

Who cares in West Dunbartonshire? A conference report

What follows is a Conference report for “Who cares? - in West Dunbartonshire – a conference which brought together people who use services, and carers from across West Dunbartonshire

The main purpose of the day was to allow people who use services and carers to talk about what it's like to receive a service in West Dunbartonshire.

Organised by West Dunbartonshire's Local Practitioner Learning Network, the event attracted over 50 delegates from across West Dunbartonshire.

Some members of staff from the statutory and third sector also came along to the conference; their role was primarily to support individual conference delegates. The event focused on mixed groups of people sharing views and experiences; the main aim was for delegates to feel they had the opportunity to speak and have their voices heard.

The event served two purposes, it highlighted issues important to conference delegates and it explored their hopes for the future; there was also an emphasis on the importance of inclusion and dialogue between key stakeholders.

Keynote speeches were delivered by Drew McEwen, The Carman Centre, Max Agnew, West Dunbartonshire Council, Ian Millar, Bonhill Church, The Good Life Group, West Dunbartonshire, Jacquie Reid, Enable and Colin Williams, West Dunbartonshire Carers Centre. Speakers discussed the important role of carers and people who use services; the role of the Local Authority in service delivery and future planning; the part a 'community' can play in caring for others; a drama based on real-life experience encouraged thoughts of diversity and understanding; plus a perspective on Personalisation and what it means.

A range of 'themed conversations' took place; from the outset delegates were asked to consider how their experience could help others and possibly inform practice and develop services. Each of the 'themed conversations' were facilitated by either a speaker or a member of the Practitioner Learning Network, facilitators had been briefed to ensure delegates got the most out of the conversations. The willingness of people to share their stories and embrace the main focus of the day contributed to making the event such a success. Delegates were clear in their hopes and desires for service delivery in West Dunbartonshire. People want more opportunities to socialise with peers i.e. an increase in social groups, college classes and community centre activities.

Delegates also reported their concerns about availability of funding and the impact on service delivery – some people had already experienced cut in services. The opportunity to meet with other people and hear about their life experiences seemed to motivate people to seek out new interests; there is anecdotal evidence this has already happened.

Julie Thomson, Development Officer, Scottish Social Services Learning Network [West](#) said, 'The event allowed people to talk about issues which were important to them and also showcased effective practice across areas of West Dunbartonshire and beyond. We know that for service users and carers it is important to meet other people who may be

in a similar situation; this conference provided a great opportunity to share the experience of the many service users and carers living in West Dunbartonshire who are keen to affect change in their area.

Support organisations, further and higher education establishments were invited along to showcase their own services.

West Dunbartonshire Carers Centre, Enable, Welfare Rights, Choose Life, Credit Union, Advocacy Service, West Dunbartonshire Council, Carman Centre, Health Improvement Team and Community Learning and Development plus Leisure Services and Mental Health –Who Cares? were in the exhibition space, delegates were able to spend time chatting to exhibitors and finding out about available services.

Health checks were offered to conference delegates; blood pressure readings, core strength tests and peak flow monitoring all proved popular.

The conference marked an important milestone on the journey towards placing people who use services, and carers at the heart of service provision. It is clear that services have come a long way; however, it is understood that work still needs to be done.

Some general comments from conference delegates are listed below:

“Good communication”

“Would like to have seen more people here”

“Think more could have been done to look at mental health”

“I really enjoyed the day, thanks”

“More should be done for service users – we need more!”

At the post conference-briefing meeting, there was agreement that this type of event could be offered on an annual basis. There was also recognition that a similar event would need to have an increase in numbers and definitely more time allowed for conference planning. There is acknowledgement from West Dunbartonshire’s Local Practitioner Learning Network that this type of event is important to the people of West Dunbartonshire watch this space! For additional information on this report or to find out more about the Network please contact julie.thomson@westlearn.org.uk or phone on 0141 848 1500.