

RELATIONSHIP-BASED **SOCIAL WORK** **WITH ADULTS**

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**CRITICAL
SKILLS FOR
SOCIAL WORK**

Introduction

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Relationships are at the heart of social work with people and carers; however, until recently most of the literature regarding relationship-based approaches have focused on describing and supporting work with children and their families. As editors, we have all either worked in or have connections with both children's and adult services and passionately felt that we wanted to contribute to the developing body of literature that is calling for a resurgence of relationship-based practice and in this instance on adult social care.

We feel that these are exciting times for the development of social work; pressure from advocacy groups and service user networks, together with the introduction of the Care Act 2014, has seen a move away from managerialist practice that had been a feature of adult social care since the 1990s with the introduction of the NHS and Community Care Act 1990. This piece of legislation brought the idea of 'Case Management', with social workers often described as 'Care Co-ordinators', or 'Named Assessors' and who acted as 'brokers' to commission and co-ordinate packages of care. Within this context, relationships were not considered an essential component of effective social work and those of us who were committed to this way of working found organisations did not provide the time and resources necessary to support this approach. With the current climate of deep austerity, many social workers and people and carers may feel that little has changed; eligibility and thresholds for services are high, resources are limited, and organisational structures often still do not support a way of being with people that is relationship-based.

However, it is often at times of crisis that creativity and innovation flourishes and as this book illustrates, it is the relationships we develop with people who use services, with carers, and with other professionals which are instrumental to support and assist change.

The book contains two parts; Part 1 provides a summary of a range of theoretical perspectives for relationship-based practice with adults as well as outlining the policy context for adult social care. The final chapter in Part 1 introduces us to the IDEAS Model; a useful framework to consider the various elements necessary for effective relationship-based work. Included in Part 2 of the book are eight chapters; the first four cover distinct areas of adult social care, while the next two focus on work with adult offenders and people who use substances. The decision to place the final two chapters at the end of the book, which discuss domestic abuse and highlight issues for people who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex or Asexual, was purely for convenience. These chapters are different from the others in that the themes discussed within them are pertinent to all of the specialist areas of practice discussed in the preceding chapters. Also, there are some areas of practice

not covered – in particular people with physical and sensory impairments – but some of the issues discussed in the existing chapters will map across and be relevant to these areas.

The book is aimed at practitioners, managers, practice educators and students, including those who work in environments other than social work, eg health and probation settings. It can be used as a resource to dip into; you may wish to read a chapter that explores a specialism that you are interested in or currently working within, or you may wish to explore an element of the IDEAS framework across a number of practice areas by reading the ‘Expertise’ section for all the chapters included in Part 2 for example. Doing this supports the promotion of a shared understanding of work with adults and can help to avoid silo working.

A brief overview of the book contents

Part 1

A focus on strengths-based social work within adult services is emerging, with the Department of Health in 2017 publishing a report stating that ‘Choice, control, citizenship and connectedness are common themes underpinning all strengths-based work’ (DoH, 2017, p 7). Building on this, in 2019 the Department of Health and Social Care produced a practice framework to support strengths based social work with adults. Within this in mind, in **Chapter 1** of this book Hollinrake outlines some of the strengths-based approaches that can be used by practitioners, as well as outlining other theoretical perspectives which have relationships as a key component. The case examples included in each of the chapters in Part 2 will help to illustrate how the theoretical perspectives summarised in this chapter can be utilised in practice.

Chapter 2 traces the policy developments that have shaped practice in social work with adults, looking at these in the wider context of political and ideological influences, and critiquing these from a relationship-based perspective. There is a particular focus on personalisation and co-production as major policy trajectories that have been gaining ground and are now firmly based in contemporary practice and can sit comfortably within a relationship-based approach, within a supportive organisational context.

The ability to develop effective relationships within social work is often taken for granted; it is accepted as underpinning practice, but as the IDEAS model developed by Dix and Meade and outlined in **Chapter 3** illustrates, adopting a relationship-based approach requires a combination of skills, knowledge and values. The IDEAS model was borne out of a curiosity from the authors to find out what contributes to effective practice and how best to support practitioners within a youth justice service to achieve this. Thus IDEAS was developed to support practitioners to think comprehensively about all aspects of their own individual practice as well as what they should expect from an organisation to support them to undertake their best work. The IDEAS model can also be a useful tool to aid supervision as it can be

used to consider the conflicts, dilemmas and challenges that arise in working in a way that is relational and therefore identity strategies, and the support required to overcome these to bring clarity to complex situations.

It quickly became apparent to us that the IDEAS framework is applicable to most, if not all, areas of social work practice and therefore the model underpins each chapter in Part 2 of this book, where different areas of social work are discussed in relation to the model.

Part 2

Chapter 4 in Part 2 looks at how the IDEAS model can be used by practitioners in their work with older people. Dimes begins by discussing some of the perceptions of age and ageing and illustrates the importance of trust in developing a relationship that is able to challenge stereo-types to promote the well-being of older people.

Hollinrake in **Chapter 5** highlights how relationships are at the heart of effective co-production at a strategic level by outlining how commissioners and service providers collaborated with people, families and their naturally connected networks to develop a Learning Disability Strategy in order to promote choice and control and achieve better outcomes for people. The chapter also focuses on how co-production and personalisation can occur at an individual level, that is, between the person and the practitioner.

Within **Chapter 6** Chard places an emphasis on the importance of practitioners needing to value and validate the experience of informal carers and through the use of case examples illustrates how some of the theoretical approaches outlined in Chapter 4 can support a relationship-based approach.

Chapter 7 discusses how the IDEAS model can provide a framework for practitioners working within mental health settings and Mustin describes how utilising the knowledge gained from ‘practice wisdom’, from research and from listening to and responding to people’s experiences are essential to the development of relationships to enable positive change to occur.

Meade, in **Chapter 8**, argues that even though practitioners who work with adult offenders are no longer required to hold a social work qualification, the values required of practitioners working in a range of agencies and organisations that provide services to people in contact with the criminal justice system are similar to social work values and those that underpin relationship-based practice.

Chapter 9 uses the IDEAS model to illustrate how relationships are central to supporting people who have experiences of trauma, abuse and neglect and Cobb emphasises how the application of therapeutic approaches are necessary to effectively work with people who misuse substances.

In **Chapter 10**, Howells argues that practitioners need to take a human rights perspective to working with people who experience domestic abuse and stresses the need to build trusting alliances with victims/survivors in order to support more effective interventions. Howells asserts how adopting a trauma-informed approach can enable organisations to provide safety for practitioners to undertake transformational social work.

We believe that relationships are at the interface between the personal and the political. Social work, by its very nature, is an inclusive profession and integral to the Professional Capabilities Framework is a commitment to promoting equality and diversity and the promotion of the fundamental principles of human rights, social justice and economic well-being (BASW, 2018). **Chapter 11**, with its focus on working with people who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex or Asexual, offers practical examples to enable practitioners to utilise the power that is inherent within the social work role to identify, question and challenge inequality nationally and locally as well as providing information regarding the need to consider all aspects of a person's identity in order to support their well-being.

Several chapters in Part 2 of this book are written by practitioners and we are immensely grateful for their contributions; it is the content of these chapters that we believe makes this book a rich source of information. Two of the editors of this book are academics, one also works part-time as the practice and development manager within a local authority and the third editor is a Joint Head of a Youth Justice Service. Most of the practitioners who contributed to this book are working within a local authority that is involved in a Social Work Teaching Partnership, a government initiative to support the collaboration of HEIs and Employers to recruit, train and retrain a high-quality social care workforce.

A key factor in the success of our Teaching Partnership is a shared understanding of the roles and responsibilities of all involved. The development of relationships based on empathy has created an environment where mutual respect and trust has helped to overcome differences in organisational cultures and values. In many ways this has mirrored the approach taken in the creation of this book, in that it is the trusting and respectful relationships that have been established between academics, practitioners and people who use services and carers, which enabled this book to be written and we are all very proud of this achievement.

References

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