



nalized and discriminated groups in society. Today, PowerUs consists of partners from Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, South Africa, Switzerland, Sweden, and the UK.

What is Gap-mending?

PowerUs has introduced the name gap-mending for methods of inclusion that result in a more equal practice. The gap-mending concept is an analytical tool that helps teachers, researchers, students and service users to reflect upon what, in their practices, increases, maintains or mends gaps between policies, services and professionals – and of course – service users and students. Gaps exist in a context. Contextual knowledge is essential in gap-mending reflections, as well as a good understanding of existing gaps. Gaps can be maintained because of prejudices based on social work's categorization of people, because of language barriers, because of institutional hierarchies and the roles we have created for people within them. They can also exist because of lack of knowledge. Multiple perspectives on different social issues offer a more complex picture. A step in this direction can be the power of narrative when people become a part of writing their own history, and stating what they think the problems are.

Peer Support and Experiential Knowledge

Together with colleagues from ten European countries within an ERASMUS -financed strategic partnership, we are developing methods and research about various ways to use the experiences of recovery from social problems when helping others. This occurs when the experiences of service users are channeled into so called peer support, but also when professional social workers or teachers use their experiences of having recovered from mental health problems or other life difficulties to help others.

Peer support is a well-established practice within self-help groups around the world, but also a growing group of employees within the municipalities and within mental health authorities. Researchers from Lund University have a FORTE-financed co-productive research project (RECO: Resilient Communities by Sustainable Welfare Transformation) which includes the development of peer support and service user inclusion within Housing First in several Swedish municipalities.

Read more: www.powerus.eu

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The Mobilization Course

Since 2005 the School of Social Work at Lund University has been running a course where social work students and people from service user organizations study together. The course, which is called the Mobilization Course, started as a radical attempt to include the perspectives of service users in social work education at the School of Social Work at the University of Lund. By its construction the Mobilization course aims to challenge common views of the client as someone with problems and the professional as an expert of these problems. The pedagogy includes creating community, trust and mutual knowledge development between the different student groups. Instead of focusing on the problems of individuals the focus is on creating community, inclusion and development projects in co-production. Since the start of 2005, the Mobilization Course has been given 21 times. A total of 700 students have attended the course. 450 students have been social work students. 250 have been students from service user organizations.

The Mobilization Course is a full-time six weeks' course and gives 7,5 credits (ECTS). The social work students, who attend the Mobilization Course, choose the course within the social work programme. The service user students are recruited from around 50 different service user organizations representing people with experience of addiction, crime, homelessness, mental illness and disabilities, but also ethnic minorities such as Roma people. For some of the students, years have passed since they needed social services, but many are still living in vulnerable situations and it is not uncommon that service user students are attending the course shortly after they have been in jail or in institutional care.

The course contains lectures on theories about power, inclusion, exclusion, social mobilization and social change. Pedagogically we have been working in line with an idea that people need to step out of dichotomous categories (social workers/service users) to challenge prejudices and power imbalances. One way to arrange meetings as subjects – or individuals – is to offer everyone the opportunity to reveal themselves as persons. During the first weeks of the course the students, as well as the teachers, give their personal presentations which means that they get opportunities to share who they are, and what matters in social work practice. The presentations create a base of experiences that contributes to better cooperation and trust between the students. When they meet outside their roles as service users and social workers, differences concerning experiences, status, age, gender, disabilities and class no longer becomes a limitation to community between them.

I realized how alike we all are despite our differences. We shared many experiences, for instance the fear of speaking in front of a big group. When we dared to be ourselves and stand up for who we were, the barriers between the student groups disappeared. When community, understanding and trust was created many felt they grew and developed as individuals. I did too!

Social work student

Two weeks into the course the class and teachers spend two days, with a sleepover, in the countryside, having a Future Workshop where the students develop innovative and alternative project ideas. During the Future Workshop, project groups are constructed. The project groups form the base for the project development the students work on for about two weeks after the Future Workshop. The project development is reported in the form of a project plan presented to an external expert panel that gives feedback on the students' ideas.

The last week of the course, the students work on an individual exam question where they make personal reflections regarding the course, with the help of the course literature. The exam questions are discussed in a seminar and the course ends with a course evaluation, which includes both individual feedback via a questionnaire and oral discussions. Most of the students are very positive about the course and believe that it has been very educational. Most students say that the course has strengthened them in their personal development.



The course has helped me to grow as a person, and I have done things I never thought I could, like speaking to a big group of people.

Student from service user organization

The Mobilization Course has developed into an action research-oriented platform for gap-mending-based networking and development of co-production solutions to social problems. Several project ideas developed within the Mobilization Course has been realized in different services. Some new service user organizations have also developed from ideas that emerged in the course. Former service user students take part in other courses at the School of Social Work at Lund University, as guest lecturers and mentors after the course.

The international network PowerUs

School of Social Work at Lund University was one of three partners that 2011 took the initiative to PowerUs. Lillehammer University College and the British service user organization Shaping our Lives. PowerUs is an international network of teachers and researchers from schools of social work and representatives from different service user organizations. PowerUs develops methods of mutual learning to change social work practice to be more effective in supporting the empowerment of margi-