“Promoting the Importance of Human Relationships”
World Social Work Day 2019:
Stories from the Hertfordshire Social Work Teaching Partnership
Promoting the importance of human relationships

World Social Work Day is an important date in our calendars that enables social workers worldwide to stand together to celebrate the achievements of the profession, and take the year’s theme message into their communities, workplaces and to their governments to raise awareness of the social work contributions and need for further action. This year’s theme focusses on the social relationships between people’s essential relationships with each other, their environments and their futures. Dr Rory Truell, International Federation of Social Work Secretary-General said:

‘There was a famous moment in recent history when politician Margaret Thatcher ushered-in the current global period of conservatism and the dismantling of state services when announcing: “there’s no such thing as society, there are individual men and women”. Thatcher’s view continues to have devastating effects as it remains dominant over many aspects of world and national politics. This 2019 World Social Work Day theme directly addresses this false and brutality conservative dogma. From the social work experience all people are bound together by social relationships that determine the quality and security of life. Worldwide the social work profession will unify in promoting the importance of building policies and practices that recognize, cultivate and enrich our interdependent relationships – for peace, the realization of all people’s equal rights and a sustainable world.’

As a Social Work Teaching Partnership with our colleagues at Hertfordshire County Council, Hertfordshire Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust, The University Of Hertfordshire and the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust, we have brought together stories from Social Workers across our organisations, highlighting this years themes, the relationships they have built throughout their career with service users, carers and colleagues and the impact these have had on their practice and the lives of people we are here to serve.
Our vision for Social Work in Hertfordshire

Social work in Hertfordshire will be aspirational and creative, ensuring that the people we work alongside are valued and enabled to achieve full lives. Recognising a human approach that values adults and children as equal citizens with rights, opportunities and potential. Social work in Herts will embrace the cultures, variety, relationships and wonder that people are and work with this for positive effect. We will do this via the very relationship we have and develop with people we support, their families, communities and organisations that are part of their lives.

Social workers in Herts are challenged to develop their own skills and practice, adding to the shared knowledge and vision of our profession and bringing new thinking and learning back into their teams. We are proud to work alongside Hertfordshire citizens, proud to work in a modern and diverse County and proud of our accomplishments and our profession.

Hearing, seeing, trusting, valuing and respecting people will be at the heart of our social work practice. This in turn should be felt in its truest sense by the people who allow us in to their lives. Where difficult conversations and decision are needed this will be done in a proportionate, open, fair and honest way. Striving to ensure the individuals voice is heard and considered at all times.

All people have the right to live a life that is full off opportunity, purpose, love and kindness. Hertfordshire social workers will support this in all that we do.
A message from our Leadership Team...
As social workers we recognize the primary importance of human relationships and the strengths that they bring to individuals and communities. It is so much a part of what we do that it often goes unnoticed, yet it is the foundation upon which everything else is built.

The human person is a relational being and we define ourselves in relation to others. The relationships we have with our families, friends and our wider communities all contribute to our own sense of identity, belonging and overall wellbeing. Relationships can be wonderful, fulfilling and rewarding yet they can also be challenging, disappointing and sometimes painful. Life events can emphasise the centrality of relationships in our lives and particularly the need for interdependence in times of adversity.

The importance of the human relationships in my own life was brought home to me three years ago when a close family member became suddenly and seriously mentally unwell. I recognize the importance of my role in her life at this vulnerable time – supporting her, advocating for her and enjoying life and loving her at every opportunity. Sometimes this brings fear of what would happen if I wasn’t there.

The people in my life continue to provide me with an immense amount of support that I could not have managed without. I am lucky to have a supportive family and close friends with whom I can share my thoughts, feelings and fears with. However I also have a wider network of colleagues and associates that have been incredibly important in providing a sense of normality, a life away from “the difficult stuff” and a sense of belonging.
My experience has provided me with many opportunities to reflect on my professional practice as a social worker, particularly working with families and carers. Have I always fully recognized the expertise that they bring and their experience of the situation? From my perspective I know the positive impact that being listened to and really valued has on both experience and outcome.

Listening to people’s stories is an important part of social work and I have always felt privileged to hear the stories of others. For the shorter or longer term we also become part of that story and use the relationship we develop as a powerful vehicle for change. Social work is and always will be grounded in human relationships.
Jenny Coles, Director of Children’s Services – Hertfordshire County Council

World Social Work Day celebrates the contribution social workers make to building resilience of a whole range of children, adults and families. So we must recognise the value of the social work role and how we develop and adapt to meet the needs of the who require support at various stages of their lives. The evidence base regarding the positive impact of our work is growing every year and this is particularly important in supporting young people in challenges they may face affecting their emotional health and well-being and vulnerabilities to exploitation.

Jo Fisher, Operations Director, Services for Children and Young People – Hertfordshire County Council

World Social Work Day is a key day for social workers to celebrate our achievements as a profession and to talk about our role in supporting many of the most vulnerable people. It is opportunity to tell the real stories of our work, and to celebrate how as social workers we can build relationships with families, bringing different agencies together and offering early help and support to change what’s happening in the family or community. It is one of the toughest but most rewarding jobs – often resulting in a brighter future for many of the most vulnerable children and young people.
Claudia Megele, Head of Service for Quality Assurance – Hertfordshire County Council

Unfortunately, in life most people will tell you what’s not possible, a few will tell you what’s possible, less than a few will tell you to reach for the stars, even less will be your staunch advocate and committed supporter who believes in you and believes you’ll get there! Less than a handful will be there right next to you when it matters most in moments of heartache, pain, failure, loneliness and loss.

For most of us we turn to our close family and friends in difficult moments… moments when we feel most vulnerable, scared and confused. They give us light, hope, strength, kindness and love. Their kind words, listening ear and practical support means that the pain, distress, discomfort starts to melt away and we are able to pick ourselves up and recover from some of the difficult experiences and moments life throws at us.

Unfortunately, at times for some people there is no-one to turn to, there is no champion that believes in them unconditionally, and there is no listening ear, kindness or care. In those instances, it’s social workers who are right there, next to you showing kindness, empathy and understanding and offering practical advice and empowering support.

That is what relationship based practice is about and that is what social workers do and that is why social workers play such an important role in the lives of children and young people and their families. That is the challenge, the reward and the essence of what we do and why we do it and the wonderful contributions to this book attest to that.
In November 2014, I stumbled across one of the most beautiful yet saddest stories I had read in many years. The article in ‘Hemel Today’ told the story of Charles and Paul Barrett, aged 94 and 63, and the discovery of their deaths. The first thing that struck me about the article was the lead picture. The picture, I presume, is from the 60s and shows Charles and Paul side by side, father and son. The look of pride and love upon their faces are immeasurable.

Charles and Paul shared their lives from Paul’s birth to their deaths, within days of one another, in the Summer of 2014. The article tells us they were seen as ‘loners’ but locals knew Charles as a gent, witty and always polite. Paul, kind and generous, contributing to children's charities and mentoring junior engineers - keen to help them progress and learn. Both father and son described as good citizens.

For me, what truly stands out in this story is love, a love that they shared and one that may ultimately have led to Paul’s death. When Charles passed away that summer I cannot imagine or comprehend the sheer feeling of loss Paul must have endured, a loss that appears to have led to Paul deciding to take his own life.

Paul had written his fathers initials on a calendar space on 6th June. The following day Paul organized his rubbish, cancelled the following weeks Ocado delivery and left extra food and water out for the cats that had shared their lives. Paul was later found dead of self-inflicted injuries.

This story when, I read it, made me weep terribly but also shone a light on what was a beautiful human relationship, one I could relate to as the father of two very different boys whom I have a deep pride and love for. I can hear the words of Danny Champion of the world as I read them to my youngest in this article. I can feel the love between Mark and Steven Neary in their amazingly told stories of life, complex but more importantly wondrous. I could relate as a social worker knowing the importance of human contact in its various wonderful, painful, exhilarating, damaging, memorable and joyous forms.
This story when, I read it, made me weep terribly but also shone a light on what was a beautiful human relationship, one I could relate to as the father of two very different boys whom I have a deep pride and love for. I can hear the words of Danny Champion of the world as I read them to my youngest in this article. I can feel the love between Mark and Steven Neary in their amazingly told stories of life, complex but more importantly wondrous. I could relate as a social worker knowing the importance of human contact in its various wonderful, painful, exhilarating, damaging, memorable and joyous forms.

Never be afraid to enquire and ask about human relationships in those moments where you are privileged to be a part of peoples lives. They may tell you to mind your own, they may not, they may ask you to help mend broken relationships or even help escape them. But. what they do tell you will be important, to them, and important for you to understand.

https://www.hemeltoday.co.uk/news/father-and-son-can-rest-in-peace-together-1-6439544
Stories from Hertfordshire Social Workers…
“I believe the relationship lies at the heart of social work practice and is the building block from where any meaningful intervention begins. The relationship enables service users to develop trust in us as professionals and facilitates collaborative working towards achieving better outcomes. I came into social work because I personally experienced transient, turbulent and neglectful relationships in my childhood. Having grown up feeling there was no one I could turn to who could advocate on my behalf, I now pride myself on being that advocate for others. However, this would not be effective without that first step of a human connection, instilling a sense of trust and offering a safe space to explore the possibility of an alternative future.”

_Natasha Constantinides, HPFT Adult Services_

“It is the principal vehicle through which change can be affected in the lives of clients. Social work practitioners rely on the relationship they have with service users, both as means through which they can understand how best to help, and as a medium through which any intervention is offered (Ruch, 2005). Indeed, a service user case study conducted by Beresford and Croft (2008) found that service users frequently said that the relationship that they had with their social workers was the most helpful.”

_References_

_Mary Francis, HCC Adult Care Services_
“I learn, acquire and enhance my knowledge and skills, through interacting with other professionals in social and health care, different organisations and communities.

I work with service users, their support networks, using available resources; journals, TV documentaries, libraries and internet and social media and to have a general social anthropology in-practice: understanding about how people live in societies and their environments.

I learn to understand how they make their lives meaningful, relationship between their values and behaviours. To understand why and how people do what they do, to contribute in redesigning service user/patient experiences, though participant observation.”

**Nick Khumalo, HCC Adult Care Services**

“They are the bedrock to the foundations built with your service user and their families. Through effective relationships social work can support clients to gain a better understanding to their situation and environment and help them to feel included in their plan. Good relationships skills will ensure that clients are fully informed and equipped with the tools needed to learn and gain confidence. By extending communications through human relationships Social Worker’s can build bridges and support their service users to become more independent and allow their families to recognise their personal situation and need for progression and growth.”

**Melissa James, HCC Adult Care Services**
“Last Christmas, I was standing in the queue at our local Co-op, as I watched one of my neighbours, an older, now quite frail gentleman, purchase their 3 biggest bouquets of seasonal flowers. As soon as he had paid for them, he turned around asked the queue for their patience with him. It was then that we all watched him hand them over to the young women behind the checkouts one by one, give them a hug, and wish them Merry Christmas. He turned around and explained, “these girls are like friends, like daughters to me, we have a little chat every day”. The women had tears in their eyes and told him how much they looked forward to seeing him each time he popped in. Every part of this story, sums up for me the importance of human relationships. As social workers we can make many referrals to day centres, luncheon clubs, and befriender schemes, but we should never underestimate the importance of what can be built by everyday interactions in communities. Relationships aren’t something you can refer for, they don’t blossom through commissioning with a tightly knit care plan. Relationships are simply about one human, making a connection with another.”

_Ingrid Richardson, HPFT Adult Services_

“It is crucial to form relationships with children and families to fully engage with them. Having relationships with colleagues provides me with support and enables me to grow. Having a relationship with my managers and L&D colleagues helps me to continually develop.”

_Janet Jones, HCC Children’s Services_
“Relationships are important to me and enable me to connect to the families as well as the clients I support. Breaking down barriers and the image of authority or representation of the state ensures a personal connection to form relationships of trust and develops empathy in family struggles.

Being a social worker has and always will be for me, a privileged position. Balancing professional and professional values when invited into people’s homes, often being at critical periods of their life, I know no other role in which we can bring positive outcomes as well as it being a positive experience.

Problem solving and working collaboratively, social workers enable and promote people’s lives and enhance a journey which often starts from a difficult place. Through forming relationships, difficult conversations can be openly discussed without offending and creating an environment or platform for change. Relationships for me promote confidence for others to enable taking control of their own destiny and erode dependency, be it in health or social care. It never ceases to amaze me the families and people I come in to contact with, as much I help them they inspire me and all through relationships and trust.”

Tony Mitchell, HCC Children’s Services
“The relationships that are most important to me as a social worker are: my immediate peers and line manager as these help me to manage the pressures of this job but at the same time reflect on where I have come from and looking into the future. I also value the relationships with the staff that I supervise because it gives me job satisfaction and belief that I am contributing positively into social work practice. I enjoy working with and supporting students as they are the future professionals and leaders to drive social work practice. It gives me pride to see them progress and become confident and competent professionals I must say all these relationships would be meaningless without the very important people, that we aim to work with and support, that are service users. I always strive to create good/supportive relationships with these people as without this, as social workers, we would be unlikely to make the difference. Of course in all this I have to go back home to my family and they are the source of my strength.”

**Pretty Nkiwane, HCC Children’s Services**

“Relationships with other people, partners, colleagues, siblings, parents and my children are very important because it helps me have a well-balanced life. As a student Social Worker, sometimes I might feel overwhelmed having to balance so many responsibilities. The people around me help me to cope as I can relive some of the stress when I talk to them. They also provide me with support that enables me to live a balanced life.

Promoting Social relationships is important more now due to technological advancement which might lead to isolation and a gateway to developing mental health problems. I therefore encourage my children to talk to me and I believe people are more healthier when they have some form of contact with other people.”

**Caroline Githae, HPFT CAMHS**
“My placement at an adolescent mental health inpatient unit has demonstrated the value of positive relationships. Positive relationships are key to collaborative practice with service users, carers and multi-disciplinary team-working because it ensures that all are working towards the same goals. The ability to establish rapport enables social workers to gain a greater understanding of the service user’s and their family’s wider support networks, or where intervention may be offered to improve their quality of life. Social workers can build positive relationships by actively listening to service users, being empathetic to their needs and including them in decision making.”

Stacey Quirk, HPFT CAMHS

• “Moments of togetherness are a smile, a look, an understanding
• Moments of togetherness are a shared value, different opinion, talking, listening, endorsing, challenging, laughing, learning and crying.
• Moments of togetherness are being in touch whilst being apart.
• Moments of togetherness are sharing our collective worth, fun, tenderness, sorrow and support for one another with hope and aspiration.
• Moments of togetherness are intimate, quiet, loud, spiritual, reflective, solemn, celebratory, dull and exciting.
• Moments of togetherness are our love for one another and define our relationships as citizens, people and communities.”

Warren Belcher, HCC Adult Care Services
“The relationships that are important to me as a social worker are the ones I have with my supervisor, supervisees, team manager, senior managers, and colleagues in my team, partner agencies, including schools and with adult and children’s social care. As all these relationships help to support and build on the key relationships I have with the children and families I work with. I also hold the relationship with community colleagues and in voluntary sectors as important, as I view as a social worker the relationship I have with the network and community underpins a great deal of the good work we endeavour to achieve for those who are vulnerable and in need.”

**Sam Wells, HPFT CAMHS**

“Relationships are essential in day to day working as a social worker as well as a family member, colleague, carer, service user, individual, customer, client, friend. Connections are vital in propelling a sense of belonging as a unit, a community, a family, a friendship group. As an individual; I strive to support a wider understanding of the fundamental elements to human relationships; not only to support individuals to create new connections; but to build and become involved with existential relationships & societies locally to them. Influencing individuals to connect with their environments and community; is a fundamental role to me which I strive to impel in my personal as well as professional life.”

**Joy Rickard, HPFT Adult Services**
“The therapeutic working relationships I build with the service users and families I see are at the heart of my practice and it is this I believe that is key in moving forwards to help facilitate change. The relationships built together are based on respect, trust and collaboration. Relationships built with colleagues are also extremely important and help me to feel part of a team, valued and supported. Alongside these relationships are those in the wider networks and communities within which I work with service users I am seeing and with colleagues. Establishing positive relationships with all in my professional capacity as a Social Worker is extremely important to me.”

Helen Chatfield, HPFT CAMHS

“Developing a working relationship with a mother with terminal cancer was one of the most significant relationships I have made as a social worker. I met with her mother, her children and grandchild and spoke with them about what she wanted to happen to her home and children after she was gone. I organised a meeting with the Housing department and Children Services to discuss these wishes. I put her in touch with a solicitor who obtained a non-molestation order so that she could have peace in her final weeks, away from an abusive ex-partner. We exchanged Christmas cards for her final Christmas. This was an important human interaction that has stayed with me as something profound and touching. The family were grateful for my help after she had gone. I like to think that I made a small contribution towards a peaceful and dignified death.”

Mark Shields, HPFT Adult Services
“A social workers role is sometimes very difficult. People outside of the profession often say “I couldn’t do that” and sometimes with good reason. Supporting others and safeguarding children requires a strong support network which enables social workers to keep going. There are things that only work colleagues can hear about your difficult day, and often only a work colleague can lighten that day by listening and using just the right amount of humour!”

Caroline Cook, HCC Children’s Services

“Human relationships are as important to our survival as the need for food, safety and shelter and are essential to our mental well-being (Matthew Lieberman). Social Workers understand that human relationships are important vehicles of change and are the cornerstone of what we do on a day to day basis. As Social Workers we are there to listen and enable communication. We are a shoulder to cry on. We offer time and companionship to allow people to explore and make sense or their situations. At times we are on the receiving end of hostility and anger but even these emotions need to be expressed. We pick up the pieces, help mend the broken, mediate, advocate, validate, empathise and be compassionate. All of which would not be possible without human relationships. Even we ourselves seek encouragement and validation from our colleagues and loved ones to help us maintain our functionality. These meaningful relationships lead to feelings of pleasure and give us hope and a sense of security and being curious helps us to achieve this.”

Sharon Marsden, HPFT CAMHS
“I have been in my current post coming on two years and feel promoting human relationships has been part of my journey since day one. During my time in post in the beginning I remember distinctly, my ASYE supervisor giving me excellent support through frequent supervision sessions. Supervision has continued to allow me to demonstrate professionalism towards those I am currently helping support. I find my supervision sessions valuable time to explore my ideas with my supervisor and to seek their advice and support. Barnard, Homer and Wild (2008) describe professional conduct in social work as maintaining the competence to fulfil your job and acting with compassion, empathy and care (p.31). As such, social work is essentially about relationships: first and foremost with service users; but also with our social work colleagues and colleagues from other professional backgrounds – health, education, police to name a few. These relationships do not exist in isolation from each other and are interrelated and exert influences on each other. I continue to use my supervision and supervisor to explore values and the power dynamics between my service users and the central characteristic of relationship based-practice and the emphasis it places on the professional relationship as the medium through which the practitioner can engage with and intervene in the complexity of an individual’s internal and external world. I continue to thoroughly enjoy my career at HPFT and our ethos of all around recovery for our service users.”

Russell Evans, HPFT Adult Services

“It helps to have trust and confide with one another to an extent. It helps service user treatment in a positive way.

To enable positive outcomes and build rapport.”

Aliyah Djazouli, HPFT CAMHS
“Ubuntu is a Zulu term meaning “humanity”, sometimes translated as “I am because we are” and it reflects all that connects humanity and the spirit of being human. As a social worker, I have come to learn that the relational landscape of the work isn’t just what sustains the people who receive or deliver services, but that it is social work itself. It is through some of the most profound and challenging relationships with others, though deep human connection, through every shade of darkness and light, that I have learned to be who I am, what I do and how I have become to be. Relationship and our ability to connect, therefore is a gift that we have the power to give, in whatever shape we choose, to enable others to be their best selves. My best teachers have been those who have experienced the challenge of living life with a physical or learning disability and others who have experienced the rawness of permanent separation from their family of origin. In every situation, I have seen the power of the human spirit and the gift of connection.”

*Jo Williams, Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust*

“I grew up within a close-knit family, and visited my grandparents every Saturday for dinner almost without fail. Over the years they had a couple of people stay with them for a few months to get themselves back on their feet; usually following periods of substance misuse or family relationship breakdown. Seeing their willingness to sit with these people through their hardest times, and support them at their pace in a secure environment set a great example to me. The relationships they developed with these people allowed them to feel valued and supported as they engaged with formal support, which they had often previously not been able to consistently attend beforehand.”

*Sam Amos, HPFT Adult Services*
“Clark (2005) stated that “de-professionalization of social work and other welfare occupations reduces workers’ professional discretion and autonomy”. I was allocated to different service users to care coordinate to support them mentally. One of my service users was not engaging with the services and at first did not want to see me due to the unhealthy relationship with his past care coordinators. I found a way of establishing a good working but professional relationship with him by using a person-centred approach to involve him in any decisions I took about his care. The impact of the good relationship has enabled the service user and I establish a good rapport and a good working relationship. Eventually, the service user is now engaging well with the services and is responding well to treatment. This personal experience has helped in shaping my career as a social work practitioner.

Reference

_Isaac Osei, HPFT Adult Services_

“We live in a complex world with uncertain futures and working together we can help each other to find solutions to challenges and make the changes we want in our lives.”

_Clare Williams, HCC Children’s Services_
“I found the stories and perspectives on relationships and social work in this book moving, uplifting, and full of wisdom. But not everyone thinks like these contributors do. A story sticks in my mind from many years ago when I did a workshop at a Directors of Social Services conference, and proposed that social work is about the provision of a helpful relationship for people in difficult life transitions and distressing conflicts with others. One Director responded ‘I don’t think the people in my borough want a relationship, they just want a service’. So a ‘service provision’ mentality can seem to be in tension with a ‘relationship’ mentality, but surely they aren’t really incompatible? As many of the stories in this book suggest, relationships are everywhere and underpin pretty much everything that makes us human, including the struggles, conflicts and pain we experience as humans. Most of the problems we engage with as social workers arise out of problematic relationships, present and past. The most challenging situations – child maltreatment, domestic violence, mental health difficulties - boil down to questions of troubled relationships. Poverty, inequality, racism and other processes that marginalise and disadvantage people are ultimately about relationships within society and communities and how we are affected at a personal and social level. In other words relationships are at the root of most of our struggles and pain, and skilled attention to transforming relationships is usually central to improving matters. A good ‘service’ is a relationship based service.”

**Andrew Cooper, Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust**
“Many years ago, before I became a social worker, I worked with adults with learning disabilities in, what was then a large residential home. I had pre-conceived ideas of people with a learning disability in that they had the mind of a child and very little future in terms of independence. After working in the home for just a few weeks I realised that my views weren’t only wrong but complete discrimination. So over the next few years I grew to know the service users there, what made them tick and what they wanted to achieve with their lives. Some people were happy moving from day to day with their usual routine. Others wanted more to their lives so I took great pride in supporting and helping them achieve this. My role went from buddying a person through an NVQ at a local college to finding out that someone loved “corners” on silky pieces of cloth just the same as me! Yes you heard it right, I noticed one day that this particular man found comfort in fiddling with the silky corner of a throw on his sofa. This is something I also loved to do so we formed an allegiance and over time documented many ‘corners’ that we both found around his home, we logged them in a book in order of how ‘de-stressed’ they made him feel. He was very proud of his log book and the work he had completed within it. My care work in this home stays with me today, it helped shaped my values. It’s so important to understand the whole of a person and that one’s person’s dreams and aspirations won’t be the same as the next.”

Clare Landy, HPFT Adult Services

“Relationships form an important basis for all aspects of wellbeing and impact on all aspects of our lives, work, play, family etc. It is through relationships that most support can be provided to make an effective change to improve outcomes.”

Claire Wheatley, HPFT CAMHS
“There is not any one relationship in particular that has shaped my career, more over the other in my personal and professional development – it has been shaped by many and I have learnt such a lot from many. I never fail to be touched by the strength and courage of the service users we work with, or people that I meet in general whether that be in my personal or work life. For me, the importance of building relationships, that are not judgemental, but that are honest, open and transparent, being oneself, being genuine, meaningful, kind, respectful, but also having boundaries are so important. I feel humbled to have met so many people in my life that have a positive impact on the relationships I make and continue to make, and I never stop learning from these about the power of the human relationship.”

**Julie Pratt, HPFT Adult Services**

“Everyone is wired differently, one after the other, our traits, our thoughts, our interest and dislikes, and more importantly our life experiences. For me human relationships support my growth as a human being. Big or small, human relationships for me have a way of promoting a change. A change for them and a change for you, and as a social worker. “Change” can be pivotal in people’s lives. Being part of positive change enhances the value of human relationships.”

**Cynthia Munana Olanya, Student Social Worker**

“*Relationships*: makes it possible for social workers to encourage and nurture change rather than demanding it.”

**Rose Wanjoghi, HCC Adult Care Services**
“Social work education at its best is more than academic understanding combined with practice experience. It is immersive, maximising opportunities for collaboration between students, academics and professionals to transform individual learners and aim for excellence in practice.

Certainly, students absorb knowledge; but they make sense of that knowledge because of the relationships which they have with one another, with lecturers on the programme, with practitioners and practice educators and with service users. These conversations challenge us all to construct and reconstruct our understanding in the light of the world around us and the experience of those we work with.

Social work education is transformational, and it is the relationships we have with one another which make us the social workers we become.”

Karen Mills, University of Hertfordshire

“Human relationships start the day we take our first breath… As a student Social worker, I have come to realise that building relationships with fellow students is really important, if we are able to work collaboratively amongst ourselves, then this working relationship will reflect in your attitude, which can facilitate a genuine rapport with both service users, carers and other multi-disciplinary team members. I believe promoting a true human relationship starts with “US”, we are CHANGE AGENTS! Therefore, we should first be the change we want to see, then will a true relationship blossom.”

Bolanle Janet Akinlawon, Student Social Worker
“I'm someone who likes to connect. I smile at people in the street, share a joke at the checkout and chat to people next to me in the queue. Each of these tiny connections, are momentary relationships; a touch of warmth, perhaps a smile but always some humanity. They remind me I'm not alone.

So no surprise I'm a social worker. Underpinning all the complexities of social work, it's connections such as these that we offer. Whatever the change or loss or crisis being faced, we tender recognition and the chance to form a bond. Relationships can't be ‘delivered’; they're a co-creation, an understanding. At best, they're a gift for all involved. Social workers use relationships to show warmth, sometimes humour, always humanity. Whether a few minutes or developed over time, human relationships can be the most powerful means to remind us all we're not alone.”

*Tanya Moore, HCC Adult Care Services*

“Although I’m not a social worker (I’m a social work lecturer/trainer), I place relationship building as one of our core social work skills. The careful building of close interpersonal relations with others, whose views, experiences and attitudes may differ vastly from our own, is crucial.

In these divided times we need to remind ourselves that the world is a series of a human and environmental interconnected networks. At the heart of these lie unique individuals and it is their interconnectedness – built through personal relationships – that ties the individual into the familial, the local and ultimately the global.”

*Andrew Bernhardt, University of Hertfordshire*
“I believe that connecting meaningfully with others is what helps to bring about change, hope, and feelings of worth. Many of the people we come into contact with have had experiences in relationships which have been traumatic, abusive and lacking in warmth. I believe that building and sustaining positive relationships is what helps the people we work with to begin to make positive changes and research has shown that it’s often the therapeutic relationship itself which is essential to success rather than simply the choice of the model used. Feeling we are truly connecting with others improves our physical and mental health, increases happiness and there are thoughts that this could also lead to a longer life. Seltzer (2017) talks about the importance of relationships and feeling understood and I really like the following that sums up for me why relationships are so important:

You’re known, Your identity is confirmed, You exist, You belong, You’re part of something larger than yourself, You’re accepted, You’re empowered, You understand yourself better.”

**Annabel Smith, HPFT CAMHS**

“Relationships are important to me as a social worker as a strong relationship with my service users means that we are able to work together towards more positive outcomes. Working on relationships builds trust between myself and my service users and makes our relationship feel equal rather than having a power imbalance.”

**Emma Hart, HPFT Adult Services**
“I think about what helps me when I need to make changes and what I have found to be helpful in working with individuals and families over the past twenty-five years as a social worker. Basic dimensions that sometimes get overlooked, such as warmth, compassion, sensitivity and respect, are often qualities that people using services say they most want from professional relationships and which are also proven to be factors which make the most difference in the success of interventions. Central to effective relationships is trust which is built over time and requires transparency, clarity, humility and a capacity to accept we’ve got it wrong and can own our shortcomings. Once trust is established it is possible to challenge ingrained patterns of thinking and open up discussions around difficult or sensitive areas. Believing in people’s capacity to change and acknowledging the privilege that joining together with someone during a difficult point in their life should underpin everything we do.”

**Paul Dugmore, Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust**

“It is a privilege to be a Mental Health Social Worker and in a position whereby we become involved in people’s lives, often in times of crisis, and support them through these times. My experience is that the relationships we build with Service Users and their families/support networks are so vital to the success of our Social Work interventions as people know if we are genuinely interested in them. This work can be demanding and challenging and what has helped and enabled me to keep going, and to be inspired in my role, are the many colleagues and students I have worked alongside who have encouraged me to do and be my best. I am so grateful to be part of a supportive and positive team who really care about the quality of support we provide to Service Users.”

**Carol Murphy, HPFT Adult Services**
“All relationships professionally and personally are equally important, however in my role as Team Manager, my relationships with my team are very important to me because it is important for team work and creating a positive workplace. We spend a considerable amount of time at work and our profession can at times be complex and challenging. I respect and understand my team by ensuring I listen, create safe learning environment opportunities, and this encourages positive relationships and to value one another’s opinions. We generate different ideas and creative thinking together in appropriate forums and provide support together in difficult situations.

It is important because a negative experience can have an impact on our Mental Health which can lead to work absence, low morale, high turnover and isolation.

The teams work life balance and quality of life is also important to support their own personal and professional relationships therefore, working smarter and better is always supported within the capacity of our service. It is always on our agenda.”

**Vanessa Hill, HCC Adult Care Services**

“Improve your internal organisation, teams to recognise the value of people’s needs, build strong links for a healthy and powerful environment.”

**Maria Santos, HCC Adult Care Services**
“A good working relationship is important within social work as it is how you do effective work with service users. Without having a good relationship with a service user you cannot know their areas of need and what they would like to change in order to improve their wellbeing. A good relationship also helps to build trust between you and a service user which further allows you to work collaboratively with them on changing aspects of their life.”

**Rhona Hecht, HPFT Adult Services**

“There is no such thing as society. Well that was a statement many years ago you may recall. Without the existence of positive human relationships the fabric of community would not exist societies. So may be without human relationships there is no such thing as society unless we place the absolute importance of human relationships at the centre of all we strive to achieve for and with others. Then we can see this happen.”

**Dawn K, HCC Adult Care Services**

“They keep me motivated, especially the relationships with my sister, she always makes me smile and can sense within seconds when I have a bad day. Because she doesn’t work in a social care sector there is no point to talk to her about my professional dilemmas what helps me keep my work separated from private life.”

**Elo, HCC Adult Care Services**
“They keep me grounded. My work colleagues and partner help me to keep my positive outlook on life and keep my resilience in this difficult environment. They keep me on my toes pushing me to think outside the box.”

Anonymous, HCC Adult Care Services

“When I’m feeling positive or negative about my job and what is happening with my clients, my colleagues are always there. They help me celebrate success and help with solutions when I’m stuck. If all else fails there is always cake!”

Kate Watts, HCC Adult Care Services

“Relationships are fundamental to my journey, and to becoming a social worker. Establishing and utilising individual differences, perspectives and assets can help teach others and together we can respect everyone’s individual journey. With passion, support and guidance social work encourages individuals to feel empowered and validated, therefore the social work profession inspires myself and others to do the same for the services users and their families. Through consistency and a genuine attitude we can help support others to help them support others making the world a better place one journey at a time.”

Danielle Rochford, HPFT Adult Services
“Relationships are fundamental to the work we do in Social work whether it’s a relationship with service users, carers or colleague. Colleagues provide support, knowledge and experience, without them I am not sure how I would have survived in my career. Colleagues have inspired me and given me such tremendous learning opportunities, I wouldn’t be where I am without them. Mutual respect, kindness and a desire to consistently improve the services we work in go a long way. Relationships with Carers are so important – they are the first port of call for information about the people we work with. They give us ideas, challenge our practice and help me stay grounded in the work that I do. I feel humbled by their stories, their strength and commitment to their loved ones and so many want to be involved in service improvements. Working with Carers has taught me so much about seeing what we do from their perspective and not from the professional stance. You cannot get much better insight into living with mental ill health than this. I have worked with many service users over the years – the therapeutic relationship can be so powerful when working with individuals. I may not always have got this right over the years but I have always tried my best. Trust is so important as is sharing a little bit of yourself. One service user I worked with said she wished she had a mouse size version of me in her pocket so she could get me out when she needed reminding about things or a friendly ear to listen to her. Although mice are not my favourite animal I did take it as a compliment. Working with service user’s is the favourite part of my role as a social worker who has gone into a management role – they have made me laugh and cry over the years and I have learnt so much from them. The success stories stay with you forever, and the people that I have lost over the years stay in your heart and both remind me why I do this job.”

Helen Dudeney, HPFT Adult Services
“Helping and supporting people to have positive and worthwhile relationships to lead full and satisfying lives is why I became a social worker. No one lives in isolation and relationships are key to good emotional wellbeing.”

Anne Matthews, HPFT CAMHS

“They are fundamental to creating that therapeutic environment that will enable change to be made. Relationships create a sense of safety, collaboration and partnership and encourages a sense of trust in the working relationship.”

Stacey Brooker, HPFT CAMHS

“Relationships are important in individual and family work. The relationship between the parent and the child is the basis for all future relationships. I also value the relationships with my colleagues and our ability to collaborate with each other.”

Allison Simon, HPFT CAMHS

“Relationships are at the core of everything! Relationships with colleagues keep me going – they inspire and support me. Good relationships with families are vital to our work. It’s the foundation of what is to come.”

Claire Knox, HPFT CAMHS
“Promoting human relationships is important to me, both in my personal life and my own work. It is one of the reasons I wanted to enter social work rather than other professions in the field of mental health and I see the development of relationships having a real impact on people’s lives. For example, I have been working with one particular service user for around 18 months. He was difficult to engage with at first, often going out just before I went to visit him at home. Over time, I built a relationship with him and began to understand that the relationship he had with his brother had been very important to him. Since his brother’s death, he was struggling with loneliness, which appeared to be impacting his behaviour and having a knock-on impact on neighbours and local police call-outs. Promoting human relationships in his life is a big factor in my work to help him manage independently, and this had to start with me building a relationship with him, and others involved in his care, so I could understand his situation and feelings.”

*Deborah Waller, HPFT Adult Services*

“Relationships are important to me because they have the power to restore, rejuvenate and repair. It is not just a matter of restorative power, however. Relationships have the power to foster empathy, strength and resilience. The critical path; to recognise that while diversity characterises all our existence, essentially, we share a commonality. As human beings. Appreciating our shared humanity helps us to better understand the emotional state and ideas of another person. It is through our relationships that we uphold those principles of equality and human rights. The essence of social work. The attainment of equality and rights achieved through humane and empathic relationships.”

*Julia Warrener, University of Hertfordshire*
“I am privileged to say that I come from a working class black British background from London. Anti discrimination was the norm on the housing estate that I grew up in as everyone else was also working class and from different ethnicities. Many neighbours left their fount doors open and in the late 1960’s an early 70’s and neighbours would be invited to walk in and out of each others flats and look after each others children. Therefore young, old, Irish, Asian, Caribbean and British people all got along.

I firmly believe that coming from my background has really helped me as a social worker. I feel that I can relate to service users especially the disadvantaged ones and having experienced financial hardship myself growing up, I really take inequities, discrimination, stigma and disadvantage seriously as I understand the damaging impact it has on our mental health service users and their families.

As social workers we are in jobs because of our services users and because of those inequities and I am reminded daily when I work with our mentally ill service users and listen to their stories that there is a very fine line between mental illness and mental wellness and consider how we as professionals would want a service for ourselves or our families if we became mentally unwell ourselves. This realisation not only humbles me but also enables me to go an extra mile. I am fortunate to do this job in HPFT and If I can make a difference to the life of even one person then that is a blessing in itself.”

Janet Kennedy, HPFT Adult Services
With thanks from:

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