

Workshop Comments:

Janet Birks
Director of Housing and Social Work Services, Falkirk Council.
Joint Chair of the Changing Lives Service Development Group.
Facilitator
Workshop 1

We are running a joint workshop - the Service Development Group are running this Workshop with the User and Carer Panel and we think that's important because our theme is about Personalisation and Citizen Leadership. From our perspective this is the underpinning theme throughout the whole Changing Lives. I think this is the theme that all of the work groups are really driven by - because it is the outcome that we want for service users.

We want to tell people a little bit about the Service Development Group, and what the group is doing, but we want to keep that to a minimum because the User and Carer Panel are going to have a user talking about their particular experience and their aspirations about what Citizen leadership and personalisation would mean to them. Then we want to get into a conversation with people in small groups. What we want people to be looking at are 3 key areas. First there are things that practitioners can do just in the way that they do their work as individuals to promote the principals of Citizen leadership, so we want people to understand what those principals and what they can do as individuals. Secondly what can practitioners do in their local Practitioner Forums to support each other, perhaps influence the local systems that they are part of . And thirdly those real big national priorities - so the issues that the service development group could be assisting with. We want people to be thinking about the big things that are going to make a real difference to the way that they take these things forward.

Changing Lives has been a very important reminder as to why most of us went in to Social Work – and it was about changing lives! It's about putting users and carers right at the very heart of what we do and developing systems and frameworks that support the outcomes that we're trying to get. I think that over the years we've kind of lost the way and a lot of our activity has been about feeding bureaucracies and systems and I think that what Changing Lives does is give an opportunity to build our systems and our frameworks in a way that really supports the frontline, as opposed to the frontline feeding a whole range of things which support a bureaucracy.

Citizen Leadership – well I think we can get quite hung up on words and Citizen Leadership may mean different things to different people, and I don't think that matters too much. For me, Citizen Leadership is about people having the opportunity and the capacity both within themselves and within their communities and their families to take more control both of their individual service user experience, but also community development. It's about building and developing healthy people in healthy communities. Today's workshop is about helping people to gain their own perspective on these things – realise what these things mean to them, and also how can we make a difference? How do we make a difference as Individuals, as Practitioner Forums and what is it that the National work streams should really be doing to support frontline practice?

Mary Rasmussen
Chair of the Sensory Impairment Task Group, Aberdeen
Service User
Workshop 5

I've really enjoyed the camaraderie of today. It was a unique opportunity for people to meet and greet and talk about the issues that directly concern them. It also was a good opportunity for me to raise awareness of blind issues which is important to me and to social workers in general because such a large proportion of the older community become blind or hearing impaired during their lifetimes.

I was involved in the communication workshop – it went well. Again it was a good opportunity to thrash out matters that were important regarding communication. It also gave us a chance to have a bit of a laugh at ourselves as well as think about the issues that are important and how they could be brought over to the media – particularly with regards to social work 'happy stories'.

Being blind is quite an isolating condition and when people come up to me they very often speak to the dog first and then to me. It kind of restores some of the status I had when I was working and all of these things are important to maintain confidence and independence.

I think people will mostly take away from today the idea of working together and perhaps different means of both working together and communicating the work they do and the needs of the service users to the general public.

Mary MacLeod
Family Group Conference Worker, Children 1st
Delegate
Workshop 8

Children 1st have started a first, what they call a cohort, of people doing practitioner research and there has already been a year of 8 people being put up for research and 6 people completing and they now want another 8 people doing practitioner research - so the person running the workshop was from Children 1st just talking about practitioner research and how it can enhance your work and look at where you can go and have a new interest. She was trying to tell people that it might be something they'd be interested in doing.

I joined a small group and talked about how research would impact on what you were doing and what it could inform. But the main difficulty was time - so people were saying that they felt so overloaded already would they have time for any research? And I think that you would have to be very well managed, or the research would have to be very well managed - to actually allow people to have time. Children 1st have said it would be about ½ a day with ½ a day of your own time a week so you would have to have managers that would really protect that time for you.

I think that what I got out of today is being filled with a bit more enthusiasm to go back and encourage other people to join in. I think also just hearing other peoples' views are interesting and listening to the difficulties that they've had. We haven't actually got a Local Practitioner Forum going yet in east Lothian but we hope that will come – so it's interesting speaking to people who've actually already got a group going. One thing I've learned is that we had a group with about 8 people at our last meeting and I thought that was too small but I was speaking to somebody who is having quite a productive group with 6 so I have realised we don't need to have too many to get something going.

Andrew Lowe
Director of Social Work, Scottish Borders Council
Chair of the Practice Governance Change Programme
Facilitator
Workshop 4

It was a great workshop, we had about 20 people there and we were talking about the assessment of risk which is something that is close to the heart of social workers as you might imagine. The whole business of social work is that whilst trying to enable and empower people to lead fulfilled lives we must at the same time protect them from the risks and issues that we're all familiar with that happen in life – so social workers are very keen to get involved in this. It was great because it was an afternoon session and I thought they might want to sneak off but they didn't – they were very keen and we had lots of dialogue and experience examples from Shetland, from Glasgow, from the Western Isles, from Clackmannanshire – from all over Scotland. It was very good and the striking thing was the commonality of experience. People were saying “Yes that's true for me” regardless of where they worked.

The workshop was made up of quite a diverse audience -mainly practitioners from a range of different local authorities in Scotland. Some first line managers which was important because they brought a different contribution, and some academics. My contribution – I'd put together a presentation on some research that's been conducted sponsored by the Scottish Executive. It looks at all of the literature on the assessment of risk in Social Work around the world so that we can get the best information and it came up with some interesting issues and some challenges for social workers. So I threw up some controversial things. For example, I threw up the idea that social workers take a deferential position to doctors and lawyers - some people recognised this and others argued against, so we got some quite lively debate. Ultimately the aim of the workshop was to look at how we can make a change to the way in which we work in social work that can ease the issue of risk assessment so that people feel we're not just bound by forms and tools and procedures, but that we can get to a place where we have a more interactive relationship with our service users - where we can value and listen to, and take account, of what they and their families have to say. So it was very good, very challenging, and there were lots of ideas coming and going and quite a measure of agreement which was interesting.

Today's event was all about Changing Lives – that's both the topic and the title of the Change Programme, but it's also the aspiration that underlies all of this work. So what today meant for me was an opportunity to interact with practitioners from across

Scotland – to listen to their ideas and to get some messages out to them about the work that has been undertaken through Changing Lives. So it was very disappointing to hear people at the early stages of the day to say that they hadn't heard anything about Changing Lives for a year and surprised by it's still happening, but then other people were saying "we've got our local practitioners forum going and it's going really well and we want to do this and we want to do that etc." So this is all about culture change, it's all about engaging with people and today was a very good example – it was a good turn out, a turn out from Shetland to the Borders – across the whole length and breadth of Scotland and it's carried forward the debate – and that's what we were trying to do.