Service user participation in social work education – five examples of mending the gaps

PowerUs symposium number one

Introduction

PowerUs is an international network of teachers and researchers from schools of social work and representatives from different service user organizations. In this symposium we would like to share five experiences in trying to develop good practice when including service users in social work education. The presentators are all part of the PowerUs network.

PowerUs develops methods of mutual learning in order to change social work practice to be more effective in empowering marginalized and discriminated groups in society. PowerUs consists of partners from Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Norway, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland and the UK. Furthermore, PowerUs has associate contacts with representatives from schools of social work in many other countries around the world. PowerUs promotes policy change, initiates research in collaboration with service users and work with gapmending methods in the education of social workers. In 2013 the PowerUs Charter was developed encouraging good practice when including service users in social work education. It was a call for the inclusive involvement of diverse communities of service users to inform and influence social work education programmes as equals. The vision was that social work education should be developed in a partnership between service users, carers, practitioners, managers, academics and students.

Principles

1. Social work education should promote social justice, ensuring non-discriminatory and inclusive practices. The involvement of service users in social work education is an essential part of working towards a fairer society that respects civil and human rights and challenges inequality.
2. Service users and their allies should be encouraged to take an active role in social work education. This should include all aspects of the education. Physical, environmental, attitudinal or cultural and communication barriers to this should be removed.
3. PowerUs promotes gapmending methods in social work education, where social work students and students from service user organisations learn together including integrated courses on equal terms in order to improve social work practice, theory and research. Members of PowerUs integrates these methods in their day-to-day practice.

4. All service user involvement should be properly valued. This involvement should be resourced and funded appropriately.

5. Accredited training should be developed and made available to service users. This will help ensure that service users are treated as equal partners in social work training.
6. The involvement of service users should not be seen as a substitute for recruiting and employing people with such experience generally as academic staff. On the contrary, PowerUs promotes strategies to mobilize service users into the academic system.

The presentators of this symposium will share their experiences of trying to live up to this charter of principles. The symposium would include the following submitted abstracts for oral presentations:

1. Title: Mending gaps with young people, refugees and asylum seekers in professional education and practice

Author: Helen Casey

2. Title: Including the concept of service user involvement in different teaching settings in Switzerland

Authors: Veronique Eicher, Emanuela Chiapparini, Jeannine Hess

3. Title: 'The implementation of service user experience in Social Work education'

Authors: Lisa van Bentum, Roy Leunen, Anne-Lis Paur, Carla van Slaagmaat, Simona Karbouniaris

4. Title: Co-creating education with people with mild intellectual disabilities

Author: Sascha van Gijzel

5. Title: Service User Science On the Standards Required for Social Workers: Gap-mending evidence

Authors: Becki Meakin and Ann Nutt

6. Title: Créer les conditions pour intégrer, dans la formation initiale des travailleurs sociaux, les savoirs de vie des personnes accompagnées dans le cadre de dispositifs sociaux

Author: Philip LeBaille