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**University of Stirling Social Work Service User and Carers' Group**



## Presentation skills and SWAN conference

At the beginning of 2015, there was a discussion about the development needs of the group. There was recognition about the valuable experience and skills that members got from their involvement in teaching and other activities in and outwith the university, but there was also acknowledgement that more could be done to support members. One area of development highlighted was to improve presentation skills. Unity made use of funding from the School of Applied Social Sci-

ence Teaching and Learning committee and in spring there was a 'Presentation Skills' workshop, led by Kate Donne. This included tips and feedback tailored to individual members to improve their presentation skills and feedback on forthcoming conference presentation. Kate worked with Ronnie, Jim, Malky, Linda and Tracey to perfect their group presentation for the Social Work Action Network conference, at the University of West Scotland, Paisley (attended by over

400 delegates from around the world!). After numerous rehearsals, attention to clarity of expression, voice projection, intonation, speed, standing position, the walk and 'handover' between presenters, Unity were fully prepared and they delivered a fantastic, professional and informative presentation about their involvement in social work education at the University of Stirling, making excellent use of the presentation skills training. **Siân**



### Student Feedback

"Excellent activities which were engaging and encouraged discussion."

"More valuable than any info you can get from books."



### Call for New Members

Do you have experience of using social work services? Would you like to share your experiences of social work, contribute to social work education and improve social work services?

We are looking for people who have experience of using any social work service, this can be: alcohol and drug services, fostering and adoption, support for children and families, people with physical or learning disabilities, health problems, dementia services and any other reason that brought you into contact with social work.

For further information please contact Fiona [f.c.sherwood-johnson@stir.ac.uk](mailto:f.c.sherwood-johnson@stir.ac.uk)  
**Unity members look forward to welcoming you!**



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We welcome articles, photos, poems or anything that you think would be of interest to our readers. Contributions for the newsletter should be sent to

Fiona Sherwood-Johnson  
[f.c.sherwood-johnson@stir.ac.uk](mailto:f.c.sherwood-johnson@stir.ac.uk)

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UNIVERSITY of  
**STIRLING**

**Social Work Service Users  
& Carers Group**

**March 2016**

### Welcome!

Welcome to the 2016 newsletter of Unity, the University of Stirling Social Work Service Users and Carers group. Unity contributes to many aspects of social work education at Stirling. The group also links with other universities and organisations to promote service user and carer involvement in professional education.

We welcome new and continuing members to our meetings every six weeks. Please contact Fiona [f.c.sherwood-johnson@stir.ac.uk](mailto:f.c.sherwood-johnson@stir.ac.uk) if you would like to come along. We also have members and supporters who can't attend the meetings. This newsletter is one way for us to keep in touch with them, together with our website: [unity.wordpress.stir.ac.uk](http://unity.wordpress.stir.ac.uk). I hope you enjoy the newsletter.

Best wishes  
Fiona Sherwood-Johnson  
Unity Convener



*Unity members join staff, students and their families to celebrate the students' success at the 2015 graduation ceremony.*

Unity is made up of service users, carers, staff from social care organisations, student representatives and staff members from the Social Work subject group at the University. Organisations actively involved include: Caledonia - Falkirk; People First- Alloa; Klacksun; Stun; Plus. You can find contact details for the organisations on page 4.

### Siân looks back on 2015



We said goodbye (for a little while) to Unity Convener Siân Lucas in December, when she left to have a baby. Siân took the time before leaving to reflect on a successful year. She writes:  
"It has been a pleasure working with Unity in 2015. As well as contributing to social work, Unity participates in events throughout the university and

nationally. Some of my highlights as Unity convener in 2015 are covered in this newsletter. They include: welcoming and working with student representatives Colette and Tracy (see p.2), the presentation skills workshop for Unity members and contribution to the Social Work Action Network conference (see p.4) and the Reading the World workshop and performance (see p.3). All in all, it has been an excellent year. Unity continue to receive positive feedback from students and staff and they were commended in the Social Work subject review. I would like to thank Unity members for their involvement at Stir-

ling. The convener role is a highlight of my work at Stirling. I was overwhelmed by the thoughtfulness of the group as they said 'farewell' and wished me and my family well. The group will be in a safe hands with Fiona Sherwood-Johnson, the 2016 Unity convener. I look forward to working with Unity on my return.

**Siân Lucas  
Outgoing Unity Convener**



Baby Willow was born on 11.01.16 weighing 7lb 6oz.

## Roleplay workshops: two members' accounts

Unity takes part in a range of teaching throughout the Social Work courses. This issue we focus on a unique workshop in the first year of Professional Studies, which gives students the opportunity to practice their interviewing skills. Linda and Lynda reflect on their experiences of the role play workshop.



I love working with the students, especially participating in the role play exercise. I know the students can get very nervous about it, but it teaches them so much about social work interviewing skills and life; as the topics we talk about in the role plays are based on real life experience. Sometimes this can be hard for us, as we are going back to a time when life was not good. We do the work with the social work students at the University of Stirling to train them to become the best they can be and to go out with the courage of their convictions to do the right thing for their clients.

Lynda

To make role play as authentic as possible, we all choose something from our own experience. Mine is about when I had very bad post-natal depression after the birth of my daughter when my son was four. In the classroom, I worked with three social work students. I was interviewed by one social work student and there were two students sat on chairs observing the role play. This experience was very nerve-wracking for both the students and myself, as I had to go back to a very difficult time in my life. Some people in the Unity group were pretending to be at the social work office, but I was in my house. We had a little laugh when some students asked if I had found the office alright, and I had to remind them that I was in my house. I found it difficult to remember just how bad my depression had been for two years, culminating in a nervous breakdown, however, I think very strongly that it is important to prepare the students to handle people with mental health problems sympathetically and in a caring way. I must say that the students are a credit to the University and some were outstanding in their role play interviews. It is a privilege to work with people who are so keen to help others. Most students asked many appropriate questions and were most forthcoming about asking me many questions about depression and mental health in general. It is so nice to see people seeing you as a whole person and not an illness and we hope we are helping the students as much as they are giving us hope for the future.

Linda

## Students get involved

In 2015 Unity welcomed two student representatives, Colette Morrison and Tracey McQuillian. Colette and Tracey have been a fantastic addition to the group. Throughout the year, and on top of being full time students, they have attended meetings, been the link between students and Unity members, written articles about their involvement, delivered IT training sessions for Unity members, supported members at seminars and presented at conferences with Unity members. Perhaps their most memorable contribution was the sponsored abseil, in which they raised a staggering £985. The funds will be used towards a service user and carer conference in 2017—another exciting project to look out for. I would like to say a huge thank you to Colette and Tracey and the students who abseiled. We look forward to more student and Unity collaborations

Sian



Students abseil for Unity



## Induction 2016

Unity began the new year with an induction session for new and continuing students. Students were asked to think about the qualities of an "ideal social worker", drawing on members' own experiences of receiving support.

A special thanks to members of Plus who were involved in this workshop for the first time.



<http://unity.wordpress.stir.ac.uk/>

## Reading the World

On 7th July 2015, a team of community actors and academics from the University of Central Lancashire came to Stirling to give a workshop and performance. Catherine shares her account of the day.

### Creative writing workshop

Not being very good at writing essays or stories I was quite apprehensive about the writing workshop. The first exercise was to write a general story about yourself, but you had to put a lie in it. We were asked to read our stories to the group and see if anyone could spot the lie. For the second exercise we were invited to pick an object that we were drawn to, for whatever reason – a clear memory or unknown connection.



I noticed a recipe book which immediately made me think about my Granny. We were asked to write about the object for 20 minutes. I found this exercise so much easier than the first exercise as describing my Granny seemed to come very easily, as memories of her were always happy.

We each took turns to read our stories and the group were invited to feed back, with a focus on: *What is strong in the writing? What stands out and stays with you? What insights about the author's world do you gain? What do you want to know more about?*

The feedback from the group was encouraging and made me think maybe I can write stories. This was a really good and rewarding experience.

### Afternoon performance

During our writing workshop a group of Reading the World (RTW) performers were rehearsing for the afternoon performance. After the workshop we had lunch with the performers and got to know a little more about RTW.

The performance was called 'After a Blind Marathon' and was attended by Unity members, students and staff. There were individual and group performances, based on lived experience. The topics and performance style varied; one performer sang a song, others used movement. All of the performances were powerful and memorable. Some performances were very moving and at times made the audience feel uncomfortable. One performer talked about child sexual abuse, another talked about the stigma attached to mental health, institutional oppression and discrimination to living with an impairment. After the performances there was a question and answer session. This was an important way to learn about the audience members' reflections and more about the performers' intentions and their journey as writers and performers. All of the members talked about how beneficial the RTW programme was and how it helped with their recovery. Unity members would like to thank RTW performers and facilitators for an excellent and though provoking day. We hope that the programme goes from strength to strength.

Catherine



*"I felt the performance to be intense and powerful. As a student it allowed me to appreciate how difficult it is for service users to share their experiences. I personally felt the performance to be uncomfortable and hard hitting but I thought this was an important aspect because it gave me an insight into the performer's life."*

*'After a Blind Marathon' audience member*

