

Social Perspectives Hub – A Proposal

Aims

For BASW to host a mental health “Social Perspectives Hub” that promotes, supports and develops social perspectives in mental health. This will be a BASW Special Interest Collaborative Group of service users and survivors, carers, practitioners using the principles of co-production and the 4PI National Involvement Standards. The Hub will be hosted by BASW but it will be open to every kind of interested person; service users, non-BASW members, other professionals, academics, policy makers and interested members of the public. It will build on the work of the “Social Perspectives Network for Modern Mental Health” (known as SPN), hopefully keeping its active members and using their energy to support the establishment of the new “Hub”.

The Hub will make the case for effective commissioning and practice that is socially focussed. This will have a positive benefit for people who use mental health services, their friends, families and communities. This is in line with the SPN charitable objectives.¹

The History of the Social Perspectives Network for Modern Mental Health (SPN)

On its website SPN describes itself as “a unique coalition of service users/survivors, carers, policy makers, academics, students and practitioners interested in how social factors both contribute to people becoming distressed, and play a crucial part in promoting people’s recovery.”

SPN has been in existence since 2001. It began at a point in time when integration of local authority mental health social work within integrated NHS teams was the priority. There was a concern about what would happen to a focus on social aspects within this new way of working. Study days were organised and a network of interested people was formed, including academics, social workers, trainers, service users and carers. SPN was formally launched in 2002 and was supported by three organisations; TOPSS England, NIMHE and SCIE. SPN flourished during this period; study days were held, free papers written and distributed, influential books were published including “Social Perspectives in Mental Health” (edited by Jerry Tew in 2005), “Values and Methodologies for Social Research in Mental Health” (edited by Jerry Tew and SPN colleagues in 2006), “Whose Recovery Is It Anyway?” (SPN in partnership with SCIE and the Delivering Race Equality Programme in 2007) and “Understanding Social Work and Mental Health” by Vicky Coppock in 2010.

As formal funding support from government and national organisations or programmes ended as they were disbanded or finished, SPN reinvented itself as a charity. It has become a more “virtual” organisation. In very recent years SPN has slowed down in terms of the work that it is doing, but it continues to have approximately 300 members across England and Wales, an excellent website with a valuable archive of reports and the involvement of a number of enthusiastic people committed to promoting social perspectives in mental health.

The Opportunity

A BASW hosted Social Perspectives Hub can take forward the aims of SPN, incorporate its resources and provide new impetus to the work of promoting, supporting and developing Social Perspectives in Mental Health.

There is much activity at the moment being carried out by various service user led groups and professional groups. There are links between these networks but these are not well developed and often people are working in parallel. The Hub will provide a “place” for networks to link with each other, pool resources, facilitate co-production, act as a springboard for activism and partnership projects. This “place” does not currently exist. In order to be successful the BASW hosted social perspectives hub must be clearly multi-professional and be co-produced with service users.

Benefits to BASW

Mental Health Social Workers are engaged in supporting people experiencing mental distress. The role of the mental health social worker is to work with service users from a “social” perspective. Mental Health social workers are likely to welcome an attempt to promote social perspectives in mental health. The development of a BASW social perspectives Hub will promote BASW membership amongst mental health social workers.

The social perspectives hub will have a clear explicit commitment to co-production from the outset. It will involve networking with a range of service user led organisations. This will enhance BASW’s reputation amongst mental health service users and service user led organisations.

The social perspectives hub will not be social work led. It will be a multi-professional hub. It will aim to bring together a range of different networks. This will enhance the standing of BASW within other professional groupings and help raise its profile.

The Hub will assist BASW to be outward looking and influential within mental health.

Co-Production

The Hub will be co-produced with service-users from the outset. Its structure is deliberately not fully defined at this stage but will be developed through co-production as the Hub evolves. This paper has been shared with Dr Sarah Carr for initial advice about ensuring that the Hub is co-produced. There are a wide range of service user led organisations, activist campaigns and research groups that might become involved with the Hub, representing the diversity of activism in the service user and survivor movement. These include NSUN (which is finalising a Members' Manifesto), Hearing Voices Network, Recovery in the Bin and PDx in the Bin, Shaping Our Lives, Survivor Research Network, the Mad Studies Network and the Mental Health Resistance Network.

Sarah outlines how sometimes boundaries are slowly blurring between service users, survivors and practitioner allies and how various critical discussions are being driven by factors such as welfare benefit reforms, austerity, stigma and discrimination, trauma, poverty, poor housing and inequality as well as the state of mainstream NHS mental health care and support, critiques of neoliberalism and the emergence of 'Mad Studies', the development of the social model of madness and distress, gender and the BPD diagnosis, plus the ongoing development of service user and survivor research and peer support. The Hub potentially offers a way to make links between those concerned with or interested in these issues.

Multi-Disciplinary

Although BASW is hosting the Hub, it will be clear throughout all its activity that it is not social work led; it is a service user/multi-professional collaboration. All its structures will reflect this. There are many Psychologists, Psychiatrists, Nurses, Occupational Therapists and others who are engaged in work concerning social perspectives in mental health, such as the Critical Mental Health Nurses Network, the Critical Psychiatry Network and Psychologists Against Austerity. There is also the opportunity to link in with the work of Dr Pamela Fisher at Leeds Beckett University, who is leading an ESRC funded programme of work entitled Re-imagining Professionalism: Towards co-production and with Jill Anderson who facilitates the Mental Health in Higher Education Hub.

What will the HUB do?

The Hub will support a range of activity all aimed at promoting and developing social perspectives. This will include:

- An online space within the BASW website. This will be a place where resources can be pooled and accessed.
- Regular co-produced multi-disciplinary events, seminars, training events and conferences
- Publication of various material including reports, research, and policy guidelines
- Promoting social perspectives in mental health through media activity

Resource Implications

- Administrative support – including IT support to develop and incorporate SPN web space into BASW website
- BASW Staff time or funded external project worker time to develop the Hub networks and organise initial event(s)
- Ongoing staff time or funded project worker time to maintain and develop the Hub.
- Discussion needs to take place about the possible transfer of SPN resources.

Next Step

- This paper needs to be discussed and agreed at the BASW Mental Health PPEG on 30th January 2017.
- It will then be discussed at the SPN AGM on 20th February 2017.
- Work will then take place to gather a list of potentially interested individuals, networks and organisations
- It is proposed that BASW and SPN will then jointly organise an initial launch/discussion event that will take place on a date some time from mid-April onwards. A possible venue is Birmingham University.

ⁱ Charitable objects - 2008

1) to advance the education of the public in the United Kingdom in mental health by providing or facilitating public education in mental health by lectures, research study days, publishing educational materials and training. 2) to develop the capacity and skills of those with mental health problems in such a way that they are better able to identify and help meet their needs and to participate more fully in society. 3) to promote equality and diversity for the public benefit by: a) the elimination of discrimination in mental health on the

grounds of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation or religion. b) advancing education and raising awareness in equality and diversity. c) promoting activities in mental health to foster understanding between people from diverse backgrounds. 4. to advance the health of people suffering from mental illness of any description, in particular but not exclusively by the following: a) publishing reports, research and policy guidelines concerning effective mental health care. b) the provision of support, education and practical advice.