

Developing Good Practice in Community Care: Partnership and Participation

White, V. and Harris, J. (eds) (2001) Jessica Kingsley Publishers, £14.95, paperback, 208pp.

At a time when the world of health and social care is changing so fast, there is a danger that any book written on the subject will be out of date before it is printed. *Developing Good Practice in Community Care* largely gets over this by focusing throughout the book on recommendations for good practice which are valid regardless of the ever changing context in which they emerged.

This edited book contains 10 chapters written mainly by practitioners involved in a project in Warwickshire Social Services Department which set out to identify good practice examples that were developed in that authority following the community care reforms of the 1990s. Contributors write from a variety of settings within the county but move away from a purely descriptive account of their particular project towards a more general analysis of how the themes of partnership and participation ran throughout their work and how they must be an integral part of any further social welfare reforms.

Unlike many books written on community care which have taken a managerial or organisational perspective, this book sets out to enable the voices of social workers and front-line managers to be heard. The majority of the book is written by practitioners and the editors have effectively co-ordinated the chapters and produced a clearly written, accessible volume which will have relevance for practitioners, managers, politicians and social work educators.

In the opening chapter, White and Harris set the legal and policy context for the book. They give a concise historical perspective on the community care reforms and explore how the three inter-related themes of marketisation, managerialism and consumerism have impacted upon the organisations in which social work is now provided. In line with one of the main features of the book, they explore what this means for social work practitioners and examine some of the dilemmas it has posed. This chapter contains a useful review of some of the critiques of the official rhetoric around partnership and participation and sets the scene for further exploration of the issues in practice.

The remaining chapters explore the issues of partnership and participation along a continuum. For example, focussing on individual assessment practice, Morrison describes how one adult team sort to critically evaluate its approach to assessment and provides an excellent step-by-step guide of how collaboratively they have adopted less discriminatory and more respectful and consultative methods of working. At the other end of the spectrum, Lalani and Whiting in a chapter on '*Progressing Race Equality*' describe a much longer-term process of developing service provision in conjunction with the minority ethnic communities in a town where there is little or no demand for services from the Black communities.

There are 2 chapters on developing effective working between social services and health. Although the policies on joint working have obviously moved on since the book was written, the issues discussed by Roy and Watts in setting up 4 collaborative ventures based around hospital social work remain largely the same. Similarly, the 5

projects described by Walters which were set up to prevent unnecessary hospital admission, facilitate early discharge and enable people to remain living within their own homes all identified familiar factors which helped or hindered collaboration between social services, health and other agencies.

A service user perspective is provided in 2 chapters describing small-scale research projects undertaken by social workers. Fleming and McSparran describe how team members interviewed service users and carers to ascertain whether they had perceived their encounters with social workers and occupational therapists as empowering. Tanner examines the topical question of preventative practice and describes a study which explored how older people who do not meet eligibility criteria manage their own difficulties. The findings from both the studies have encouraged the workers to reflect upon their own practice and work towards a more participative approach to their work with older people.

The importance of building and sustaining relationships with service users runs through the discussion in the chapter entitled 'Guardianship, A Participative Approach'. Barry looks in detail at the use of Guardianship Orders in their current form and proposes how they may be used positively to enable service users to take more control over their own lives. The penultimate chapter describes the work of a multi-disciplinary community mental health team for older people. Millen and Wallman-Durrant clearly identify the positive principles to which such teams should aspire but give a frank account of the problems of people from different backgrounds working together and how they addressed them.

Finally, Hallett summarises the projects described in the book and reflects on the impending changes, some of which have already taken place like the inception of the General Social Care Council. He concludes by mapping out a range of possibilities that may exist as opportunities rather than threats for social workers in the future, all of which are offered in the context of more integrated services than we currently experience.

One of the key features that is apparent throughout the book is the honesty of the contributors about both what worked well for them but also the shortcomings of their efforts. They make no great claims about their approaches necessarily being the right or only ones, but instead they contribute positively to the ongoing debate about what works where and why.

For students starting out in social work practice, this book will show many examples of how individuals can make a difference and how relatively small projects can have positive repercussions throughout the system. For qualified social workers and those following post qualifying training, it will be a reminder of some of the fundamental principles that underpin good practice and hopefully an inspiration for them to reflect upon their own practice and direct their energy into ways of working that encompass partnership and participation.

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