

# **Social Work & public accountability: What do Carers Say?**

**Julie Lawrence**

**University of Salford**

## **Background to Research**

Legislation, policy and strategies encourage services and professionals to work with carers in ways that complement and enhance their roles. This is in order to maximize their capacity to care for their relative (e.g. Department of Health (DH) 2008, 2009, 2010; Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), 2006; Scottish Executive, 2010; Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), 2007), (James, 2012). Family carers, therefore, are recognized as a valuable resource in terms of caring for their relative and also when involved in public and professional partnerships, including the DH and statutory services.

## **Research Aims**

This presentation will address the conference theme by exploring carers' perceptions about working in partnership with social workers through a qualitative research study undertaken during 2012 in the UK. The research site was a statutory intellectual disability service for adults in the North West of England. The purposive sample of carers lived in the local community and had access to a social worker, to support them with their son or daughter. This paper argues that evaluating social work that matters to carers is important (Cameron et al., 2012). Outcomes defined by carers may differ from policy, strategy and practice imperatives, but are a crucial aspect of understanding the effectiveness or otherwise of accountable social work.

## **Methodology**

A narrative approach was adopted, whereby both the researcher and participants (n=6) worked as collaborators in order to facilitate in-depth 'life-stories' about valuable experiences. The data set was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA enabled the detailed and nuanced analysis of the lived experiences of participants to be explored (Smith et al., 2009).

## **Key Findings**

There is limited research which addresses the support needs of carers. This study highlighted 'what mattered' to carers, in terms of how social workers supported them to continue caring, including implications for effective social work practice:

- \* Displaying a genuine interest and commitment to people with intellectual disabilities
- \* Having a key person to contact
- \* Offering a consistent approach and co-ordinated service provision