

Reflect on a work experience in which you have applied your learning from your life experience to your current Social Services practice.

### **Experience: Describe the experience, what happened?**

The experience was participating in our whole organisation annual review meeting. This meeting happens once a year in our organisation which has varied provision for people with learning and other disabilities. I thought carefully about the work of the organisation from my perspective and that of the people who use our services, and contributed two items to the agenda. The first was a suggestion for reviewing how we involve people who use our services in decisions about the running of the organisation (for example, they are not currently represented at the annual review meeting); the second was about our shift patterns which are sometimes quite limiting for service users. I worded the agenda items as follows: reviewing involvement of service users; shift patterns – are they a limitation for service users?

The next thing I did was prepare before the meeting in terms of areas where I might contribute, especially around the agenda items I had suggested. I discussed with the service users for whom I am key worker areas where they might like to participate more in decisions and talked to care workers whom I supervise about their views on shift patterns. I also discussed my thinking in my own supervision session.

Communication is quite difficult with one of the service users I work with because she has no speech and only limited signs, so I use colourful magazine pictures to facilitate communication. It also helps that we have known one another for a long time and I have observed how she makes her wishes known.

The final thing I did was participate in the meeting. I made sure that I spoke clearly to the agenda items I had put forward. The advance preparation was really useful and other organisation members participated fully in the discussion. I was also able to contribute to other parts of the review meeting because I had thought in advance about what had happened during the year.

### **Knowledge: What do you know now that you did not know before you had the experience?**

I built on my knowledge of organisational policy through checking the policy in relation to service user participation in decision-making.

I gained a more thorough knowledge of teamwork and the value of well-planned meetings through doing some reading around the subject in textbooks and journals. This related especially to how power can be used and abused and how to motivate other people through role modelling.

I learned that it is possible to influence organisational policy through well-researched and well-presented material

I improved my use of supervision through developing a personal and professional plan

### **Skills: What can you do now that you could not do before you had the experience, or can do better now because of the experience?**

I feel more confident about presenting my viewpoint and suggesting changes in organisational practice now that I have done this successfully in the whole organisation annual review. I can present an argument in a balanced and well-prepared way, presenting the case clearly but also encouraging the contribution of others.

My preparation before the meeting, researching current organisational policies and asking service users and staff for their views was invaluable and also a skill which I built on from my previous experience of leading a team meeting.

My experience of supervising others also enhances my own use of supervision, especially in terms of identifying developmental needs and developing a personal and professional development plan.

I built on my use of communication skills by ensuring that I listened as well as spoke, responding positively to the suggestions made by my colleagues.

**Reflections:**

What were your feelings and thoughts? What did you do well? What would you do differently? What values did you use?

**What did you do well?**

I felt much more involved in the meeting this year than I did last year. Last year I didn't have the confidence to put forward agenda items for the meeting and I didn't really contribute very much, mainly because I hadn't done enough thinking and discussing beforehand. I was asked to start off the discussion for the items I put forward and they generated quite a bit of debate. The advance preparation I had done enabled me to put forward not just my own views but also those of the service users who had expressed an opinion.

**What would you do differently?**

I didn't mean to, but I do think I talked too much to my agenda items and wasn't good enough at facilitating discussion from others. I did however ask people what they thought and there was rewarding discussion did take place.

**What values did you use?**

I have huge respect for the views of my colleagues and service users and I hope this respect was demonstrated; I also think that service users should have equality and that we should encourage and support them to optimise their potential. All of the values of the Code of Practice for Social Services Workers and the National Care Standards are part of the bedrock of my practice.

**Application:** Think of a situation in which you could apply what you have learned.