

Social work and empowerment assignment

[Business](#), [Work](#)



The purpose of this essay is to explore social work theory and practice. The essay is based on a scenario of a father (Mathew), who after many years of caring for his disabled son (David), and having suffered a stroke attack an year ago, finds he is struggling to care for himself or the son. In relation to working with the elderly, the essay will discuss the roles of a social worker, the practice of empowerment, possible ethical dilemmas and an anti-oppressive practice. The type of agency chosen for this essay is Learning Disability Partnership (LPD) in Cambridgeshire.

LPD is an organisation, which includes multi-disciplinary teams of Social Care Services and Health professionals. LPD dedicates services which help learning disabled people lead normal lives and life in abundance. Fully aware of the strain and stress brought on by caring, LPD tries to provide services which help people with learning disabilities, and their carers, to cope with these pressures. The diversity of social work roles in this organisation includes advocacy, direct change agent and executive. These roles can be used singly, or as a combination of two roles.

The role of advocacy is about people speaking up for themselves directly or indirectly (Beckett, 2006: 9). Despite having communication problems, and assuming a positive mental capacity rationale on David, a social worker may advocate for David by providing specialist communication equipment that enable him to directly communicate without undue influence by his father. Similarly, in the best interests of David and Matthew advocacy is met through negotiations for services and resources within the agency or through multi-disciplinary teams, this is a mixed role of a negotiator and a co-ordinator.

The social worker is obliged to assess the needs of Matthew and David for community care services and implement services accordingly, role of a care manager. Simultaneously, eligibility criteria are checked (role of a researcher) after which costs and services availability are checked before commissioning resources. For effectiveness, a social worker must have sufficient knowledge, skills and values to conduct good professional practice. Empowerment means " working in a way aimed at increasing people's sense of power and control over their lives" (Beckett, 2006: 126).

The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) includes in their definition of social work the promotion of "... social change... and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. " (Thompson 2001) cites empowerment as an ongoing " process" and a " goal" that takes a long time. Cooper (2000: 15) cites the four major principles of empowerment as " entitlement which include legislation, rights and policies; social model which looks at social, economic and culture; needs-led assessment which looks at wants in life; and promotion of choice and control which moves institutionalisation to independent living... In view of this topic's diversity I shall address each principle briefly.

In terms of entitlement law, rights and policies offer guidance and support, good example been the 1990 Community Care Act and the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 which places a duty and requirement on local authority to provide services, resources and funding for services and resources for the needy people in the community (Brammer, 2003: 304). To

empower David and Matthew rights to live in own home entitlement services like home carer provide personal care and help with shopping.

David may also be entitled to practical home assistance to improve on safety and mobility. However, despite been eligible for service, due to limited resources services may not be easily implemented by local authority. The main objective of need's led assessment is to concentrate more on individual needs and preferences rather than the services available. Needs determine the level of assessment required based mainly on empowerment and choice (Parker, Bradley, 2007).

Contrary, defining the meaning of 'need' inevitably leads to procedural bias and restriction of services due to financial constraints. If the service user satisfies the local authorities eligibility criteria then they have a legal duty to provide the necessary assistance. For example needs for both Matthew and David vary and might change over time. Matthew's perspective might be need of rehabilitation and home help to enhance his physical well being whilst David's needs might be gradual introduction to socialisation and communication needs.

Choices for independence targets services for persons at risk for institutionalisation. The Kantanian approach of individualisation (rights and respect for David and Matthew to be treated with personal differences) and user-self-determination (liberty to make informed choices or decisions) promote choice and independence (Banks, 2003: 31). Direct Payments, supports self-directed care. This enables David and Matthew to recruit,

organise and pay for their own services, enabling them to exercise choice and control over their lives.

The campaign for real choice by guardian newspaper quotes that " the growth of direct payments is causing for celebration, alongside pilot schemes for individual budgets which give disabled people more independence" (www. guardian. co. uk). Social model is concerned with experiences of vulnerable people at a risk of oppression and social devaluation, seeking to reserve vulnerability. Medical terms have been used to normalise people, for examples labelling David as severe learning disabled and Matthew as suffering from stroke is disabling in itself, and leads to total loss of rights.

However these terms are used to check threshold criteria for assessment of their needs enabling empowerment. Consequently, on meeting the criteria, local authority must facilities for services, which at this point must be pointed out that they may not necessarily be needs led as intended, but resource led due to limited resources. Simultaneously, this leads to David and Matthew depending on the state welfare instead of encouraging independence and active participation (Oliver, 1996: 25). Similarly, choices encourage empowerment.

David expressing his wish to stay at home proves that his mental capacity is able to receive, retain and make decisions. (Adams, Dominelli and Payne 2002: 196) states capacity and ability to act on decisions brings about equality, however, this supports choice making more than services that best suits David. Possible ethical dilemmas encountered include: Choice and capacity: Because of communication problems with Matthew his dad may

have to translate his thoughts expressed. Dilemma occurs as dad's interpretations may not be accurate with the Matthew's needs; this may lead to a social worker implementing wrong services.

Similarly wrong services may also be offered if in the past Matthew has had little or no experience of choosing. Care and control imposed due to limited resources, social workers are obligated to evaluate David and Matthew against other service users who are in need. Following the utilitarian approach, the dilemma here is whose needs outweigh the other? On what orders would these needs be prioritised? If David and Matthew's priority are of low, then resources will be allocated to those in most significant risk.

Consequently lead to two immoral issues: (a) Societal distrust in social work profession as most people fear being selected for sacrifice despite their needs, (b) David's and Matthew's health might get worse as they have to wait a long time for care packages to be implemented. Empowerment process shifts power away from social workers and given to service users. This reliance to create the conditions for empowerment and identify eligible for empowerment would appear to contradict this intended shift of power. Conflict of interest arises on who the primary client is.

Once a referral has been made, a social worker will purposely be going in to assess whoever is in need. However it soon comes to light that both the service user and the carer are in need, torn between two people in need a social worker therefore has to work with the wholefamilycreating conflict of interest. The Mental Capacity Act 2005 states that: " a person must be assumed to have capacity unless it is established that he lacks capacity". In

line with this, dilemma occurs on how to assess capacity and to what extent would capacity be measurable?

A social worker is obliged to make a value judgmental call, and if the wrong move is made then the consequences lie with the social worker. To overcome these dilemmas awareness training and anti discriminatory practice would give a balance. From learnt theories it is evident that some social workers might have limited resources and lack of awareness. If a social worker is not aware or informed of these factors, then they will not be able to achieve empowering practice and that they will find their practice may revolve more around issues of empowerment and control are evidently forgetting service users and carers self-determination.

Conclusively, Social workers are employed in varied social settings necessitating diversity of social work roles. Empowerment enriches and enhances human suffering, therefore should always be linked with anti-discrimination. The topic of empowerment is very broad, it not only requires technical competence but also qualities of integrity, genuiness and self-awareness.