

My social work practice



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Within this assignment I will demonstrate my ability to critically reflect on the impact the service user feedback had on my social work practice. Firstly, I will briefly explain how my agency became involved with this particular young person and the purpose of my intervention. I will be referring to the service user of whom I received the service user feedback from as Child A. My agency had previously been involved with Child A, a colleague worked with Child A for a number of months before it was referred onto me. Child A continuously absconded and was known to associate with older males. It was for these reasons that Child A was referred to my agency by the 'Vulnerable Police Officer (VPO)'. I had previously visited this young person with a colleague, the colleague did not get along successfully with Child A and so Child A was referred onto me in the hope that I could work with this young person and develop a professional relationship.

Child A worked very well with me and a rapport was immediately created in which Child A was willing to share sensitive information. I believe one of the reasons why Child A was willing to work with me might have been because Child A was known to associate with older males whom are in the similar age range and ethnicity as me, therefore I believe that she did not mind being around me. I wanted Child A to perceive me as a 'friend' similar to the people she hangs around with but I also wanted her to understand that I was there to help her and the relationship between us must remain professional.

Another impact that this type of relationship might have is that Child A may be willing to talk to me because she may see me as one of her friends rather than another professional. On the other hand, there is a possibility that this 'friendly' type of relationship might have a negative effect on our

relationship. Child A may have trusted me with sensitive information but did not want me to tell anybody especially from my agency - this may be problematic because as a professional social worker it is my duty to inform relevant agencies of confidential information if it will put the service user or others at risk. At the time, Child A was dating a young male of the same age and ethnicity as me, in this respect I did not want her to see me in the same limelight as the other males she socialises with. I asked Child A to complete a service user feedback form at the end of my fourth and final visit to the care home where she was accommodated. I asked Child A to complete the form once my work with her was almost complete because by now Child A would have spent a number of days working with me and the rapport would have been well established and so, the feedback would provide more of an accurate description of my intervention and the comments would be more valid.

There are other strategies which contribute to reflection such as journals and learning partners. Journals can be very useful in terms of critical reflection. A weekly journal can be used to record and comment on experiences throughout the day. These entries can be reviewed at the end of the week and an overview can be made about yourself and ways in which you can improve your practice (Knights 1991 cited in Griffin and Mulligan, 1991). A learning partner is a co-worker/student which you pair with to " discuss ideas that are raised, explore ... interests, exchange work for comment and generally be a friendly person on whom they can call" (Griffin et al 1985 cited in Gould and Taylor, 1996, p. 25).

The service user feedback was positive and the comments received delighted me because the comments showed that my involvement with Child A was taking effect and that goals were being met. For example, an agreed goal between me and Child A was to allocate her with a project worker from a drugs misuse agency because it was clear that she needed specialist help to deal with her drugs problem. The response from Child A in the feedback showed that this need was met and that she was actually happy that I had referred her onto the drugs misuse agency. The comments were very uplifting and they encouraged me to continue in my efforts with Child A because it was apparent that she was happy with my involvement. Child A mentions in the feedback that I ask questions if Child A disagrees with me and I acknowledge what is said to me and agree to it. At first I read this in a positive perspective because it shows that I am acknowledging what she says and if there are any disagreements between us then I would clear this up by asking questions. However, Child A's comments can also be interpreted differently; it may even mean that Child A thinks that I agree with what she says even if there are disagreements. Unfortunately I was unable to clear this up and ask what Child A actually meant by this comment as I obtained the feedback on the final visit to see Child A. I now see it to be more beneficial if feedback is not obtained on the final visit.

The service user feedback identified that some of the National Occupational Standards (Skills for Care 2002) for social workers were being met. For example, the expectation of social workers to be good at time keeping had been met according to the feedback received. The National Occupational Standards states that as good social work practice, social workers must be "

good at time keeping" (Skills for Care 2002, p2) and this was clearly illustrated in the feedback in which Child A mentioned that I was on time and reliable. The National Occupational Standards also states that social workers must "listen actively to what individuals, families, carers, groups and communities have to say" (Skills for Care 2002, p2). Child A's feedback acknowledges that this was met as she states "when I have personal problems, he listens". Following the National Occupational Standards is important and we must ensure that we do not fall below these standards. Page 9 of the NOS found at Skills for Care states that "the purpose of this code is to set out the conduct that is expected of social care workers and to inform service users and the public about the standards of conduct they can expect from social care workers."

The feedback from Child A was very uplifting and encouraged me to continue in my efforts working with young people. At first glance, the feedback brought about self satisfaction in terms of my involvement with all the service users I worked with because my approach with Child A was similar to my approaches with other service users. But after further reflection I realised that not all service users are the same. Some might not have perceived me to be as effective as Child A did and that each young person I work with have their own unique problems which require tailor made approaches. Each young person has their own needs, perspective and the dynamics will be different in each relationship I have with the young person. My practice assessor was pleased with the service user feedback from Child A; this in turn led to further encouragement from the practice assessor which motivated me to work harder with service users.

The service user feedback gave me the opportunity to critically reflect and evaluate the feedback received. Banks (2001, p162) describes critical reflection as " much more than simply learning procedures or achieving particular 'competencies'. Part of the process of becoming a reflective practitioner is the adoption of a critical and informed stance towards practice. This can only come about through doing the practice, reflecting on it through dialogue and questioning, and changing the practice in the light of reflection." This critical reflection is an important part in social work practice because it scrutinizes your practice in relation to personal and professional values and commitments. I believe that reflection is absolutely crucial and without taking time to consider the work you have done; the quality of work can suffer. " Reflective practice helps us to acknowledge the important links between theory and practice and to appreciate the dangers of treating the two elements as if they were separate domains, with little or no interconnection" (Thompson, 2000, p144).

On my journeys back to the office after visits to see Child A, I would think back on the visits and the conversations we had, not knowing that what I was actually doing was critical reflection. Ixer (1999 cited in Baldwin and Gould, 2004, p. 41) " suggests that it is a slippery notion, hard to identify when it is happening and difficult to evaluate". This reflection enabled me to question whether my work with Child A was effective, this brought forth new ideas and ways to enable Child A to share information and realise the risks she puts herself in. For instance, Child A was hesitant in talking about her boyfriend but after critical reflection, I figured out an alternative approach to ask the question but from a different angle. I started off asking her what she

knows about safe sex, this enabled me to gradually come to the discussion about her boyfriend. After receiving the feedback from Child A, I took some time out to reflect on the work I did with Child A, how it could have been improved and how I might have linked theory into practice more effectively. For example, before reflecting I did not acknowledge that Maslow's work on the Hierarchy of Human Needs might have some play in my visits. It was only after reflecting on the initial visit that I reread my notes from University on Maslow and decided to work with Child A around this model to gain a better understanding to why Child A might involve herself in risky behavior.

It can be easy to come to assumptions and at times we might be unaware that we are doing such a thing. I could have assumed that Child A was like any other child from a care home, not working towards her needs and removing her 'uniqueness', which leads to oppression as it removes her identity. However, critically reflecting on the work I did with Child A challenged these assumptions and guided me to better social work practice, reminding me that Child A has her own unique needs and is not to be perceived and treated like any other child in a care home. Whilst working with Child A, I assumed that I was working effectively with her. Critically reflecting on the feedback received from Child A supported this; however, if I did not request feedback, I would not have known that I was working effectively. On the other hand, the feedback received might not have been such a valid report of Child A's views. Perhaps the fact that she knew that I would read the feedback might have deterred her from writing the truth. Maybe she actually enjoyed absconding and involving herself in risky behavior and did not want me to know the truth about how effective my

practice and methods were because she knew that I would change my approach and improve my practice with her. She could possibly have deceived me into thinking that I was working effectively with her by writing an inaccurate feedback report.

So how will the feedback received from Child A inform my future social work practice? First and foremost, it will remind me that feedback is an integral part of improving my social work practice. It raises questions, challenges assumptions and can bring forward new and innovative ways to work more effectively with service users. It also reminds me to be careful not to discriminate service users or oppress them by providing the same solutions and services for all. Feedback from one service user does not necessarily mean that all other service users are the same, in other words not all of them are like Child A, perhaps some service users might have perceived me to be very effective in the work I did, or maybe some might have thought I did not help at all. Providing the same approach to all service users might be effective for some but disastrous for others. In future social work practice, I will take time out to critically reflect on recent events and how I can improve on my practice. I will refer to my University notes and access material from libraries and the internet as these are useful sources of information that can aid effective practice. I shall also reflect on all feedback I receive and take any negativity as constructive criticism, focusing on what I might have done wrong and how I can improve in order to work more effectively in future social work practice.

Bibliography:

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