Service User and Carer Involvement in the Education and Training of Social Workers

Summary Report

Report for the South Coast Regional Centre for Social Work Teaching Partnership

April 2018

Recovery Partners
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1. Background

Social work practice education, learning and research are critical to the creation of excellent social workers of the future and the continuing professional development and retention of those already in practice. The Universities of Brighton and Sussex, and Brighton & Hove City and East Sussex County Councils established a Teaching Partnership called the South Coast Regional Centre for Social Work Education (SCRC). Based on these principles the SCRC has built a sustainable and innovative model for social work education in Brighton & Hove and East Sussex.

The SCRC believe that Service User and Carer (SU&C) involvement is fundamental in driving forward practice improvement. As the key first step, the SCRC commissioned a project with Recovery Partners, a user-led mental health recovery organisation, which sought to:

- Review the existing arrangements within the partnership for the involvement of service users and carers in social work education and training
- Provide a clear analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of current arrangements for the involvement of SU&Cs within social work education and training
- Make recommendations for improvements, including for how users and carers can be involved in the future developments for education and training of social workers.

Consultation with stakeholders took place over the period June - December 2017.

2. Methodology

The project was designed to undertake the following:

- Consider relevant literature and good practice nationally
- Interview key stakeholders to gain an overview of SU&C involvement, help shape the process and identify who to speak to
- Semi-structured interviews and focus groups with social work educators/practitioners and other relevant professionals
- Semi-structured interviews and focus groups with SU&Cs across East Sussex and Brighton and Hove
- Thematic analysis of interviews and focus groups
- Production of a report on the findings, with considerations and recommendations

The project was carried out in four phases:

Phase 1: Preparation and key stakeholder discussions (June-July 2017)
Phase 2: Outreach and development of interview schedules. (Aug- Sept 2017)
Phase 3: Fieldwork stage (Sept-Dec 2017)
3. Participants

**Professionals:** Forty-nine professionals participated in face-to-face, telephone, or Skype interviews, including academic staff and associate tutors from both universities, social work educators, social work managers, social work practitioners, workforce development, other professionals from Brighton and Hove City Council and East Sussex County Council, and stakeholders from the voluntary and community sector in both localities.

One focus group was held with eight newly-qualified social workers in their Assessed and Supported Year of Employment with East Sussex County Council.

**Service users and carers:** Thirty-six SU&Cs from across Brighton and Hove and East Sussex were interviewed and/or took part in one of three focus groups.

4. Challenges and limitations

Brighton and Hove and East Sussex County Council have many examples of involvement and consultation activities, user feedback, stakeholder engagement and partnership work. While the Teaching Partnership will link to relevant practice and strategies, the remit of this discrete exercise was to focus on SU&C involvement in social work education and training in the four partner agencies, not to consider wider engagement and involvement practice. Similarly, this has not been looked at regarding the Universities.

There were some challenges in finding the ‘right’ practitioners to speak to. Lack of capacity to take part was an issue for some. Voluntary and community sector organisations were also under pressure and some could not spare time to help recruit participants.

There are likely to be some small pockets of SU&C involvement that were not discovered during this scoping exercise. Among SU&Cs we did not manage to engage as many men, BAME and LGBT+ people as we aimed to.

Some professionals were able to provide more critical commentary on the current situation in their partner organisations; this depended on the experience and perspective of those staff who responded to requests to be interviewed. The views of a relatively small cross-section of professionals and SU&Cs cannot be said to be fully representative; the main themes that have arisen from interviews and focus group discussions have been highlighted and important points have been raised that need further consideration.

5. Desktop research

Survivor researcher and trainer Alison Faulkner undertook desktop research to provide an overview of good practice in SU&C involvement in social work education, with additional learning from other professions including nursing and clinical psychology. The purpose of this was to provide a foundation for the development of the interview schedules and inform the future practice of the Teaching Partnership.
The literature identified is dominated by mental health, nursing, and social work, but much of the learning carries strong common messages and we must be mindful of the need to be inclusive of marginalised communities and seldom heard groups, particularly BAME communities, children and young people, people with severe learning disabilities, LGBT+ communities and so on.

The literature suggests that SU&C involvement in social work education is patchy and inconsistent, with most involvement being in the teaching practice rather than in selection or assessment.

There is also little empirical evidence that it has positive benefits for students despite much passionate belief amongst service users, carers, students and teaching staff that it does.

The evaluations that have taken place tend to be small scale and limited to individual institutions. There are some good examples of involvement and co-production, a few of which are included in the full version of this report.

**Good practice findings include:**

1. It is important to be clear about the purpose of involving SU&Cs in social work education and to communicate this purpose to everyone involved.
2. Resources need to be identified from the outset, including:
   a. Liaising with the finance department of any large institution, to make it possible to pay people in a timely manner;
   b. Payment of expenses should be made on the day in cash where possible; signposting to advice to people in receipt of benefits should be offered.
3. Service users and carers should be involved from the outset and in planning for involvement.
4. Recruitment should be transparent and inclusive: with clear roles and responsibilities and a commitment to include marginalised communities. Partnership with SU&C organisations can help build capacity over time.
5. In order to ensure that involvement is inclusive of BAME communities, it will be important to engage more broadly with communities and groups where BAME people self-organise.
6. Support should be built into SU&C involvement contracts as a matter of course; support to students should also not be overlooked.
7. Training should be built into involvement: particularly for SU&Cs to enable them to take part in a meaningful way; but also for staff and students where appropriate.
8. Best practice is to employ a range of different involvement opportunities through different teaching and learning approaches.
9. It is important to create a safe learning environment, for SU&Cs to be able to share their experiences and for students to learn in. Offering students and service users/carers opportunities to work and learn together can be one way of achieving this.
10. Knowledge gained from experience should be integrated into the course and curriculum as a whole, in order to embed SU&C involvement.
11. SU&Cs can and should be involved throughout and beyond the course and curriculum: in selection, practice learning, placements, and assessment.
12. Involvement will always encounter barriers, particularly those relating to access and accessibility and this often requires local resolution. It is vital to be aware of the ways in
which institutions create unintentional barriers to people who are not used to working within it.

Some interesting dilemmas

- The professionalisation of SU&Cs.
- Finding a balance between being 'too challenging' for academia by having ongoing distress vs. being too 'professionalised' and distant from lived experience: people have the experience of being criticised or judged for both of these.
- Finding a balance between challenging students enough but not too much that they feel defensive, detracting from the potential learning experience.
- Good practice might be to establish service user academic positions - legitimising experiential knowledge. This can perpetuate stigma through identifying certain people as those with lived experience, re-creating the 'them and us' divide.

6. Map of current SU&C involvement in social work education and training

Work was undertaken to map current SU&C involvement in social work education and training of each of the four agencies in the Teaching Partnership. This mapping considered strengths and gaps for improvements. This section contains commercially sensitive information, so has been removed from the summary report. Requests for this information will be considered by the SCRC Board.

7. Summary of focus group with newly qualified social workers

Eight newly-qualified social workers (NQSWs) in the Assessed and Supported Year of Employment (ASYE) with East Sussex County Council took part in a focus group to discuss SU&C involvement. Half of the group had studied at Sussex or Brighton universities for their BA or MA. The group discussed the following:

- SU&C involvement during study helps embed theory and brings it to life, as well as providing useful feedback on their developing practice.
- Involvement is important in giving feedback on the representation of clients in assessments.
- Involvement is 'a necessity and a safety check'.
- SU&Cs help in understanding the impact of the power social workers have, and approaches that help deal with these dynamics.
- Many voices were missing, with mainly ‘confident, articulate, tried and tested’ SU&Cs involved in social work education.
- There was a lack of representation of children, wider family members, foster carers, older people, people living with dementia, people with severe and enduring mental health issues, substance users and others not able to come into classroom settings.
- There was concern about how vulnerable people could be included safely and ethically, but that all voices should be heard, and ways should be found to do this.
• There is much to learn from people who won’t engage with social workers, and from those who self-manage and use preventive services.
• An ‘us and them’ still exists, which perpetuates the power imbalance.
• Sharing own lived experience with clients is an unclear area; while it depends on context, some NQSWs feel it is never appropriate.

8. Service user and carer perspectives

Thirty-six SU&Cs undertook semi-structured interviews and/or took part in one of three focus groups during the period September-December 2017. The main purpose of interviews was to find out what SU&Cs wanted social work students and social workers to know from their experience, in terms of education and training.

Twenty-one people took part from Brighton and Hove and 15 from across East Sussex. Twenty-seven participants were interested in becoming involved in some way in the education and training of social workers. Key themes arising were:

Motivation for taking part included:
• Wanting something positive to come out of experiences that have been so difficult.
• To help other people.
• To make a difference to how social workers learn.
• Wanting to get involved in educating/training social workers.
• To help social workers understand what works and what doesn’t.
• To help social workers understand ‘what it’s like’.
• To develop confidence and knowledge.
• Seeking validation.
• Wanting to give back, as part of own recovery and healing.

What participants said were the characteristics of a positive/beneficial social work relationship:
• An authentic and honest approach.
• Being listened to and asked questions.
• Being kept in mind.
• Social workers act when they say they will act.
• Social workers walk alongside you.
• Not feeling like you’re a burden.
• Clear explanations of the paperwork and what is written about you.

What participants want social workers to know:
• Don’t take a punitive approach.
• Don’t use ‘professional’ or distancing language.
• Don’t believe what you first see and hear.
• Help people understand what their rights are.
• Spend time with clients not just in crisis, to better understand their lives and situation.
• Constant changing of social workers is detrimental.
• Be respectful; don’t treat people as ‘other’.
• Be consistent and apologise if you make mistakes.

How participants want to engage with the education and training of social workers:
• Sharing their story.
• Using existing skills - develop new ones.
• Involvement at a strategic level.
• Help develop new services.
• Finding out about the opportunities available.

What participants want to support them in becoming involved in social work education:
• Understanding how social services works (organisations, teams etc.).
• Be in a supportive group of other people, feel part of a team.
• Training on how to do the different roles.
• Mentoring by a professional (educator/social worker).
• Regular supervision, support, and feedback.
• Learn from people already doing it (i.e. shadowing someone first).

9. Key themes arising from focus group discussions

Focus group 1
Three adults with learning disabilities took part in a focus group discussion about what would help social workers work more effectively with adults with learning disabilities. The following themes arose:
• Good social work support means feeling cared for and having your concerns taken seriously.
• It has not worked well not having a dedicated social worker anymore and being passed over to Duty and Assessment.
• Social workers should always attend review meetings and stay in touch to make sure everything is working with the support package.
• Not having a proper ending with a social worker is upsetting.
• Social workers could work more effectively with adults with learning disabilities if they spend time with service users to learn more about their lives, ask them more questions, do things differently (including creatively), and involve people with Learning Disabilities in educating others, including in workshops and presentations.
• Managers need training to understand the need for flexibility in the support worker system.

Focus groups 2 & 3
Five SU&Cs took part in one focus group in Brighton and five took part in one in Eastbourne. Discussions focused what SU&C want to get out of being ‘Experts by Experience’, what they would find challenging, how they could influence the education and training of social workers, and what a training and support programme should offer them. Key themes from the discussion were:
What do participants want to get out of the ‘Expert by Experience’ role?

- To know that they are helping others in some way.
- To guide social work students; help them learn from mistakes that were made.
- To help social workers understand and empathise more.
- To help social workers understand the difference they can make.
- Some form of record or recognition of their contribution.
- Mentoring and support in their role as Experts by Experience.

The potential challenges of doing this work:

- Managing your emotions.
- Understanding the context.

How SU&Cs can influence the education and training of social workers:

- Involve more SU&C in training social workers.
- Inform SU&C educators about the training social workers receive.
- Create more continuous and sustained engagement.
- Enable SU&C to design and deliver modules.
- Talk to social work students about the importance of communication.
- Focus on social workers’ communication skills.
- Emphasise the importance of creating trust.
- Explain the importance of looking beyond the immediate situation.

What participants want from training and support programme for Experts by Experience:

- Knowing what is expected of them.
- Training to help deliver what is asked of them.
- To understand what social work students learn.

10. Conclusions and considerations across all partner agencies

The Teaching Partnership aspires to more meaningful involvement of service users and carers. There is long established involvement at the Universities and some examples of co-production in teaching and training to be built on. The partners have ambitions to move towards greater co-production of training and education of social workers, and there is general agreement that strategies for this need to be developed. These will need to take account of the very different cultures and practices between the partners, particularly between the Universities and the Councils.

Main gaps in service user and carer involvement

The main gaps in involvement in education and training are in Adult Social Care, where there is considerably less involvement than in Children’s Services. The established culture of participation in youth services has benefited Children’s Services although there is still little direct involvement of young people in the training and education of social workers.

There is a lack of representation in the existing networks and cohorts of SU&C of people from marginalised communities and challenges in hearing the voice of people who can’t
engage in a classroom or training setting, and there is a desire to find ways to authentically and ethically include the diversity of lived experience.

There is a general acknowledgment that the current network and cohort of SU&Cs are experienced, knowledgeable and reliable and that they have built up expertise over time that is valuable to the partners. There is also a strong desire for new people to become involved, who have recent or current experience of health and social care services, and who are not ‘professionalised’ and will bring a ‘fresh’ SU&C perspective.

There is agreement that more support and guidance is needed for SU&Cs in their roles, and that good practice guidelines could be co-produced.

**Co-ordination of involvement**
Within the Partnership, the two Councils are broadly in favour of external co-ordination and joined up SU&C involvement; this generally favour engaging a user-led organisation to recruit, train and support SU&Cs across the Teaching Partnership and develop good practice and standards for involvement, while acknowledging the different cultures and practices of each partner. The two Universities want to maintain their existing arrangements for co-ordination, while being open to developments.

**Evidence of impact**
The need to gather evidence of the impact of SU&C involvement in education and training of social workers was highlighted by all partners, as well as the need for more effective means for user feedback to directly influence education and training.

**What service users and carers have to say**
There are clear messages from SU&Cs who took part in interviews about what approaches work in the relationship with social workers. Information from their contributions could be shared with practitioners.

**Capacity**
There is a lack of capacity across the Partnership to develop SU&C involvement - that means unless funding can be identified, there are unlikely to be significant developments in line with general aspirations.

### 11. Considerations

The following issues arose across all four partners in the Teaching Partnership as needing further consideration and discussion:

**Defining the vision for SU&C involvement in each partner agency**
Many professionals talked about the aspiration to see SU&C involvement ‘embedded at all levels’, and the need for a coherent approach to how involvement can be resourced and driven in-house (even if co-ordinated externally).

In both Universities, there were different perspectives about whether their long-established involvement approach should be challenged, or at the least, reviewed.

There is some scepticism among practitioners and educators about whether SU&C involvement is truly valued, suggesting the need for work by each partner to examine their aspirations and what their vision for SU&C involvement is, longer-term.
In defining a realistic vision for involvement, partners will need to take account of the reality of the funding and support available to build the capacity to do this work, in the final year of the Teaching Partnership’s funding, and beyond the end of the funding.

**Moving towards co-production in social work education and training**

For some professionals, there were questions about the culture of their organisation and how open they were to meaningful co-production as opposed to ‘user involvement’. Without further resources, it will be challenging to achieve more co-production, but partners could examine where this could possibly happen, and where this sits within their vision for involvement.

**How to widen and ‘refresh’ the existing SU&C cohort and networks**

All partners highlighted the fact that the existing SU&Cs working in social work education and training were mainly White, mainly long-term, highly experienced people, some of whom had become ‘professionalised’. There are concerns that there is not enough diversity and that some voices are never heard.

There was much discussion about the benefits of skilled, knowledgeable SU&Cs who ‘make life easy by being confident, reliable, and good at what they do.’ This was balanced against a desire to not ‘keep seeing the same faces’ and to broaden opportunities out to other SU&Cs. There is a need to balance the approach of newly recruited, less experienced SU&C with the necessary skills and knowledge needed for involvement in particular areas.

Discussions ranged from possibly limiting the amount of time SU&Cs could undertake this work to promoting experienced SU&Cs to mentoring/training roles. Both universities signalled their intention to keep working with their cohort/networks as they currently are, while also acknowledging the need for ‘refreshment.’

Developing existing and new relationships with user-led groups helps with future recruitment of SU&Cs and can lead to innovations, but these groups are often very stretched, so consideration needs to be given to how relationships can benefit all parties.

There was concern expressed about how transparent and fair recruitment of SU&C currently is, and whether procedures should be developed.

Another concern raised was the lack of politicisation, or lack of social work values when relying on SU&C voice; that involvement should never happen without the overall context of the theoretic perspective and understanding of structural oppression.

Other issues raised include:

- Who has the right to represent others?
- Why don’t we do it differently and go to people where they are rather than ask them to come into classrooms?
- How do we ensure fairness of opportunity for SU&Cs who want to become involved?

**Rapid changes in adult social care - what this means for SU&C involvement**

Adult Social Care is on a rapid journey towards integration with Health, which will bring with it ‘a whole new range of issues, cultural and otherwise’ that will bring new impetus and challenges to involvement, some beneficial and others detrimental.

**Payments to SU&Cs**
Payment has always been a difficult issue in SU&C involvement and remains so. For SU&Cs in receipt of benefits, the situation is challenging, confusing, and they could be put at risk of claiming payment when not entitled to. This is likely to become more as Universal Credit is rolled out across Sussex.

The situation is further complicated when other opportunities for involvement that may be offered are factored in, with further variation in pay or recognition options. Absolute clarity must be given to SU&Cs about the very different payments made by the partners, to avoid misunderstandings and mistrust.

**Opportunities available**
The Teaching Partnership has asked all partners to list the upcoming opportunities for SU&C involvement, in a table of opportunities. This will be used to help match SU&Cs to opportunities, including the new cohort.

### 12. Recommendations

Each partner highlighted the lack of capacity to develop SU&C involvement in the education and training of social workers. The Teaching Partnership has applied for further funding for 2018-19, to include the development of SU&C involvement.

These recommendations are based on the discussions with all participants in this scoping exercise and are divided into those that might be achievable with low funding, and those that are more ambitious and would require more resourcing.

#### Low funding available:

- Develop a Service User & Carer Involvement Strategy for the Teaching Partnership for the final year of funding and beyond. This to run April 2018-March 2019 and set out the vision, aims and implementation plan, to take account of exit planning for the Teaching Partnership, identifying resources to ensure continuation. How ambitious this is will depend on the level of funding available.
- Form a Service User & Carer Involvement Strategy Group to develop this. The Teaching Partnership Working Group to re-structure to become this strategy group, to include SU&Cs, social work educators, and other relevant invited partners.
- Identify the involvement leads who will drive the strategy for each partner; one or more lead person(s) from both Universities, and from both Adults and Children’s Services in Brighton and Hove, and East Sussex County Council. Ideally, these will be senior practitioners in social work education.
- Identify members of the newly recruited SU&C cohort to participate in the Strategy Group; one from East Sussex and one from Brighton and Hove. Support to fully participate to be provided.
- Each partner agency to individually consider the strengths and areas for improvement highlighted by participants, and develop their own response to the ideas, challenges, and opportunities that participants have flagged up.
- Partners to consider their own SU&C involvement strategy with short, medium and longer-term goals. This to include identifying in-house leads and champions to drive
this forward. Using the 4Pi* as a framework would be helpful, particularly in moving towards co-production (see below).

- Develop guidance and standards for SU&C involvement in-house.
- Prioritise diversifying the network/cohort of SU&Cs when there are opportunities to recruit new people, based on identified gaps.
- Partners to develop closer ties with community and voluntary groups and particularly user-led groups, to potentially recruit SU&C from and develop greater, mutually beneficial working relationships, with the possibility to innovate good practice.
- Commission consultation and training from a user-led lived experience organisation to work with agencies either individually or as a partnership to help develop strategies around SU&C involvement, based on available budget.
- Depending on available budget, fund a number of practice seminars focusing on SU&C involvement. Co-produce these with SU&Cs if there is capacity for support.
- Develop simple and effective means to help evaluate the impact of SU&C involvement and create an evidence base for the work.
- Consider how the findings from interviews with SU&Cs in this report could be used to inform social work students and NQSWs. Possibly host a seminar for students/NQSWs to focus on the key issues raised by SU&Cs, who could also be involved in co-producing this and presenting the findings.
- Agree on financial recognition for SU&Cs to acknowledge the value of their lived experience expertise.

If sufficient funding becomes available:

- Create SU&C Co-ordinator roles/hours across the partnership. This could be any of the following, or a combination:
  - Commission a user-led organisation
  - Fund more hours for existing co-ordination where a co-ordinator is already in place
  - Create new SU&C involvement posts within each partner agency
  - Develop a brief for SU&C involvement for a designated lead worker where funding enables their capacity.
- In the final year of the Teaching Partnership, co-ordinate good practice across the partners to reduce duplication and maximise resource, acknowledging the different cultures and practices of each agency.
- Co-ordinate, support, train and maintain a cohort of service users and carers to work across the Teaching Partnership (primarily the two Authorities) with one group to work mainly across East Sussex and another to work mainly in Brighton and Hove.
- Identify SU&C training and support needs and plan for how to meet these.
- Provide regular supervision and support for each SU&C in setting goals and recording their achievements (i.e. personal development plans).
- Facilitate regular peer supervision and peer support opportunities so that SU&Cs feel part of a team.
- Identify possible meaningful participation and co-production opportunities across all areas of social work education and training.
- Support SU&Cs to participate in working groups, advisory groups, seminars, and curriculum development meetings.
• Support SU&Cs into strategic level opportunities including the Teaching Partnership Board and SU&C Strategy Group.
• Develop good practice guidelines with SU&Cs and partners, to including the recruitment of SU&Cs, induction, training, preparation, de-brief and ongoing support.
• Develop guidance for SU&C on all tasks.
• Identify gaps in representation and undertake targeted outreach to address those gaps.
• Develop and maintain ongoing relationships with user-led groups and voluntary and community sector partners, developing opportunities for partnership SU&C involvement work, providing funding to enable small organisations to participate.
• Work closely with participation and involvement workers in Children’s Services to develop further opportunities for the representation of children and young people’s voices in social work education and training.
• Identify where possible, a practitioner in each team in each Social Services department whose essential role will be to identify possible opportunities for involvement, and to help contribute to and embed the strategy.
• Identify and provide for training needs of professionals working with SU&Cs to understand co-production and the culture shift needed to achieve better outcomes.
• Undertake regular reviews of how the strategy is working.
• Consider the suggestion to co-produce a conference with students and SU&Cs as part of their student assignments.
• Co-produce workshops or seminars for social work and social care practitioners focusing on outcomes (co-produced with students, SU&Cs, practitioners, SU&C organisations etc.).
• Evaluate the impact of SU&C involvement in the education and training of social workers

*The 4pi National Involvement Standards are a framework for planning, developing, delivering and evaluating co-production. Developed by people with lived experience as part of the National Involvement Partnership Project, funded by the Department of Health and hosted by the National Survivor User Network (NSUN) the Standards are being increasingly promoted and adopted across sectors as the means to ensure effective co-production, improving users’ experiences of services. Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust is a signatory. Developed within a mental health context, the Standards are universally relevant to involvement and co-production in all areas of health and social care.