

# **The involvement of service users and carers in social work education-a case example.**

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Abstract: In the UK participatory social work education involving service users and carers with the support of academic staff is an initiative that has developed in recent years. The involvement of service users and carers in education mirrors similar initiatives in health where patient involvement is a growing area of policy and practice. The need for service users and carers to participate in and make decisions about their care has gained consensus among professionals in recent times. This need has been fuelled by drivers which include the emergence of the service user movement, socio-political, ethical and empirical views as well as public mistrust of professionals. Social work practice is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary. Social work education needs to respond to the emerging needs for user and carer involvement. This abstract highlights an initiative which was to explore the motivations of service users and carers involved in student social work education and to incorporate the voices of those directly involved. Participative research between academic staff, students and service users and carers highlighted some of the challenges of maintaining meaningful involvement and the learning this produced. There is pressure from service user and carer action groups for professionals to change from holding a paternalistic view of service delivery to one in which there is choice, autonomy and empowerment. This shift away from a medical model of care and support, where service user are seen as passive recipients of services towards a more empowered approach where service users are involved in decision making; has been marked by a range of U.K Government legislation, which encourages greater inclusion of service users. The learning process brought about by the involvement of service users and carers has provided a link between theory and practice for students who believe they are able to practice from a carer and user focused perspective.