

# Social care, service users and user involvement

Peter Beresford and Sarah Carr (Eds.)

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Service user involvement has long been an interest of mine as a social work practitioner; an area which continues to present significant challenges in the Aotearoa New Zealand socio-political context. We are in our third term of a government dedicated to the marketing of social services, and the voice of service users has never been more important.

It is useful for New Zealand social workers to understand the UK experience of service user involvement, where it appears to have been more central to social service provision over the last two decades. This edited selection of contributions includes examples of service user involvement from across a diversity of groups and communities; drug and alcohol user groups, children and young people, those holding survivor-researcher identities in mental health research, LGBTI communities, older people, ethnically diverse neighbourhood groups, groups traditionally marginalised by life-limiting conditions and those with a learning disability involved in self-advocacy.

Various writers examine the impact of service user involvement in the areas of service delivery, as well as the creation and co-creation of knowledge. Apart from one Swedish study, all examples come from the UK context and all are recent.

The text is bookended by chapters by the editors Peter Beresford (Director of The Centre for Citizen Participation at Brunel University, London, UK) and Sarah Carr (Social Care Institute for Excellence, London, UK). They outline the theoretical origins of the service user involvement movement including a discussion of the contested terms, *service user* and *user*

*involvement*. A valuable overview which traces the ideological and political journey of the movement sets the initiatives in context. A final chapter captures some of the main messages from the various case studies and clearly draws the links between service user involvement, political activism and social change.

Through the various case studies a range of processes, outcomes, impacts and ways of measuring impacts of service user involvement across diverse fields of practice are explored. The wealth of information across the range of contexts – practice, policy and research, makes this an extremely useful collection. Difficulties and challenges are described along with the triumphs.

The examples of successful projects which work with some of the more traditionally hard to reach groups (for example, people with life-limiting illness, the LGBTI community, drug and alcohol dependent adults, people with learning disabilities) are inspirational. There are ways of ensuring that these voices are heard.

When the rich, lived experience of service users themselves is at the centre of research, policy generation, service design and delivery, we know outcomes are better. In our current risk averse environment, there is a pressing need for new practice models and outcomes-driven, evidence - based programmes, and we need to get serious about service user involvement in the development of these. This text collates valuable insights and in so doing, gives useful guidance to service users, practitioners and policymakers committed to taking up this challenge in our context.

Reviewed by **Jude Douglas** Open Polytechnic of New Zealand