Readiness for Practice

This short film describes the process for the 'Readiness for Practice' learning interviews, which involves students carrying out role plays with service users and carers.

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Transcript

The readiness for practice learning is a fundamental part of social work training. A social work degree requires students to satisfactorily undertake two lengthy placements, working in the field with service users and other professionals as well as the demands of academic study. The Social work regulatory body requires that before our students go out onto placement that they have the basic skills needed to work with a wide variety of people and talk to service users with understanding and respect and this is something that we value greatly.

Social work students therefore are taught a range of skills about effective communication, listening and confidentiality. The students then undertake a role play and are observed doing so by a panel. This way we ensure that students meet the basic standard before they go out into the 'real world'. For a number of years students undertook these interviews with drama students playing the service users, with mixed results. Denise Tanner and Joy Fillingham decided to change the approach and to work with service users and carers to undertake the roles previously undertaken by drama students.

There are over forty service users and carers regularly working with students and academics on the social work degree programmes to ensure that students really understand what it is like to be accessing social work. We were clear that not all service users and carers could undertake the role play, and that we did not want them to be talking about their own personal experiences as this may be 'too close to home' we also recognised how important it was for role players to be adequately trained and supported. We therefore advertised for those who wanted to take part to be interviewed in out newsletter for service users.

With the financial support from circles of influence money we were able recruit role players, we were able to run a number of training, practice and preparation sessions including the development of realistic scenarios in collaboration with our role players. The Circles of Influence Campaign is the University of Birmingham's £60 million fundraising effort. Including projects that will have an impact on local, national and international communities. The role players are now service users and carers rather than drama students. The results have been highly rated by service users and carers and the students and academics. Indeed in the current year all master students successfully undertook the process.

"I think there were distinct benefits over use of drama students who had perhaps not had previous experience of some of the roles we were asked to play." (Role Player)

"Made a difference to how real it felt - more like a professional work role." (Student)

"Very realistic. I think it's a situation I would potentially be dealing with in practice." (Student)

We now have a much more realistic situation, where students are able to see people they may work with in the future as whole people, with skills sets and insights which they can share rather than passive recipients of services. The feedback given by the role players is invaluable in helping the students reflect on their interviewing skills and how they relate to the people they work with. They people who undertake role play continue to have training each year and we continue to work to make sure the scenarios and role players are diverse and realistic. It has opened up new opportunities for wider involvement of the community in social work education, developed the skills and confidence of service users and carers and students alike and feels an empowering and positive process which would not have been possible without the monies from circles of influence – thank you!

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