

# **Mental Health, Service User Involvement and Recovery, Jenny Weinstein (ed.), London, Jessica Kingsley, 2010, pp. 223, ISBN 978 1 84310 688 3 (pbk), £19.99**

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A collaboration between service users and academics, this edited collection includes powerful personal narratives as well as conceptual review and critique in order to convey the vital connection between user involvement and Recovery. For the contributors to the collection, the use of the capital here denotes the distinctive character of Recovery for service users and the central importance of the person's own aspirations. Only the full participation of the person in decisions about their support and treatment will enable their Recovery. Crucially, good practice guidance concludes the majority of chapters and offers clear strategies for maintaining the 'momentum towards increasing user involvement' (p. 15), across the varied areas practice, service development and research within mental health. Each chapter is referenced at its close and the short personal biographies of each contributor offer context on their contribution.

There is an implicit suggestion that if the momentum for Recovery is not only to be maintained, but increased and full participation realised, the quality and efficacy of relationships between service users and professionals will be central. So, too, will the relationship between citizen and state. In the opening chapter, Philip Kemp suggests that changes in the relationship between citizen and state have embedded user involvement within mental health services. One is left to question what moves towards the Big Society and 'smaller' government will mean for expectations, outcomes and relationships—both structural and individual. How will future challenges impact on these relationships? Will they be increasingly undermined by limited budgets or will they be underlined as an increasingly important resource? Such doubt would appear to underline the importance of this collection at this time.

Interestingly and perhaps relatedly, Kemp moves on to consider the fundamental contradiction between recent policy rhetoric on user involvement and the language of risk and dangerousness. Julie Gosling complements this theme in Chapter 2, as she emphasises the importance of user involvement both for learning from the 'other' ([Wright \*et al.\*, 2007](#)) and for understanding challenging behaviour. This, to me, underlines the importance of a much needed refocus on the relationship between person and mental health professional. Indeed, Gosling suggests, on p. 43, how user involvement can 'heal' the relationship between person and professional. Stressing the importance of change through the relationship, rather than systems of target-driven governance, Gosling asserts the healing benefits of involvement, of how empowerment for the person 'can bring improved mutual understanding and tolerance and thence real change' (p. 43).

Quality relationships, based on interaction and mutual understanding, will require, as Aloyse Raptopoulos in Chapter 5 suggests, a shift in professional perspective. Professionals will need to interrogate both their practice, but also 'their fears, feelings and contradictions, and above all, assumptions' (p. 81). Partnership, involvement and genuine accountability will require the dismantling of professional defences and involve fundamental questioning of the function of professional role, systems (Bentall and Tyrrell, 2003) and knowledge. The challenges in such tasks cannot be underestimated for the professional, but perhaps, as has been suggested here and elsewhere, alliance, rather than opposition, should be the goal (Beresford and Croft, 2004).

There is a suggestion that interventions, such as individual budgets, will make these necessary shifts in professional perspective inevitable. Perhaps this is the case, but the collection ends with a stress on the importance of the person's own aspirations for Recovery and how the achievement of these aspirations can be supported both by the effective strengthening of the user movement and the professional who is able to show 'humility, humanity and hope' (Secker, 2009, cited by Weinstein, p. 213), who indeed is able to join the person's 'circle of hope' (p. 213). This is an important and inspiring collection and will enhance the involvement, knowledge and practice of all those involved in mental health services.

#### References

Bentall R., Tyrrell I. *What Was That You Said Again? A New Look at Psychosis*. Chelvington: The Human Givens Institute; 2003.

Beresford P., Croft S. *Service users and practitioners reunited: The key component for social work reform*. *British Journal of Social Work* 2004;34 (1) :53-68

Wright K., Haigh K., McKeown M. *Reclaiming the humanity in personality disorder*. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing* 2007;16 (4):236-46.