

Reflections: an interview with Lucy Buckley

Social Work Research Facilitator, Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Partnership NHS Trust

Q1. Please tell us about your new role as social work research facilitator.

LB: The purpose of the role was twofold – to raise the profile of social care within the trust (SSOTP) and also to see if the research facilitation role which is well established for health services could be applied to social care. The idea being to help embed evidence based practice and research participation into social work and supporting service users in taking part in research. In terms of raising the profile I think this has been very successful, certainly within the Trust and even nationally with some coverage in Community Care. It has however been much more of a challenge making the links with researchers and bringing research into the Trust.

Q2. What made you interested in this post?

LB: I have been interested in research since completing my undergraduate degree – the dissertation being empirical research. Then when I completed my social work MA (Master of Arts) and completed a literature review based dissertation it confirmed that I was always going to be interested in research, from the practicalities of methods and design to knowledge synthesis and theory. This post was an opportunity to bring my interest for research to role at the earliest stage of development and I saw it as a chance to start to develop a more evidence based culture in social work practice, even if this was only on a small scale.

Q3. Please could you tell us about your background?

LB: I completed my MA at Keele University, qualifying as a social worker in 2012 and have been with Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Partnership NHS Trust (SSOTP) for nearly two years now, initially working in a hospital discharge team and now in an adult integrated community team. I also have experience in child protection and adult substance misuse.

Q4. Why do you think research is important in social work and social care?

LB: Research is something which prompts questions, changes practice and empowers service users. I think the value of research in social work can be harder to articulate compared to for example, medicine because the data collected tends to be qualitative rather than quantitative so results are more open to interpretation. It's fair to say that one intervention will not work for all service users even where they have very similar needs, but the same can be said of medication. It's important to conduct research to provide an increased evidence base and continue developing social work as a distinct profession; increased interest in social work practice and knowledge can only be a good thing both for service users and practitioners.

Q5. What do you think should be the research priorities for social work and social care?

LB: I think dementia is a huge topic in social care at the moment, but because of that it already has a lot of research attention. I would like to see more research done on adult safeguarding, practitioner involvement in research and the impact of the Care Act on all aspects of social work practice and service provision.

Q6. How can social care practitioners get more involved in research?

LB: Speak to your local heads of social work – even before this secondment opportunity came up I had spoken to the Trust’s Head of Social Work and as a result I am involved with some research being done by the University of Birmingham on GP & social care integration. You never know what is around so make it known that you are interested in research and even if there are no opportunities at the time ask to be kept informed. The School for Social Care Research is also a great resource for people considering undertaking their own projects as they do fund studies and recently put out a call for abstracts. It’s also worth keeping an eye out for internal vacancies as research opportunities may be advertised that way.