

Involving alcohol and other drug specialists in social work education

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Introduction

Student evaluations consistently show that input from practitioners and service users is highly valued by social work students. The use of such expertise is particularly needed where myths, stereotypes and judgmental attitudes exist about a problem and the people who suffer it. This is arguably the case for people who have experienced alcohol or other drug problems. Negative stereotypes abound and they explicitly, or implicitly, portray people with substance problems as 'undeserving', unfeeling, and unworthy of care and attention. Inviting input from alcohol and drug specialists is therefore essential in helping to challenge these values and attitudes, increase social workers' knowledge and awareness, and help them to understand the discrimination and challenges people with alcohol or drug problems face. Substance use specialists include the person with the substance problem, alcohol and drug service staff as well as the partners, children and extended family and friendship networks. All of these specialists can be contacted through local services and support groups.

Why involve alcohol and other drug specialists?

- People who use substances are one of the main groups of people in touch with social services (TOPSS 2002).
- Alcohol and other drug use is an issue that is applicable to all social workers regardless of specialist area of practice.
- People with alcohol and other drug problems often have complex and overlapping needs that require a holistic and supportive approach. Social workers are best placed to intervene where there are levels of complexity and a range of services needed.
- The Q and PQ social work curricula need to be responsive to the needs of front line social workers. According to newly qualified and experienced social workers, they lack knowledge of alcohol and other drugs, resulting in a lack of confidence to intervene and discuss any concerns they may have (Galvani and Forrester 2008, Galvani and Hughes 2008).
- Students highly rate service user and practitioner contributions to teaching. Involving people who have professional and personal experience of alcohol and other drugs adds value to a programme. It also ensures students hear a range of personal and professional perspectives.
- Encouraging partnership working with practitioners and service user/carer involvement is key to the development and delivery of the social work degrees and the post qualifying curricula. Where not already established, contact with substance use specialists can lead to other opportunities for collaboration and involvement.

What specialists can offer

There are a number of ways specialists in substance use can be involved in social work education:

- *Teaching*: this could include contributions on a range of topics relating to alcohol or drugs, from alcohol and drugs and their effects to types of intervention to good practice in making referrals. Teaching can also include the views and experiences of someone affected by alcohol or drug problems, eg. parent, partner, child, as well as the person with the problem.
- *Development of teaching materials/case studies*: service users can work with academic and practice staff to develop a range of teaching materials for use across various modules. This could include written case studies based on their own professional and practice experiences or videos, audio materials or group exercises to support student learning. Some specialist partners may also be willing to role play scenarios with students or talk to students about their own experiences of substance use and/or contact with social workers.
- *Administration*: service user and practitioner involvement is now a requirement in many of the administrative tasks required of social work programmes. These include recruitment processes such as interviewing prospective students, to assessing student presentations, skills work and other aspects of their learning.
- *Practice Learning Opportunities*: many social work programmes are finding it increasingly difficult to find good quality placement learning opportunities – there are opportunities for placements within most local drug and alcohol agencies. Alcohol and drug agencies provide a varied work environment including experience of individual counselling, educational and therapeutic group work, outreach, family work and project development roles as well as work with people from other disciplines.
- *Student assessment*: increasingly social work courses require students to demonstrate their presentation skills as well as testing their interpersonal skills through observed role plays. Specialists in substance use can be observers and participants for role plays and offer an important alternative view on a student's skills and abilities. Tasks involved in completing practice portfolios also require service user and practitioner evaluations on the students' progress.
- *Research-based projects or dissertations*: specialist agencies may be interested in taking part in Q or PQ research projects that will also have some benefit to them. Many alcohol and drug agencies are voluntary sector and may welcome the opportunity for a small scale evaluation of services or to offer resources for a review of literature on a particular aspect of their work.

Provide a clear brief

- If you are unsure what to ask for in terms of content, be honest and ask for the specialists' views on what can be achieved in the time that you have available.
- Be clear about previous input students have had on this subject or related subjects.
- Give your presenters ideas about how to deliver teaching in terms of the modes of delivery available. Some people's experience of teaching will be of lectures only so encourage presenters to be creative and encourage debate using small group exercises, case studies, role plays, interactive presentations and so on.
- Explain the practicalities, e.g. size/shape of room, number of students, equipment available, how to find the room on campus, accessibility of refreshments, whether or not they will be paid and how much, arrangements for handouts.

How to find substance use specialists

There are several easy ways to access substance use specialists in your local area or geographical region:

For local (or national) agencies

- Contact your local Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT). Each region in England has a DAAT (or DAT - Drug Action Team) – a statutory service that provides a range of drug and alcohol services in the region. To find your local DAAT/DAT, go to the National Treatment Agency website and look under the drop down menu 'About Treatment' for 'Treatment Directories'. Click on 'Local DAT Directories', find your region and nearest town and email or telephone the contact listed. Most DAATs will offer free training for social work professionals as well as training student groups www.nta.nhs.uk/about_treatment/treatment_directories/default.aspx
- Helpfinder is a database of drug agencies (some of whom will accept both alcohol and drug using service users) provided by Drugscope, the UK's leading charity on drug use and related policy matters. Click on the 'Search Helpfinder here' hyperlink then complete the search form with as much or as little data as you can. For example, you could search by town or by drug or by the type of treatment offered. Summary details and contacts are given. www.drugscope.org.uk/resources/databases/helpfinder.htm
- The Alcohol Services Directory is a database of alcohol agencies (some of whom will accept both alcohol and drug using service users) provided by the leading Alcohol Charity in the UK, Alcohol Concern. Its directory is split into regions, then towns. Alternatively you can find out your nearest service by entering your post code. <http://servicesdirectory.alcoholconcern.org.uk/>
- Services in Scotland can be found on the Scottish Drugs Forum directory www.scottishdrugservices.com and services for Northern Ireland on the www.drugsalcohol.info website. Services in Wales can be found at www.dan247.org.uk/Services_Drugs_Alcohol.asp

For local (or national) service users

- Most DAATs or DATs will have a service user coordinator whose role is to facilitate service user involvement in the design, delivery and evaluation of services. Some will also have or want experience of public speaking or training. Contact your local DAAT/DAT and ask for the service user coordinator's details - www.drugscope.org.uk/resources/databases/helpfinder.htm
- Many voluntary sector alcohol and drug agencies now have service user groups established to support the development and evaluation of the service and/or to provide a supportive peer group for those attending the service. Call your local alcohol or drug agency and ask if they have a service user group or, if not, any service user representatives they could approach on your behalf to ask about taking part in training.
- Black Poppy is a small voluntary sector organization that produces a website and magazine run by drug users. It has a contacts and links section that lists drug user forums and groups and special interest groups, e.g. women's groups, as well as listing other links and useful resources. www.blackpoppy.org.uk/blackpoppy/contacts.htm

Ideas for specialist contributions to teaching

Contributions from substance use specialists can consist of separate input or combined presentations. Below are just a few ideas:



Practitioners

- Invite a local drugs service to run training on drugs, their effects and how to recognize drug use.
- Ask the local DAAT to present on the types of intervention and services available in the region and how social workers can best refer to those services.
- Invite a local alcohol service to teach about alcohol, units, and the physical and mental health impact of alcohol.
- Contact the local young people's service and ask them to present on the particular legal and practice issues for working with children and young people using alcohol and drugs or affected by parental substance use.
- Find the local family alcohol (or drug) service and invite them to talk about their work and the methods they use to working with families affected by alcohol and other drug use.



Service users/carers

- Arrange for one or more service users to spend time telling their own personal stories about how their alcohol or drug problems developed and how they have sought help and what worked for them, followed by a Question and Answer.
- Ask for people with specific experience of a particular role, e.g. a parent who had problems with alcohol or other drugs, to talk about how their substance use had an impact on themselves and their children and wider family.
- Ask family members to discuss the impact on them and how they coped with the substance use of their loved one.
- Run a guided interview with one or more service users followed by questions from the student group – often a good tool for service users who, while willing to take part, may lack confidence to create a presentation.
- Ask a group of service users to present their views on how services and individual professionals can best help them, for example, what qualities in a service or practitioner helped them most and, conversely, for some of their worst experiences.



Combined

- Invite a local drugs service together with a service user group to offer a combined teaching session on drug and/or alcohol awareness, with presentations from service users about their own experiences of problematic alcohol or drug use.
- Ask a practitioner and service user representative to present on, and role play, how to ask the 'right' questions in the right way and some of the do's and don'ts of early assessment and intervention
- Many alcohol and drug services use methods such as cognitive behavioural interventions or motivational interviewing. Ask practitioners to explain the approaches and demonstrate some of the techniques. Ask the service users to talk about what it is like to be on the receiving end.

Support for service users

- Some service users will be used to presenting to groups but others will be new to it. Check this out.
- Ensure you factor in enough time for an initial meeting at which point you can also show them the teaching space as well as discuss content of the teaching.
- Make time to follow up with phone support or to look at materials if they want to send you a draft and coordinate arrangements for handouts and other resources you/they may want.
- Raise the issue of fees and expenses in terms of what the department can pay. Some people may only want/be able to accept travel costs and a small honorarium. If so, arrange a nice lunch.
- As with the practitioners, explain the practicalities of the teaching and the administrative processes.
- Ensure you make clear arrangements for meeting and greeting presenters on the day of the teaching and ensure you or another member of staff stays with them through the teaching for additional support or to deal with any student issues.
- Provide immediate constructive feedback after the session and again later if the session is part of a formal module evaluation some time later.

DVD/Films

Crossing the line. Hard hitting drug education package with real life interviews and reconstructions which combine in a compelling way to tell stories of former heroin and crack cocaine users. It highlights the potential impact of drug addiction on individuals, families and society. Contains resource folder, DVD and CD rom. www.kgbproductions.co.uk/crossing_the_line.htm

A cup of chocolate. Amusing and poignant short film made by Cumbria user's forum substituting chocolate for alcohol or other drugs. www.virginmediashorts.co.uk/films/film/a-cup-of-chocolate/

www.inexcess.tv contains short films and video clips. Has a 'talking heads' section with service users discussing their own stories of alcohol and drug problems and their efforts to change.

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