



scottish care 



## Practice Learning in Care Homes event

**Wednesday 9 December 2009: Edinburgh**

AN EVALUATIVE REPORT: 22 DECEMBER 2009

Following the success of a pilot project in Spring 2009 which provided and supported nine social work student placements in private care homes in the South East of Scotland, the Learning Network South East (LNSE) and the Private Care Sector Workforce Initiative hosted a joint event to reflect on the work of the project and to consider some of the strategic, resource and practical issues in developing practice learning within the care home setting.

The event was attended by 35 people from a range of settings including private and voluntary sector care home and care at home providers, Scottish universities, the Scottish Social Care Council (SSSC), the Scottish Government, Scottish Care, Scottish local authorities, NHS Education Scotland and the Learning Network West. Two students and several independent practice teachers also attended. Wendy Paterson, Development Officer with the LNSE welcomed everyone and introduced the programme.

### *Programme*

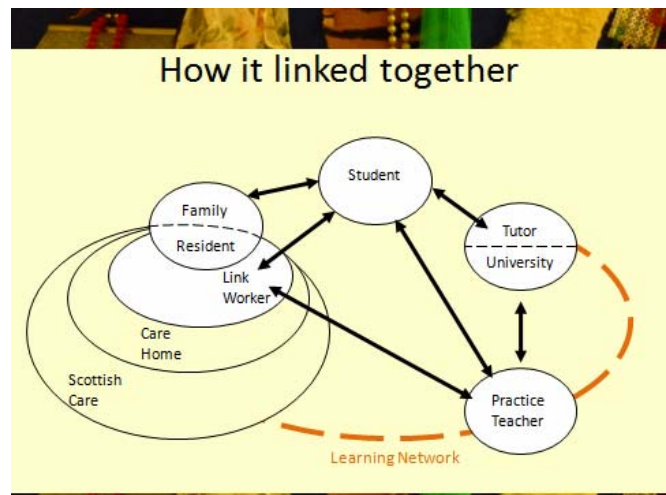
Ranald Mair, Chief Executive of Scottish Care, set the scene in terms of the growing importance of the independent sector in the care of older people and the imperative for all those involved in this work to collaborate. Diane White, from the Scottish Government, outlined why this work is vital to the Government's drive to ensure that we can meet the requirements of the social work degree in terms of placement time and diversity of experience. Sheila Lockhart (SSSC) expressed the Council's support for this initiative and commended the report which may be useful to other groups undertaking similar work.

David Rennie (Scottish Care & Private Care Sector Workforce Initiative) outlined the history of the project against the demographic and policy background. After a scoping exercise, Scottish Care received funding from the SSSC to create

opportunities for students on a professional social work degree course to undertake assessed practice learning in a number of care homes. Wendy Paterson then outlined the project and how it had worked. For all of the homes involved this was a new venture and in March 2009 nine students were placed in eight private care homes in Edinburgh, West Lothian and Scottish Borders council areas. These placements were successful, though a number of issues were raised about the prospect of developing and sustaining such practice learning in the future.

A key part of the project was the training for link workers, the people (all nurses) in the care homes who would have direct responsibility for the students. A five-day course was provided by Pat Collingwood, and Moira Dunworth, the project evaluator, outlined the findings of her evaluation of that course. The participants were very positive about it and identified more commonalities between social work and nursing than they had expected.

The next part of the programme was a panel discussion, led by Wendy Paterson. The panel comprised students, practice teachers, a care home owner and manager, a representative of the university and the link course tutor. The families of residents could not attend but had sent comments for inclusion in the day. In the feedback from participants this session emerged as the most useful and the most powerful, in particular the testimony of the students to the work which they did with the care home residents. The session was supported by a diagram indicating the perspective of each speaker.



Moira Dunworth then talked through the project outputs and illustrated the activities matrix/grid, which matched activities in the care home to the standards/requirements of the placement, as well as some of the life-story work done in one of the homes. She shared feedback from families of the residents, commenting on how much the students' work had enhanced the lives of their relatives. The project outcomes included the willingness of participants to engage in this kind of work again and a sense of improved understanding between social work and nursing professionals. The factors for success included the link workers' training, the personality and engagement of the students, the use of experienced practice teachers and the careful planning of the whole project. The recommendations centred on continuing with what worked this time and on the need to consider the resource issues involved in running similar placements in the future.

David Rennie then moved onto a consideration of the wider picture in terms of the Scottish Government's re-shaping of the care of older people, the emerging dementia strategy and the focus on the personalisation of services. A re-design of services and a review of how we provide them are necessary if we are to

provide the care needed by the changing demography of Scotland. He stressed the mutual benefit of the care home placements and their importance for the future of social work education. He told the conference that the private care sector is willing to engage but that we need resources in order to support this new development. He reported that, across five universities, 37 placements had either been completed, were current, being assessed or planned and that includes care homes, care at home and housing support services around Scotland.

## *Round table discussions*

In response to the challenge, *'How do we promote and sustain growth and ensure joined-up and smart learning, assessment and skills development?'*, the participants moved into groups and discussed the issue from three perspectives. Responses to these discussion areas are summarised below, using the working notes of the groups and their comments in the subsequent plenary session.

### 1 PRACTICE LEARNING IN CARE HOMES – MAKING IT WORK.

- a. Careful **preparation** was seen as vital to the success of any placement arrangement. Participants were concerned that link workers would have access to enough training and that all parties involved would be adequately prepared. This includes preparation for the students in terms of working with older people and the accompanying issues of loss and bereavement, particularly in relation to dementia. The care home staff and residents should be prepared for a social work student too. Training for link workers should be consistent across universities and five days was considered a good model.
- b. **Communication** was mentioned by several groups; it was felt that good communication between all parties at all stages was essential to success. Collaboration between all stakeholders is important to sustainability. Better co-ordination of placement provision between the private, voluntary and statutory agencies would help with placement planning.
- c. **Clarity** about the social work role in the care home should be incorporated into the working agreement.
- d. **Good links** with the local social work services are important to the success of such placements. Some groups were keen to develop 'blended placements' where the student would spend some time in a local social work setting which related to the work in the care home.
- e. **Change in attitudes** is important if this kind of model to be embedded in care homes; the 'double jeopardy' of residential care and older people means that this work is undervalued. It was noted that work in private or voluntary settings is often considered less than 'proper' social work and this negativity continues to be a challenge to students in those settings.
- f. It was felt that the **benefits** of these placements to the care homes, the students and universities need to be clarified and publicised.
- g. One group suggested that care homes should be encouraged to **'grow their own'** practice teachers – see also 3e below.
- h. Finally there was a suggestion of a **National Steering Group** to oversee these developments and to ensure consistency and good communication.

## 2 POLICY CONTEXT – THE SHAPE OF FUTURE SERVICES AND THE ROLE/EDUCATION OF THE SOCIAL WORKER.

- a. The **funding** of practice learning opportunities in the private and voluntary sectors must be reconsidered if it is going to be possible to maintain placement provision there.
- b. Given the important place of residential care in the social services perhaps it should be a **requirement** that students experience a **group care placement**.
- c. Explicit links with the **Care Commission** would help to raise the status of the placement; the Care Commission expectations of care home services should have a more explicit place in the placement work; also see 3b below.
- d. The life story and reminiscent work of students was consistent with The Care Commission focus area of 'meaningful activities' – see 3b below.
- e. A **consistent policy on training of link workers** would be useful.
- f. Care homes should be involved in **mechanisms which inform** them of placement opportunities and the benefits. Care homes don't always know that there is a payment for this provision.
- g. Work with older people should have a **higher status**; this connects with the **employment prospects** of students from care home placements.
- h. These developments should include consideration of placements with **care at home** services
- i. These kinds of placements should be encouraged in order to increase the **diversity of placement opportunities** available. There is also considerable diversity available within individual settings.

## 3 RESOURCES TO SUPPORT PRACTICE LEARNING IN CARE HOME.

- a. **Students who have completed** care home placements are a potential resource as ambassadors.
- b. **Social work students are potential resources in supporting care homes to address** Care Commission requirements.
- c. A **bibliography** to support work in care homes would be helpful and could be a shared resource.
- d. A **matrix** of the '**Key Capabilities**' (in child care and protection) mapped to activities in care homes would be welcomed and would be a shared resource.
- e. Investment in the development of **practice teachers in care home settings**. This would be a cheaper alternative to off-site practice teachers in the long term.
- f. Consider the '**enhanced link worker**' model where one practice teacher oversees several students.
- g. The **university curriculum** should include more teaching on working with older people and in group care settings.
- h. Funding for **link worker training, including replacement costs**, is a resource issue for care homes and Learning Networks.
- i. **Collaboration possibilities**, such as offering a social work placement in exchange for an SVQ Health & Social Care place.
- j. **Practice teacher's time** requirement is higher in a setting unused to social work students.
- k. **A forum to share experiences** of those involved in developing this model would be welcomed.

## *Participants' feedback on the event*

Completed evaluation forms and other feedback indicate that participants were happy with the structure of the day, the speakers, the table discussions and the venue/facilities.

'This was a well planned morning which provided lots of relevant information and guidance',

*'The project participants' contributions and the table discussions' were an important part of the success of the event with the input from the students being the highlight for most people.*

All those who provided feedback reported that the event increased their understanding of the issues discussed and that the event was a useful networking opportunity. Those who worked within an organisation felt that this practice learning model could be used in their situations and cited funding and staff attitude change as vital prerequisites to any development of this work. Good planning and thorough training for link workers was also mentioned as important if this model was to be used more widely. The 'further comments' were positive and encouraging, such as

The event was VERY inspiring - I felt on a high all day!

## *Conclusion*

This half-day event aimed to share the experience of providing social work student placements in private care homes who had not previously offered that service. There were contributions from a range of stakeholders during the morning and the students' accounts of their direct work with residents were widely considered to be the most powerful testimony to the value of these placements.

A number of issues about the sustainability and development of this model arose from the table discussions and are listed under the headings of 'making it work', 'policy' and 'resources'. Support for developing ways of creating and supporting more placements in the private and voluntary care sector was expressed by the groups and in the feedback received later. Issues raised included the need to change attitudes within Social Work to the learning potential in care homes, the need to ensure that adequate funding is available for link worker time and training and the imperative to collaborate across stakeholders, planning these placements well in advance.

Participants felt that they could apply the lessons learnt from the project in their own organisations and there were suggestions of ways of collaborating across the country, by forum or through a more formal Steering Group.

Questions arising from this report should be addressed to Wendy Paterson at  
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