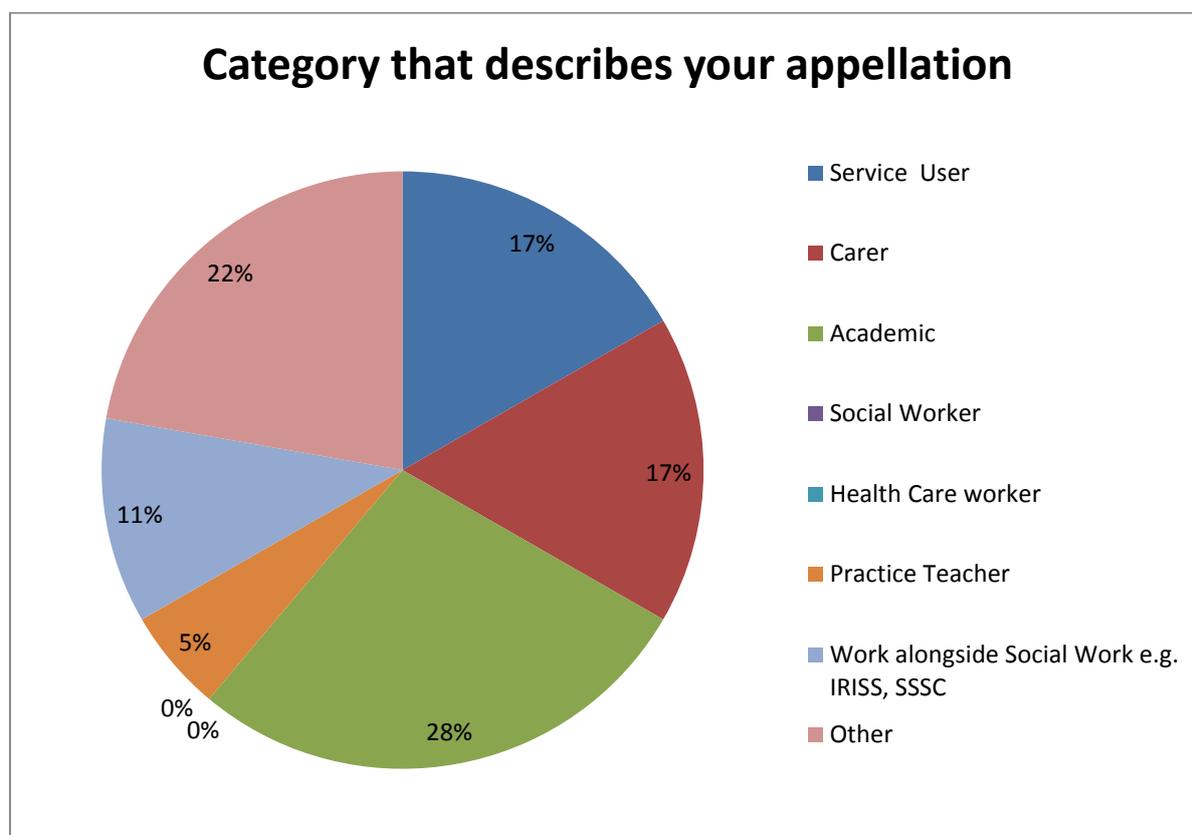
On 13<sup>th</sup> September 2011, a meeting was convened at the University of Stirling amongst social work academics, service users and carers involved in some aspect of the delivery of social work education. All 8 Scottish universities with Social Work programmes were invited to be a part of this meeting and there was representation from each university alongside some people from the voluntary sector. Though the issue bringing this group together was an imminent loss of funding to support service user and carer involvement in Social Work education, it was also agreed at that time that it would be beneficial to continue to develop an Inter University Service User and Carer Involvement Network to be able to share good practice ideas and problem-solve if necessary. It was also during that meeting that a one-day conference about service user and carer involvement in Social Work education was proposed. The purpose of the conference would be to showcase good practice in relation to involving service users and carers in Social Work education and all agreed this might go some way to highlighting what we were doing well across Scotland in this respect. It was also agreed that the conference would begin to provide us with much needed evidence of the effectiveness of service user and carer involvement within Social Work education. As the idea for a conference developed, those involved in the Inter-University Network unanimously agreed that a conference highlighting good practice would be beneficial not only for members of the inter university network, but also for others involved in professional education programmes across Scotland and the U.K.

Based on all the ideas brought forward at the Inter-University Network meetings, it was decided the purpose of the conference would be to raise the profile and increase awareness of service user and carer involvement in Social Work education while also sharing good practice so that we could learn from one another. From the outset, the Inter-University Network was clear in its stance that the conference not only include academics from Social Work and other “allied health” professions as presenters and participants, but also that it include service users and carers in all aspects of organisation, preparation, presenting and participation. It was further suggested that students, Social Work practice teachers, staff from voluntary organisations, colleagues from the allied health professions, MSPs and staff from regulatory bodies (such as the Care Inspectorate) and those organisations which support workforce development in the social services (such as the Scottish Social Services Council) be invited to attend the conference.

The conference planning committee then took all of that information, developed a structure for the conference to include: a keynote speaker, a presentation by an academic colleague who was in the latter stages of a research project examining the impact of involvement in Social Work education on service users and carers, and a series of workshops showcasing good practice, led by service users and carers, students and academics from different allied health disciplines. Workshop proposals were then submitted to the conference planning committee to ensure variety in workshop topics and to avoid duplication. The culmination was the Real Lives, Real Difference: Service User and Carer Involvement in Professional Education Conference, which took place at the University of Stirling on the 4<sup>th</sup> of June 2013.

## WHO WE REACHED

On the day, there were over 100 conference participants in attendance. During the registration process we asked participants how they would most likely identify themselves (as service user, carer, academic, student and so on). While asking people to label themselves in this way presents challenges (people are likely to have multiple identities) and is not necessarily desirable, it was helpful for us to have a little more information about who was represented at the conference. The pie chart below suggests that was a fairly even spread of service users, carers and academics in attendance at the conference although it is not possible to distinguish between different academic disciplines. It is also not possible to determine from the information available how many of the participants identified themselves as students although we do know that there were a reasonable number of students in attendance at the event. It is helpful to note that the conference had some success in attracting those from outside the academic community with 11% of participants identifying themselves as “working alongside Social Work” and 5% identifying themselves as practice teachers. Unfortunately no health staff were present suggesting that different ways of publicising such events would be helpful in future.



## ON THE DAY – WHAT HAPPENED

The day opened with an introduction from Brigid Daniel, Professor of Social Work at the University of Stirling. She welcomed all conference participants and expressed anticipation for this day set aside to showcase good practice in service user and carer involvement and learn from each other. She passed on a message from Michael Matheson MSP who wished to express his support for the event although he could not be in attendance. She then introduced Glenn Merrilees, from the Falkirk and District Association for Mental Health (FDAMH), who started proceedings with a recitation of his own poetry.

### Poetry Recitations



Glenn Merrilees is a published author from Falkirk who discovered his talent for writing poetry when he joined a creative writing group at FDAMH. Writing has become an important part of Glenn's recovery in relation to his experiences of mental ill health. Glenn read three of his own poems at different points throughout the day. "Am I" and "Stigma" explore the struggles experienced through mental ill health whilst "Great, Great Uncle Albert" is a light hearted and humorous story about Uncle Albert who tells very tall tales!

Participants' feedback stated; ***"the poetry was excellent"*** and highlighted Glenn's poetry as a positive feature of the conference. Since the conference, a number of people have asked Glenn to contribute to other events, highlighting how powerful they found his work.

## Keynote Lecture



Glenn's poetry recitation was followed by the keynote lecture, given by Professor Peter Beresford. Peter is a Professor of Social Policy at Brunel University, the Chair of Shaping Our Lives, an independent, user-controlled organisation, think tank and network, and a long term user of mental health services. His lecture was entitled, "Strengthening something precious: The future of user and carer involvement in professional education." His main argument was that user and carer involvement in professional education is of unprecedented importance and makes possible a transformative approach to occupational roles, education and practice. He argued that within our current roles within Social Work education it is not enough to support and advocate for this transformational change; we must be ***"the guardians and defenders of this change even though this may not be a simple task"***. He argued that the different knowledge, skills and experiences that academics, service users and carers and students alike, bring to professional education must be equally valued and protected.

He pointed out that even although social work education in the U.K. has the requirement to involve service users and carers, policy makers seem to be putting pressures on Social Work educators to do this without adequate support and resources, leading to the potential for tokenism. He sees this in what he calls some "worrying developments" in England, including the introduction of a new regulatory body with a more minimalistic, 'tick-box' approach to regulation, fears of a potential move away from the ring-fenced provision of funding for the involvement of users and carers, and the move towards 'elite' social work education at a qualifying level putting an emphasis on strong academic qualifications. He argued that all of these developments have the potential to disregard the valuable contribution those with lived experience of services and carers make in terms of teaching others how we might see each other, treat each other and formally support and look after each other on equal terms.

As Social Work education in England faces further reviews, Peter felt that the situation in

Scotland should be viewed positively in comparison. However, he argued that this should not lead to complacency and expressed concern about the withdrawal of direct government funding for Service User and Carer involvement in Social Work education in Scotland.

However, he noted, that by involving service users and carers in professional education, there are opportunities to build bridges; bridges between different professions and educators in different fields, between practitioners and professional organisations, trade unions, carer's organisations and disabled people's and user-led organisations. Building these bridges will help to break down barriers between these groups, and will help to reflect more accurately our values and commitment for a society that is without inequality, discrimination and exclusion.

Peter's presentation can be listened to in full on Iriss FM by typing the following web address into your internet browser or by clicking on the link below:

<http://irissfm.iriss.org.uk/episode/046>



Conference participants found Peter's lecture to be inspirational and conference evaluations suggest not only that he was "*interesting and thought provoking*" but that he successfully "*set the tone of the day*".

## **MORNING WORKSHOPS**

After Professor Beresford's lecture, conference participants chose one of 6 possible morning workshops to attend:

### Workshop 1: The ideal social worker and other stories

This workshop was facilitated by members of the group, "A Voice of Reason"; William Rae, Murray McKinnon and Julieann Arthur, along with Jeremy Millar, Lecturer in Social Work at Robert Gordon University. The workshop described and demonstrated the range of teaching and training inputs undertaken by the group at the Robert Gordon University. The workshop included audio-visual material and a group exercise run by the young people. This workshop had a particular focus on working with and engaging young people as contributors to social work education and was particularly helpful in allowing participants to consider how to overcome some of the barriers often experienced when attempting to involve children and young people who use services within social work education.

### Workshop 2: Building bridges: Constructing social workers through service user involvement

This workshop, presented by Sarah Ferguson, Yvonne Hill and Fiona Mitchell, all Social Work students at the University of Stirling along with Laura Carse, a newly qualified social worker (NQSW), had as its aim to share with others the student experience of being involved with service users, to share their knowledge and learning, and to explain the difference this involvement has made to their lives and to the lives of service users. The presenters also touched on what they would like for the future for Social Workers and the field of Social Work. They explored issues of collaboration using a group building task.

### Workshop 3: Coffee, biscuits and laughter: Creating a meaningful user involvement culture

Incorporating service user perspective into professional education gives students experience of life on the other side of the table as well as access to the experts of mental illness - those who have experienced it themselves. Through drama and a bit of bricklaying, James MacKenzie, Involvement Development Worker, Jim Bell, Lynda Morrison, Ronnie Gilmour, Linda McCulloch and Claire MacLean, all members of UNITY (The University of Stirling's Social Work Service Users and Carers Group) shared the principles of good practice that they have learned through their experiences of service user involvement in social work education.

### Workshop 4: People, narrative and possessions: Who I have been makes me who I am. A spiritual care workshop.

The goal of this workshop, presented by Dr. Morag Campbell and Dr. Beth Seymour (both Lecturers in Nursing at Glasgow Caledonian University) was to develop an understanding of the spiritual importance of narrative and possessions and how to use these to enhance

spiritual care particularly in times of illness and at the end of life. In this workshop, the presenters suggested innovative teaching and learning methods, which use story-telling and symbols to expand personal and professional understandings of spiritual care. They discussed how students are encouraged to hear the stories of patients/clients, reflect on their own personal and professional stories and find meaning in objects that have significance for patients in their care.

Workshop 5: An inter-professional experience. An overview of service user and carer involvement in Health and Social Care at the Open University in Scotland.

This workshop was presented by Anna Duffin, Surinder Saroya and Grainne Smith with Mo McPhail and Peter Blackledge of the Open University. The aim of the workshop was to share examples of involvement of service users and carers in nursing, social work and social care education and to reflect upon future development of service user and carer involvement as a focus for inter-professional education. The workshop highlighted both the benefits and challenges of working collaboratively across disciplines and showed the ways in which people who use services and their families can contribute to overcoming some of these challenges.

Workshop 6: Who's stigma is it anyway?

The theme of this workshop was stigma and discrimination. Led by Karen Martin, James McKillop, Sharon Mercardo and Linda Hamill with Gillian MacIntyre, all members of the Glasgow School of Social Work and Glasgow Caledonian University Service User and Carer Network, this workshop showcased the ways in which service user and carer involvement in social work education can challenge stigma and discrimination. The workshop encouraged participants to consider some of the myths and stereotypes often associated with particular labels or conditions before showing how considering the "person behind the label" can help us to challenge these. They highlighted the ways in which students are encouraged to be non-judgemental, moving beyond labels to view service users and carers as individuals.

The lunchtime break offered an opportunity to refuel, network and enjoy the sunshine.





## Research Presentation



After lunch, Mo McPhail, Head of Social Work at the Open University in Scotland, presented the preliminary results from her research project exploring the views of service users and social work lecturers about recruitment of service users in social work education across Scotland. Mo was particularly interested in exploring the “hows and whys” of service user involvement in social work education specifically in Scotland as there seems to be a dearth of research in this area. Her work also set out to compare the views of service users to those of social work academics, as this is another gap in the current literature. To achieve her aims, Mo interviewed 20 service users and 10 social work lecturers between January 2011 and 2012 about their experiences being involved with the university and how they came to be there.

Overall, she found a number of similarities among the views of service users and lecturers about how and why service users were recruited to be involved in Social Work education. Service users were recruited in three main ways: via social work and/or social care agencies, directly from service-user led forums or from personal prior contact in previous jobs. She also found that it was important to use a combination of all three approaches to get the most diversity of involvement of service users. Mo noted that though there was a wide range of service user and carer groups represented amongst the universities in Scotland, for various reasons, particular universities may have particular strengths in involving specific service user groups whereas other universities may have had gaps in certain areas. This, she

argued, provides a strong case for establishing – or continuing – networks among the universities in Scotland to share experiences and make use of areas of expertise.

According to the service users interviewed, they were mainly involved to tell their own stories or to speak for people who were unable to speak for themselves. They wanted to help students gain an understanding of what it was actually like to be a service user so that they could provide a better service for future users of social work services. In addition to these reasons for involvement, social work lecturers also acknowledged that involving service users also provides a model for good relationships between practitioners and service users.

In terms of the useful support provided to aid involvement, service users noted that help with transportation (in terms of both time and funding), lunches and refreshments, positive staff attitudes and clarity of task all aided their participation. There was also an acknowledgement that there were differences in the amount of power a service user had compared with a social work lecturer, but this could be used wisely and sensitively to ensure it does not have a negative impact on peoples' involvement. Also, as alluded to above, it was acknowledged that there was benefit in hearing individual voices, but it was also beneficial to hear a collective voice and acknowledge the wider context in which service users experience social work services.

Mo suggested that her research re-iterates the importance of face-to-face contact between service users and social work students. However, she noted there may be different ways to facilitate this contact, moving away from bringing service users to universities and suggesting students meet with service users within their own contexts in order to better understand the issues they wish to share. She also noted a way forward was for those with more experience with involvement in social work education to mentor those with less experience or who were new coming into the group. Finally, she noted that universities must work together to share experiences and expertise and therefore inter-university networks were crucial to continuing to meaningfully involve service users and carers in social work education.

## **AFTERNOON WORKSHOPS**

After Mo's presentation, conference participants once again had the choice of attending one of 6 possible afternoon workshops. While Workshops 1 and 2 were repeated in the afternoon for those who were not able to attend in the morning, a further four additional workshops were put on in the afternoon.

Workshop 7: *The Way We See It...* The making of a DVD for teaching purposes. How we went about it and what we learned.

Presented by Martin Fraser, John McAloney, members of UNITY, Jim Quigley, People First, and Sara Hitchin, Teaching fellow in Social Work at the University of Stirling, this workshop was developed so that UNITY members could share their learning from the experience of producing a DVD for teaching purposes. This included the management of ethical issues relating to privacy and the sharing of personal information, how decisions were made about content, the production of an accompanying information booklet and teaching notes and unexpected spin off benefits of the project.

Workshop 8: Experts by experience – Weaving positive relationships

Led by service users and carers associated with Robert Gordon University; Margot Fairclough, Dinah Hood and Mary Rasmussen with Iain Turnbull, Lecturer in the School of Applied Social Studies at Robert Gordon University, this workshop examined how the equal nature of the relationship between carers/service users and educators is promoted when carers/service users become involved in various aspects of higher education. It examined the importance of telling and retelling stories and emphasised the importance of developing reciprocal relationships between academics and service users and carers. In this context, the presenters explored what service users and carers get out of it; what is important to them and what contributes to making involvement work.

Workshop 9: Evaluating the Impact of Carer and Service User Involvement in Social Work Education

John Dow, Service specialist and Susan Levy, Lecturer at Dundee University facilitated this workshop. The Community Care and Caring Experience module at Dundee, is grounded in partnership working with carers and service users. The module enables students to spend a minimum of 15 hours with a carer and/or service user to gain an insight into their everyday lives. Feedback on this module provides evidence that it is valued by carers/service users, students and external agencies. There is however, limited evidence of how carer/service user involvement in social work education impacts on students' later practice and service provision. Dow and Levy have therefore begun a study examining how the caring module has developed students' learning in relationship to co-production and personalisation and will explore the ways that the module is and can impact on practice. This workshop introduced the work of the Carers and Users Group at the University of Dundee, the caring module and provided time for participants to explore issues around the impact of service user and carer involvement in social work education on practice.

Workshop 10: Degrees of Success: A mentor's PATH

This workshop was presented by Anne Ritchie, Senior Lecturer at the University of the West of Scotland, Jill MacSporran, Lecturer at the University of the West of Scotland, Raymond Brennan from Support for Ordinary Living (SOL), and Jackie Wyllie, Peter Fleming and Mary McDermott, all service users at SOL. The aim of this workshop was to demonstrate good

practice in promoting the role of service users as mentors in observational practice learning settings. Each student on placement with SOL is allocated to a service user mentor who is responsible for supporting them throughout their placement and offering feedback where appropriate. Using a PATH format, the process of planning, delivering, assessing and evaluating student placements was outlined, with a focus on what this all meant for the service users in the mentor role.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?



Subsequent to the afternoon workshops, there was a final plenary session, which was a time to wrap up and discuss ways forward. It was agreed that the conference had provided everyone with an opportunity to hear about the different ways in which service users and carers voices are present in Social Work (and other professional) education and how valuable this is for all involved. Further, it was noted that all participants supported the universities in Scotland continuing to work together to try and achieve change, and the view was expressed that the conference had been a stepping stone along this path. Though, inevitably, funding is important to support all involved to achieve change, there was a strong sentiment expressed by the participants that the inter university network does not become focused on this single issue. Also, as noted in Mo McPhail's presentation, one area of work for the inter university network will involve ensuring a more equitable representation of different, often unheard, voices of service user groups throughout social work education across Scotland. Finally, it was agreed that all participants have a responsibility to continue to engage in the discussion about the important role service users

and carers can and do play in professional education. On that basis and with all information from the conference being considered, the following recommendations are made:

1. Ensure Scottish Universities continue to work together to raise awareness, problem-solve and share good practice in relation to service user and carer involvement in Social Work education through the Inter University Social Work Service User and Carer Network;
2. Develop stronger inter-professional alliances to allow all helping professionals to become closer through shared experience in involving service users and carers in all aspects of education and training.
3. Ensure all voices are heard, even those from under-represented and seldom heard groups;
4. Seek ring-fenced financial support to both ensure continued good practice in involving service users and carers in professional education and to expand our work in this area to involve other professional education programmes.

The conference working group would like to thank all the workshop facilitators already mentioned for their valuable contribution to the day as well as student social workers; Lynne Cocker, Claire Hamill, Matthew James, Paul Stewart and Suzy Docherty for their help in showing people around, moving furniture and generally being cheery and helpful. Also Joanne Murray and Brigitte Innes for administrative assistance as well as academic colleagues, UNITY members and everyone else who helped to make the day a success.

**James McKillop, Martin Fraser, Debbie Innes, Gillian MacIntyre and Sara Hitchin (Conference Working Group)**