

CREATING LINKS GROUP*

“Creating Links”: The Involvement of Service Users and Carers in the Provision of Social Work Education in England

Abstract

This chapter sets out the processes and outcomes of the involvement of a group of service users and carers in the provision of social work education at the School of Health and Social Work University of Hertfordshire, England. The School was one of the first adopters of service user input into the provision of learning and teaching in social work in England. User involvement in social work services is well established in the discourse about social work services in relation to some service user groups in the UK, although its reality and extent in reality is contested, and service users and carers' meaningful involvement in social work education on a practical level is less frequently discussed. The chapter sets out the model of participation adopted and evolved over the period of existence of the group of service users and carers who chose the name, “Creating Links” for their steering committee.

Introduction

This chapter describes the involvement of a group of service users and carers in the provision of social work education at the University of Hertfordshire in England – one of the first adopters of service user input into the provision of learning and teaching in social work in England (Peake, 2007). Whilst user involvement in social work services is well established under legislation and guidance (*Care Act*, 2014; government

* School of Health and Social Work, University of Hertfordshire, United Kingdom.

agency guidance, e.g. NHS England's [2016] *Five year forward view for mental health; Children Act, 1989*), its reality and extent in actual usage is contested (Beresford, 2009; Ferguson, 2007), and meaningful involvement in social work education on a practical level is less frequently discussed. We explain in some detail the model of participation adopted and evolved over the period of existence of the group of service users and carers who chose the name, "Creating Links" for their steering committee. Activities of the group are democratic rather than owned by individuals, hence this chapter is written under the group name rather than under the names of the present members of the group.

The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), which has a statutory duty to register professional social workers in England, and discipline them if they do not meet its standards as set out in its *Standards of Proficiency – Social Workers in England (2017)*, requires social workers to:

- be able to support service users' and carers' rights to control their lives and make informed choices about the services they receive;
- be able to work in partnership with others, including service users and carers, and those working in other agencies and roles recognise the contribution that service users' and carers' own resources and strengths can bring to social work.

The HCPC, under its the *Standards of Education and Training for Social Work (2009)*, also validates and regulates qualifying social work programmes in universities in England, and the university's key duty under these HCPC requirements are for such programmes to ensure that student social workers are able to meet all of the above mentioned *Standards of Proficiency for Social Workers* when they finish successfully their programme of study. This includes the matters raised for co-production with service users and carers as set out in the paragraph above, and how this should take place in terms of the learning from and with service users and carers on their programmes.

This growing trend towards service user control and input chimes with social work's historical championing of the principle of self-determination and avoidance of dependency as well as acknowledging the truth claims of groups such as disability movements towards rights-based adoptions of principles of voice and choice in the definition of their needs and the provision of services to meet them.

In their 2 chapters in the book by Brian Littlechild and Roger Smith (2013), *A Handbook for Interprofessional Practice in the Human Services: Learning to work together*, the "Creating Links" group set out important principles for developing social work education practice from their experiences.

Rationale

The rationale for the original setting up of the “Creating Links” group emerged from a series of understandings of need within the social work programme and in wider social work practice.

- Social workers were facing increased pressure in their professional lives;
- Many practitioners felt that trainee social workers were not receiving enough practical training to supplement their academic and theoretical knowledge and understanding;
- An answer was required to the demand for amplification of the service user voice in social work education to mirror similar demands in the provision of services in the field;
- It became a necessity to incorporate the experiences of service users and their carers into social work education under the direction of regulatory oversight;
- The University of Hertfordshire’s Social Work department founded “Creating Links” to answer these demands;
- Initially external consultants supported “Creating Links” but very soon the group became self-sufficient with the support of a mentor in the shape of a dedicated member of the social work academic staff to facilitate meetings and advise on university procedure.

Principles

From its inception, the key principle informing the involvement of “Creating Links” has been a parity of esteem between academic and professional and user expertise. The equivalence of these forms of knowledge in social work is encapsulated in the phrase “experts by experience”. Importantly, this is understood in the university to mean that service user and carer expertise is not restricted to the narrative or biographical account of each individual’s life experience but, more widely, renders possible a more fundamental expertise about the nature of social work itself and its fulfilment in the knowledge, skills and values required of social workers in the field. It is this valorisation of service users and carers’ expertise as equivalent to academic expertise that enables “Creating Links” to participate fully in the learning and teaching within the university and to permit them to advise on and assess students’ work on placement and in the academy. We describe this in greater detail later in the chapter. A practical manifestation of this equivalence of esteem is the status of the members of the “Creating Links” group as Associate Lecturers at the university with

access to systems and training in the manner of other academic members of staff. In the same way as academics are qualified to teach social work by virtue of their academic background and professional training and experience, service users and carers are qualified to teach social work by virtue of their deep understanding of the impact of social work on the lives of members of the communities of which they are a part.

Freedom to share knowledge

Once the principle of respect for service user expertise is established, a further principle becomes available. Service user expertise becomes trustable such that the dissemination of their knowledge and understanding can be freely shared in the classroom in a similar mode to the concept of academic freedom. Service user learning and teaching need not be moderated, filtered or explained in relation to established academic knowledge. This does not mean that academic research is not included in the module curriculum, but rather that academic knowledge does not need or indeed deserve to stand as an intermediary between the knowledge claims of service users and carers and students.

Central to the inclusion of the group is the principle that their involvement should be meaningful and not tokenistic. Avoiding tokenism – that tendency to provide only the appearance of involvement while effectively withholding influence and power - can wittingly or unwittingly manifest itself where a requirement to include service users and carers is set in policy but not in the commitment of the given institution to fully integrate their voices. In such a case, service users and carers may be present but not be influential. Their involvement is consequently rendered peripheral through a combination of processes such as lack of information, lack of access to knowledge and lack of democratic decision-making power in the processes of the institution.

Decision making power and control is central to avoiding such tokenism. It is axiomatic to the work of “Creating Links” that the discussions they hold rise above a level of consultation or sharing of views and opinions, instead achieving a level of democratic control over the learning and teaching for which they are responsible. Certainly, regulatory and university policy and procedure applies to the work of “Creating Links” but not to a greater extent than that applied to academic members of the university. There is no hierarchy perceived in the status of members of “Creating Links” and other university staff and this democracy in the group is thought to foster trust and confidence in the teaching.

“Creating Links” understand that democratic and equal inclusion of service users and carers in the social work academy mirrors the desired level of meaningful participation in the co-creation of social services in the

field and fulfils the important function of modelling co-production to students in their education and training. By experiencing and witnessing academics and service users blending seamlessly in their education, it is intended that students should understand partnership with service users and carers to be their expected norm in their practice settings.

Finally, an important purpose for “Creating Links” is to enable students to experience for themselves working in partnership with service users. Students should experience the guidance and feedback of service users and carers and seeking out their opinions and ideas as part of their network of support and learning. In such a way, it is hoped to instil in students a natural propensity to seek to form partnerships with service users and carers and to take that expectation into their social work practice. Students thus learn to listen to and reflect upon service users’ knowledge and strengths.

Ultimately, each of these principles rests on the relationship established within “Creating Links”. A working relationship of this sort depends on trust established over time, and built on an appreciation of the skills, abilities and qualities of the members involved. It is this relationship that underpins the extension of trust to fully participate in the learning and teaching cycle.

Values

Fundamental to the integration of service users and carers is the value of mutual respect. Such respect, fundamental in traditional social work values, may be seen when applied to the relationship between practitioner and service user, and as extended to the relationship between academic and service user and student and service user educator. Such respect manifests itself in attitudes and behaviours, translating into expectations of punctuality, confidentiality and attention to the input of the service users. These behaviours are listed in a set of codified ground rules established with students at the outset of their course of study.

The members of “Creating Links” and other service users and carers are afforded the freedom to exercise their expertise – a value of non-interference in the course of their work. This value is translated into a freedom and trust for the service users and carers to advise and guide students on their practice and their academic work without need of monitoring or recourse to academic members of the university staff.

More widely, this ability to work with students; to impart knowledge, to advise and to guide without interference accords with the wider social work value of autonomy.

Confidentiality is always a feature of social work education and its presence as a value and as a skill for social work is emphasised and

stipulated throughout the course, but requires a special emphasis when it comes to the presence of service users and carers in the classroom.

Whereas academics bring to the classroom their interpretation of concepts and theory, and rarely stray into personal experience, service users and carers commence with their lived experiences and imply theoretical knowledge. Students are told that service users have the right not to answer questions if they choose and reminded of their obligations of respect to all speakers. Students inevitably become privy to highly personal data and information. In each session students will hear personal stories and accounts of people using services, and carers. These may even relate to teams, agencies, or residential units that the students may be familiar with. Confidentiality, therefore, becomes paramount to the safe keeping of service users privacy and safety. We emphasise on the importance of confidentiality, now and when the students qualify as social workers.

At the beginning of each of their sessions with “Creating Links” students sign a confidentiality statement specifying that it is expected that students treat all the information they hear in a confidential manner.

Specifically, students sign to agree to the following statements.

Notes taken or recorded during the session should only be used to aid learning outcomes and must not be used for other purposes unless the Creating Links members have given permission.

Personal information is sometimes given by people using services during their presentations. This must not be disclosed orally or in writing to anyone not directly involved to the module.

Conversation between individuals attending the module should take care that they are not overheard by others who are not involved in that particular module.

These principles and values inform a model of deep integration of academic and user expertise in which service user and carer knowledge and understanding is embedded at all levels of the structure of the provision of social work education in the university from the formal processes of programme design and validation through to individual student guidance and assessment.

History and composition of “Creating Links”

Each member of “Creating Links” has experience of using social care services or caring for someone who uses services. Over time, this experience has included learning disabilities, mental health, ageing and late life, fostering and adoption, and physical disability.

Each has different skills aside from the experience of using services. Several have degree and postgraduate level education and experience of

research and previous experience of teaching. Experience of involvement at other universities adds a rounded view of the programme and an awareness of the possibilities and options available.

Values associated with agendas such as personalisation, recovery, well-being, co-production and co-creation rolled out in the sphere of public services should be mirrored and adopted in the University setting.

Service users and carers should be enabled and empowered to control and direct learning and teaching, paralleling ideals of user-control and empowerment prevalent in social work discourse.

The work of “Creating Links” with students models and enables students to work with positive diversity, since members of “Creating Links” embody conditions and disabilities that require students to make adjustments to facilitate their input.

Activities of “Creating Links”

Degree design of social work education

“Creating Links” contribute skills and personal experiences for the development of the social work education, both BSc and MSc.

Curriculum design

It is an important feature of the involvement of the “Creating Links” group that their work with the university should not be tokenistic, but meaningful and conducted in the spirit of co-creation. To this end, the service users are involved in the design of the curriculum and not just its delivery. Prior to the beginning of each academic year, “Creating Links” and academics meet to design the content and format of the modules of study in which they are involved. The accumulation of educational experience they possess means that they are able to fully participate and do not risk effective exclusion through lack of knowledge of university processes and policy and regulations. They are consequently able to design a programme of study at the appropriate level and with the necessary content both to expose students to the desired understanding of service user and carer lived experience of social work intervention and its consequences and to furnish them with the capacity to meet the required learning outcomes in the assessment. Such interweaving of academic and experiential expertise ensures that necessary service user knowledge is embedded in the social work education and not merely added on to an existing curriculum.

“Creating Links” contribution in an advisory capacity includes input on curriculum development, and programme validation and revalidation. At a wider level, the group are integrated into the very formal processes that oversee and ratify the degree programmes as a whole. As such, they are privy to and part of the strategic overview of the social work provision at the university and part of those groups and meetings that determine medium and longer term planning for graduate and postgraduate social work education as a whole. In these settings, the group are able to contribute their expert understanding of the knowledge skills and values service users and carers require social workers to demonstrate, but also an expert appreciation of the direction of social work policy at national and subnational level; for example, an ability to bring to the planning real-world experience of initiatives such as the operation of direct payments for care schemes and therefore informing the knowledge that social workers should possess.

Student recruitment

“Creating Links” also serve an important function in the process of student recruitment and admissions. Most prominently, in the interviewing of students. Members of the “Creating Links” group make up part of a panel that selects students for the BSc (Hons) Social Work and MSc Social Work programmes. They assess and mark the performance of prospective students, observing them in a group discussion and evaluating their professional leadership potential, communication skills, social work knowledge and their values. In doing so, their evaluations are not filtered or modified by academic members of staff, but are accepted as valid interpretations of the qualities required by prospective students. Sometimes, members of “Creating Links” are also asked to form part of the individual interviews that prospective students are required to have, and, again, the service users and carers’ views carry equal weight with other interview panel members.

Learning and teaching

By far the most visible contribution of “Creating Links” to the learning of social work students is their input to the service user and carer-controlled module, “Collaborative working with service users and carers”. Learning outcomes for the modules are as follows:

- To critically evaluate a broad range of benefits and issues resulting from user participation and partnership in the planning of services and care packages;

- To develop a detailed understanding of how service users experience social work intervention;
- To demonstrate how to engage effectively and appropriately with the experiences of service users;
- To demonstrate an understanding of the skills needed to enhance the experiences of service users in need of support.

In Week 1 of the autumn semester “Creating Links” deliver this one-week block module to the second year BSc social work students, prior to the students’ first practice learning placement.

This week is organised and presented almost entirely by “Creating Links”.

“Creating Links” offers the core content of this module, while other speakers are invited by “Creating Links” to cover supplementary areas. It is critical to the success of this module in cementing the principle of co-production in the minds of students that “Creating Links” are seen to be in control of the module and not merely invited to take part by academic members of staff. To this end, service users lead on the teaching with core members of “Creating Links” delivering content, supplemented by other service users and carers. Students interact and engage with the members of “Creating Links”, raising questions and discussing content as they would with any other members of the teaching team. Students are encouraged to understand that service users and carers are not present merely as story tellers, not simply to gain a valuable insight into this or that person’s experience, but as educators whose input represents a fundamental knowledge and understanding of the process of social work itself. Of course, students understand that the purpose of the module is to represent the process of social work from the service user perspective, but they are required to reflect on the thematic messages from the accounts of service users and carers and not isolate or marginalise the knowledge derived as belonging only to one unique experience. Occasionally, students have misunderstood that fundamental paradigm, desiring to have practitioner “professional” perspectives juxtaposed with some of those of the service user and carer lived-through messages. Working through these revealed attitudes with students can enable them to consider their own orientation towards service user and carer expertise and hence, their own future practice. Seeing co-production modelled for them in the ‘ownership’ of the module exercised by the members of “Creating Links” serves to dispel notions of passivity and victimhood in the lives of service users and carers. See below for specific student feedback on their changed perceptions following the teaching.

Within the *Collaborative Working with Service Users and Carers* module students are exposed to notions of collaborative and partnership working across a range of social work experiences including:

- Elderly care;
- Foster care and adoption;
- Mental health;
- Physical disability;
- Supporting adults with special needs;
- Parent & young people's perspective of the care system;
- Perspective of a male foster carer.

Variously, these viewpoints are contained in the expertise of members of "Creating Links" or are available through their contacts and networks. As such, "Creating Links" are able to draw on a knowledge base much wider than is contained in the experience of the core steering group itself. It is important that the members of "Creating Links" approach and brief these other visiting speakers rather than need to go through the contacts of academics at the university. This autonomy further emphasises the point that it is "Creating Links", not the university that directs the progress of the learning and teaching for the students. These contributions are often more vivid and powerful than can be achieved in contributions from academics. In one memorable example, the mother of a child taken into care described the development and difficulties of her relationship with and experiences of the social workers who worked on the case. Students are set reflective tasks that encourage them to move beyond a sympathetic hearing of a personal story and to generate thematic and conceptual understandings of a unifying service user perspective.

In addition to these individual contributors, a variety of service user led groups and organisations constituted to represent, empower and advocate within the health and social care system, are invited to lecture to the students. These groups have included over recent years a HIV/AIDS organisation, a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning Intersexual and Asexual advocacy and support organisation, Looked after Children organisations, and a Black mental health service user group to contribute with a presentation that offers a unique and challenging perspective on social work health care service users organisations. These contributions permit students to explore reflectively their collaborative working practices with third sector service-user led organisations and forge an understanding of their purposes, roles and contributions to communities of service users and carers as well as their possibilities in addressing the needs of individuals and their development and progression.

In addition to their links in community service user organisations, foster carer members of "Creating Links" have, in the past, invited their own foster children to give presentations on their relationships with their own social workers.

Through these diverse representations and contributions of user and carer experiences across a range of experiences of social work interventions, this module provides students with diverse examples of what is expected of them by the community when they qualify and begin their

careers as social workers and raises their awareness of what life is really like for service users.

The module focuses solely on the perspective of the service users and carers and not that of the professionals. The students have ample opportunities to hear the perspectives of practitioners on other modules and in their practice placements.

As previously mentioned, the learning and teaching provided by “Creating Links” ranges beyond a simple narrative telling of their “story”, important though this is to student knowledge and understanding. The service users and carers are regarded as educators as much as exemplars of receivers of services. An example of this is orientation is an Interactive Learning session led by the members of “Creating Links” that takes place at the end of the module on Collaborative working. A note on the background of the role play is distributed to the students after students are divided into three groups. Each group will take part in one of the role plays. From each group we ask two students to volunteer as social workers and one to take notes while the others observe and contribute. All students observe the role play and are invited to comment. “Creating Links” perform role plays based on real life incidents, taking the parts they experienced in real life.

“Creating Links” avidly seek feedback and evaluation from their students. At the end of each session, students offer feedback and comment on what they have learnt. In addition at the end of the teaching programme, students comment on their experience of the module and synthesise their experiential and academic learning. Student feedback is reviewed by “Creating Links” and informs the planning of the next delivery of the teaching. In addition, formal university systems exist for eliciting student satisfaction of their teaching on the modules and these in turn feed into evaluations of teaching excellence in the school and university as a whole.

Quotes from student evaluation indicate that perceptions of service users and carers are indeed informed by the experience of learning from “Creating Links”. For example:

It was really helpful to hear real people’s experiences and to hear what they thought and perceived

A fantastic interactive morning...remembering to put service users at the centre of my practice

I was very impressed by the service users and this will help me linking it up with my placement

(...) the importance of hearing service users and allowing them to make their own decisions

(...) Understanding the importance of collaborative working

(...) understanding the difference between good and bad practice

(...) It was an education in diversity – What amazing people!

To encourage students to synthesise their learning into a thematic rather than a concrete understanding of the lives and experiences of service users and carers, space is made available for individual reflective integration of the conceptual and theoretical material and the narrative accounts of service users and carers' lives and experiences.

The purpose of interactive learning is to help students understand how their communication can help or hinder their work with service users. It is not about solving the problem presented within the role play. Feedback and role play allows students time to think about the perspectives and experiences presented to them over the past week.

The vehicle of a role play is adopted in order to offer practical experience within a safe environment. Students develop their skills in working with: learning and physically disabled service users, service users affected by mental health issues and young service users

In addition to the role play interactive learning scenarios, "Creating Links" also devise group exercises that help to demonstrate how to maintain confidentiality. These exercises experientially involve students in how it feels to have highly personal and confidential material held (though not seen) by others.

An example of the role play scenarios that students and "Creating Links" act out together may be instructive. In this particular scenario, a child has been taken into foster care. The students begin with group work analysing the reasoning behind that decision and considering the reasons behind the feelings and behaviours of the protagonists.

In the role play, the mother character, played by a member of "Creating Links", can demonstrate how she feels emotionally. Her attitude and her language may be challenging for the students to deal with. The child character, played by an academic, may be reluctant to share his real feelings. With sensitivity, the students have to find out how the child really feels.

During the role play the students will have been given the opportunity to discover that the mother has alcohol and drug dependency issues and is unable to meet her son's long term needs. At the same time the son loves his mother and wants to protect her.

Volunteers from the student group act as interviewing social workers, making real time decisions about which issues should be paramount and where to focus their attention.

At the end the students must draw their own conclusions about the situation. As a learning exercise and a debrief, time is devoted to role play feedback. For the volunteer interviewers, what was their experience of performing the role play and observing it? How might they do it differently next time? What issues arose? What did the students learn?

Finally, the facilitators (“Creating Links”) offer their own feedback and views and facilitate peer-feedback from students.

The intention behind this interactive learning is for the students to analyse their own learning, contribute to the development of their education, learn how to focus on the best interest of the service user and how to deal with their cases in a professional manner.

We believe best practice for social workers is demonstrated much more clearly as a role play and has greater impact than the students passively listening to a story.

Over time, feedback has indicated that students value this learning exercise and the feedback is always excellent and it is clear that the students are taking the message home.

Assessment

Perhaps one of the more innovative features of the model of service user and carer involvement adopted within the university is the responsibility of “Creating Links”, beginning in 2007, towards the academic assessment of the students’ assignments. For the *Collaborative Working with Service Users and Carers* module, students produce, while on their practice learning placement (students are required to undertake a period of professional workplace experience under national regulation of social work education) a poster, designed with the intention of stimulating meaningful service user involvement in the operation of the organisation in which the student is embedded. The student must also submit a rationale to accompany his or her poster that explains the thinking behind the poster drawing on academic literature and knowledge. Members of “Creating Links” grade this work in accordance with pre-set grading criteria, taking into account the realism of the student’s concept, the extent to which it is likely to develop service user influence over the organisation and the attention paid to barriers and constraints on service user involvement in the particular setting of the student.

Creating Links similarly undertake formative and summative assessments at first year Bachelor’s degree level and at second year Masters level. With the first year undergraduate students, formative feedback is given by service users and carers in an exercise comprising two parts. Firstly, students undertake a Carer’s Assessment, interviewing a member of “Creating Links” or another volunteer carer. Students are observed in their interaction with the volunteer and “Creating Links” feedback on their skills and displayed values. This exercise provides a good opportunity at an early stage of the student professional development to see how the students will work with carers to try to help improve their quality of life.

Observing the characteristics that will be important in their work, for example; empathy, professionalism and listening skills, is a key aim of this. At the same time, and towards the promotion of co-created learning, “Creating Links” always make sure that feedback from the students is also elicited. This is of the utmost importance to the group in assessing our input.

At post-graduate level, students are required to deliver a presentation, in groups, that demonstrates a critical knowledge and understanding of what helps and what hinders interprofessional and inclusionary practice with service users and carers. This presentation is assessed by members of “Creating Links” and by the module leader of the course. Again the assessment is democratic with service users’ judgements carrying equal weight with academic members of staff.

It is interesting to note that in this post-graduate learning, “Creating Links” are again explicitly teaching beyond the boundaries of relating their experiences and offering commentary on their knowledge of the importance of interagency working. “Creating Links” offer students real-life examples of the members’ experiences of dealing with different agencies.

Some of our examples are included in *A Handbook for Interprofessional Practice In The Human Services: Learning to work together*, edited by Brian Littlechild and Roger Smith (2013).

“Creating Links” have readily involved themselves in social work research activity, authoring book chapters, delivering conference papers, engaging in consultative and advisory work and taking part in international exchange activity.

Challenges and barriers

Inevitably, there have been challenges and barriers to overcome in embedding service user and carer expertise in the social work programme. At first, some resistance was encountered within the student group at studying for one module purely from within the perspective of service users and carers. Some students, wedded to the paradigm of social work as expert, raised concerns that social work practitioners’ viewpoints were not represented within the module. They wished to hear from the social work practitioner or agency perspective alternative explanations and understandings of situations and experiences discussed by the service users and carers. This objection has surfaced less obviously, if at all, in recent years, as the expectation of service user involvement has become normalised and promoted in public policy and legislation. Learning from the experience, this aspect is explicitly addressed in introducing modules taught wholly or partly by “Creating Links” and it is asserted that, whilst these modules are solely concerned with service user and carer perspectives and

“truths”, the remainder of the programmes of study do address and study professional practice in the context of policy and procedure surrounding the practice of social work in the English jurisdiction.

Secondly, the marking of their work by service users caused, at first, some students to seek to challenge their grades, questioning the credentials of service users and carers to undertake the task. Again, as acceptance of service user input to services and education has grown and its prevalence increase and normalised, these objections have dissipated and instead, students have sought out formative advice from the members of “Creating Links” as to how to set about their assignments. “Creating Links” are involved in the assignment briefings given to students in lectures and individually.

Representation across groups typically using social services has not been consistent. Individuals with experience of mental health service use have been relatively forthcoming, while parents of looked after children and looked after children themselves are less frequently involved.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the evolution of the work of “Creating Links” at the University, we can say that the model of service user and carer participation in the education of social work students has, partly through design, partly through organic development, come to be an essential component of the overall student experience. The group has to be understood as an integrated section of the academic delivery of social work education and not as an outside influence invited to join in as required. Students come to understand that the members of “Creating Links” are not “just” service users, but people from all walks of life with all sort of academic, employment, family, cultural and life experiences; people with information to share and, like the students, learning all the time. The members’ individual experiences vary and “none of us fit into neat little boxes”.

Without question, the impetus towards further integration of service users and carers’ knowledge and understanding in service provision and professional education across disciplines is accelerating. Recent English legislation and policy guidance prescribes and affirms it and groups promoting the rights of service users demand further influence and personal control over the professional services they consume. The “Creating Links” group seek to answer these calls in such a way as to positively affect the experience of future generations of social workers and service users and to undertake their partnership with the University in such a way as to genuinely participate in co-produced and co-created education.

References

- Care Act (2014), HM Government, available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/23/contents/enacted>, (accessed: 27.07.2018).
- Children Act (1989), HM Government, available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents> (accessed: 27.07.2018).
- Beresford P. (2009), *Social care, personalisation and service users: addressing the ambiguities*, "Research Policy and Planning", vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 73–84.
- Creating Links (2013a), *Member of the team? Carers' experience of interprofessional working, key issues in current policy and practice*, [in:] B. Littlechild, R. Smith (eds.), *A Handbook for Interprofessional Practice in the Human Services: Learning to work together*, Pearson Education, Harlow.
- Creating Links (2013b), *The barriers presented by power, control and agency agendas on carer participation in interprofessional working: promoting inclusionary practice*, [in:] B. Littlechild, R. Smith (eds.), *A Handbook for Interprofessional Practice in the Human Services: Learning to work together*, Pearson Education, Harlow.
- Health and Care Professions Council (2009), *Standards of Education and Training*, available at: <http://www.hpc-uk.org/aboutregistration/standards/sets/> (accessed: 27.07.2018).
- Health and Care Professions Council (2017), *Standards of proficiency – Social workers in England* (2017), available at: <http://hpc-uk.org/publications/standards/index.asp?id=569> (accessed: 27.07.2018).
- Ferguson I. (2007), *Increasing user choice or privatizing risk? The antinomies of personalization*, "British Journal of Social Work", vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 387–403.
- Littlechild B., Smith R. (eds.), (2013), *A Handbook for Interprofessional Practice in the Human Services: Learning to work together*, Pearson Education, Harlow.
- NHS England (2016), *The five year forward view for mental health*, available at: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Mental-Health-Taskforce-FYFV-final.pdf> (accessed: 27.07.2018).
- Peake J. (2007), *None of us fits into neat little boxes*, "Times Higher Education Supplement", vol. 1811, no. 18, p. 8.