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Book Preview: Social Care Workers eBook on the Standards of Proficiency for Social Care Workers

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Book Preview: Social Care Workers eBook on the Standards of Proficiency for Social Care Workers

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We need to value and include the voice of practitioners and their own contribution in theorising from their own practice experience. It is our responsibility to the profession that we enable and create cultures where this can happen (Fook, 2002, p.96)

A new free online textbook, an eBook, will be published in Ireland in the coming year. This innovative and unique book is constructed explicitly around social care workers' and their understanding and experience of the *Standards of Proficiency for Social Care Work*. This eBook is a new and pertinent development to the growing field of social care practice and education. Here the voice of social care workers is at the centre of the discussion on the standards of proficiency (SoP) providing a valid, meaningful and practice rich collection of analyses. The co-authors, (chapter authors) are all social care workers with a minimum level 7-degree qualification in Social Care, currently working in practice or involved in education. The multiple voices of workers and educators throughout the eBook is a key strength, providing a variety of perspectives across the spectrum of care contexts. Each chapter illuminates what social care practice means to the people involved in the work. This will hopefully help social care workers in developing a sense of shared professional identity and contribute to taking debates in care practice in new directions, providing questions for stimulating and controversial debate in both the education and practice sectors and where they coalesce in practice education.

Development

Collaborative writing workshops were undertaken to help support chapter authors who had not previously engaged in writing about their practice. As a peer support group, ideas were shared and collective exploration of the standards undertaken. These writing workshops aimed to reduce anxiety about the writing process and to acknowledge the expertise of social care workers on how to interpret these standards for the profession. Each workshop participant claimed one of the SoP as their own chapter and the group members considered what they would write about that proficiency. An open discussion followed, highlighting different perspective and approaches. When the discussion ended, notes were written up and provided to the author to help them shape their chapter. This collaborative, open and non-threatening environment of the writing workshops was well received with participants feeling validated and mentored, especially when their ideas were mirrored in comments by other group members and/or they gained a new perspective for their chapter. As editors, we had decided on a format for each chapter which provided authors with a framework to follow. Through sharing knowledge, social care workers supported each other to begin their own writing journey, not alone but through collaboration. The co-authors include social care workers and managers in child and adolescent mental health [CAMHS], the disability sector, homeless services and children's residential care practice, and social care workers in education from across a wide variety of third level social care programmes.

Structure

The eBook has a single chapter on each of the eighty proficiencies. Each chapter represents the writers understanding of the proficiency they have chosen and offers insights into the context in which they work, their professional relationships, and how these shape their professional identity as social care practitioners. The keywords and language of the proficiency are explored and considered through a social care lens anchored in practice. A unique section of each chapter is called 'Social Care is...'. Here the author explains what social care practice means to them, based on their knowledge and experience. The aim here is to provide as many perspectives as possible on what this evolving profession means to practitioners. Reflections of practice are drawn upon from the 'coal-face' and related to the standards to maximise the students' engagement with these. Case-studies are also deployed and wherever possible and appropriate, submission from service users are used where authors are assured that their "participation is voluntarily, free from any coercion or undue influence, and that their rights, dignity and (when possible) autonomy should be respected and appropriately protected" (Tusla, 2015, p.5). The final section of each chapter contains 'Tips for Practice Educators' with a focus on how they might teach the proficiency as practice educators, using practical exercises, reflective questions, quotes and points to consider. This e-book will be a free resource for social care workers, educators and lecturers and will be available from Social Care Ireland, individual colleges and social care services from January 2021. The social care workers involved have given their time and expertise to help strengthen the profession and their contributions are a testament to their competence, generosity, passion and pride in social care work.

About the Authors

Dr Denise Lyons is a social care worker in education since 2000, Lecturer in IT Carlow, proud member of Social Care Ireland, editor of the 2010 text *Creative Studies for the Caring Professions* and co-editor with Noel Howard of the 2014 book *Social Care Learning from Practice*.

Dr Teresa Brown is a social care worker lecturing in Athlone Institute of Technology. Teresa has extensive experience as a social care worker in Northern Ireland, Ireland and Romania. She has practiced in the areas of Residential Care, Secure Care and Child Protection/Family Support.

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