



Diverse Perspectives on Mental Health

Listening to service users

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Some of the key points that came out from talking to the service users are points which very much fit with what the course is trying to explore which is that there are lessons to be learnt for everybody and particularly lessons to be learnt for people who provide services and whether they're working directly with service users or they're managed services or commissioned services, and that's an importance of listening to people's experiences and I suppose it goes slightly against the way that professionals may have been trained which is to listen for things that indicate the presence of certain symptoms, so that when somebody's making a diagnosis of a mental health problem they will be looking for certain key words which they could then list against a list of symptoms which would then say this person has depression or they have schizophrenia, and the service users make the point quite strongly in their interviews that when that happens that they feel they really haven't been heard, that they felt they'd been categorised, that the person is not really listening to them, they're just listening for certain buzz words that will then be ticked off, and that they will then be assumed to all be part of one category of depressives, of schizophrenics, or obsessive compulsives, who all can be treated the same.

I'm sure that most health professionals don't intend to do that but that does seem to be the way that people experience things, so I think the lesson that could be picked up from that is the importance of really demonstrating that you are listening to people's stories, that their life history is very important to them, that they, for them that's why they are where they are now because of what's happened before, and they need to tell it and to know that it's been heard. And that's actually a very important part of the process of getting better, perhaps of having trust in the other person who is going to help them move on, and establishing a good relationship with them is, it can still be done within professional boundaries, you don't have to become this person's friend, but you can demonstrate that you have a certain amount of empathy, you have the ability to listen to them, and to acknowledge that what they're saying is important to them, and that they have expertise perhaps that can be drawn on though they will know what triggers their problems, quite often they know what makes them feel better, and I think that's said quite a few times by the various people who were interviewed that if there was a message that they'd like people to take home it was to listen to us, to listen to our suggestions as to how we could do things, and that it's not a conflicting situation of people in two camps necessarily, it could be more working alongside each other.