Welcome to the first Partnership Initiative newsletter, “Bridging the Gap”. My name is Mrs Dawn Harris and I will be taking on the task of Editor. I have been a family carer for almost 21 years to my son who has Down’s Syndrome and is also on the autistic spectrum. My involvement with the Partnership Initiative started over six years ago and I have found my involvement developing over the years.

The aim of the newsletter is to give the opportunity for student social workers, carers, service users and outside agencies to contribute information and work together. The newsletter will be coming out once every term, and feedback on the first newsletter would be greatly appreciated so we can bridge that gap.

Dawn

The Partnership Initiative: what’s it all about?

The Partnership Initiative was set up when social work training began at Kent in 2003 and aims to make sure that service user and carer perspectives and expertise are part of social work programmes within the University.

Membership of the Partnership Initiative is open to people in Kent and Medway with direct experience of accessing social work services, whether as service users or as carers. The Partnership Initiative meets regularly with academics and student representatives and members are involved in a range of activities, including teaching, student selection and research.

If somebody you know would be interested in finding out about becoming a member, please get in touch with Mike Thomas for more information. Mike’s email address is M.J.Thomas@kent.ac.uk and his phone number is 01634 888927.
Name the newsletter competition

Thank you to all students who took part in the competition to name this newsletter. Our congratulations go to Emma Farrow, Stage 1 social work student, whose entry "Bridging the Gap" was chosen as the name for the newsletter.

Emma explained that she had come up with Bridging the Gap, ‘as that is what I feel the Partnership Initiative does, it closes the gap that used to put social workers on a powerful pedestal when it came to intervening in service users’ lives.’

Question time

Part of the role of Bridging the Gap will be to encourage dialogue between students and service users and carers. If you have a question about service user or carer perspectives on social work, please email Dawn Harris, the Editor, and she will put your question to a member of the Partnership Initiative.

Replies to questions will be published in future editions of this newsletter.

User involvement: social work leading the way

We all know that social work gets a pretty bad press these days. So it’s refreshing to hear news that social work is ahead of the game in an important area of good practice.

Writing for the Guardian Social Care Network, Peter Beresford argues that social work is leading the way on user and carer involvement and can provide valuable lessons to other professions. Citing a government consultation on social work education, Beresford highlights the importance of user and care involvement in bringing about a much needed cultural change in social work.

Importantly, social work students also see carers and service users as making an important contribution to their learning. Follow the link to Peter Beresford’s article and tell us what you think: http://www.theguardian.com/social-care-network/2014/jun/03/social-work-education-leads-way-involving-service-users
**Personal Profile**

*Bridging the Gap* is geared towards building links between students and service users and carers. Every edition of the newsletter will feature a profile of a member of the Partnership Initiative. In this first edition, we hear from Joanna Whisker:

“Having become a wheelchair user in 1984 I have found myself on the tortuous path of living with a disability, arranging my own care via Direct Payments and trying to improve the facilities and opportunities available to disabled people.

In the early 1990’s I was fortunate enough to be offered a place on the Personal Assistant Management Scheme (PAMS) run by Greenwich Association of Disabled People (GAD). Having completed the PAMS GAD invited me to complete the Trainer for Trainer course. I have since completed a refresher course for Training the Trainer and a PTLLS course in 2012. In 2007 I gained a BA (Hons) in Creative Writing and Literature from the University of Kent. I have also provided training courses for KCC, and work closely with the social work departments of Greenwich and the University of Kent. I have been a member of the Partnership Initiative for the social work programme for a number of years as well as a small local charity – The Simon Paul Foundation which supports physically disabled people. I love these opportunities to communicate with people and exchange experiences.”

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**What makes a good Social Worker?**

**Service users and carers share their views...**

Have you ever wondered what service users and carers really think about social workers? At the Spring Term meeting of the Partnership Initiative, there was a discussion between service users and carers, practitioners and academics on the topic of ‘what makes a good Social Worker’.

Service users and carers identified the following key factors in successful social work:

- Social workers should keep in mind the importance of face-to-face contact with service users and carers. They should get out of the office!
- Social workers need to remember that everybody’s time is precious. They need to be reliable, turn up to visits on time and come prepared;
- Social workers need to listen, to build relationships and gain trust;
- They should seek feedback regularly to make sure that they have understood what service users and carers have said;
- Social workers need to acknowledge that change takes time, and that service users and carers have good days and bad days;
- Social workers should understand the politics of social work and resources but hang onto their humanity and not hide behind policies and procedures. They should avoid using jargon!
- They should be effective advocates and have the skills and knowledge to be able to make things happen;
- Social workers should be accountable to service users, and acknowledge and learn from mistakes.
What does ‘bridging the gap’ mean to you? What comes to mind?
The gaps between social workers and service users/carers?
Policy and practice?
Rhetoric and reality?
Needs and resources?
All of these and more... let us know where you think the gaps are and what can be done to fill them.
We are keen to have as much involvement in the newsletter from service users, carers and students.

Contact the Editor:
dawn.harris14@yahoo.co.uk

Next issue: Spring term 2015