

EIFSW Conference Iceland 2017

Workshop proposal

Marginalisation and social work in a changing society: Parent Advocacy and Rights (PAR) - an account of an alliance between social workers and parents with lived experience of child protection and care processes to improve decisions and outcomes for children.

This workshop will present our experience of helping parents with lived experience of involvement in child protection and care systems to set up a member-led group to advocate for a different approach. The work is part modelled on successful work in New York City, where a parent led advocacy approach succeeded in changing practice and reuniting parents and children safely.

Parents are often marginalised, and treated as the problem rather than as the possible solution, by social workers in statutory child protection and care services. An adversarial and investigative approach to families has created mutual fear and suspicion. This compounds the stress and anxiety for both parents and for social workers. With rising referrals and overloaded systems, there is a will to look for fresh approaches.

Contemporary theories of the benefits of participation, 'co-production' between service users and social workers have themselves been marginalised in the context of child protection social work. The presentation will demonstrate the strengths of parent led advocacy and rights to create the positive impact that participation and co-production are having in other fields in social work.

Regular meetings, presentations to conferences and seminars, and a closed Facebook Group have all promoted strong group identity, and generated shared reading and discussion. The group has links with other parent-led initiatives in Ireland, England and the USA. These aspects will be part of the workshop presentation as will positive and negative experiences of engagement with social workers by PAR.

***Catriona Grant** is a social worker, now qualified and training to be a solicitor, with experience in both statutory and voluntary sectors, most recently as the social worker in COMAS, a user led Edinburgh café and community centre run by people in recovery. Catriona is skilled in training, and in group and individual work. She is a member of SASW/BASW and contributes to events in Scotland. Catriona and her partner are kinshipcarers for twin girls.*

***Maggie Mellon** is a social worker, now working independently, with experience in both statutory and voluntary sectors, in practice and in senior positions. She is an advocate of reform of the child protection and children's care system, and of the potential of family group conferencing to make better plans and decisions for children. She writes and blogs about social work and related issues, and is active within BASW, as a member of SASW national committee, and of PEHR, and as a former vice-chair of BASW (2014-16).*