



Critical Social Work Practice

Involving service users

Nick Balneaves

One of the key groups that worked with the 21st Century Social Work Review was a panel of people who use social work services. Debbie Berry is a user of Mental Health Services and a member of that panel, why did she get involved?

Debbie Berry

I wanted to get involved mainly because I have quite a good experience of social care services and what I wanted to do was take my good experiences and take them into a group and say, this is how services could look if people really start making the effort and ... and if they consult with users and carers.

Nick Balneaves

What do you think about the way the review was conducted? I mean were your views really taken into account?

Debbie Berry

The feeling was within the users and carers panel, was that we had been listened to and we had had a say. But I think the proof will be as ... as time goes on and we see if there are any changes come across.

Nick Balneaves

John Dow is also a user of mental health services, but he had a different response to Changing Lives.

John Dow

I was very cynical and thought here we go again, someone else just wanted to say here's what we hope to achieve and here's the political way we're going to achieve it. Because in previous years we've seen so many initiatives, drivers for change, drivers for influence through involvement and we've been heard, we've been heard, we've been heard and they haven't actually demonstrated that they've listened and very little has changed. But that gets back to, I think Debbie made the point, a few seconds ago, that the proof of the pudding is going to be how they communicate the message, how they're gonna now build on the initial process, by accepting that perhaps within the initial process there are some lessons to be learnt.

Nick Balneaves

What lessons do you think need to be learned?

John Dow

Communication. They really need to start widening the network of the opportunity to be involved in an effective way, not just cherry picking and say well we had one group as an over action group, that did the business for us then, or run within. We as users and carers need the great and the good to start saying to us, we've listened to you and here is proof of how we've listened to you. We may not succeed, but at least demonstrate that they're trying because they're running with issues that Debbie and others picked up when they were on that panel.