Making writing a visible dimension of professional social work practice

The WiSP project
The original WiSP (Writing in Social Work Practice) project ran from 2016 - 2019. Funded by the ESRC, the project aimed to find out how much time was spent on social work writing in practice, and what this writing looked like.

The project:
- worked within 5 Local Authorities in England
- resulted in the collection of a one million word corpus of written text.
- saw 71 social workers interviewed,
- involved 10 weeks of observation and field notes,
- developed 42 text histories exploring cases in detail

The impact phase
Following completion of the original research project, and creation of WiSPeR resources, the project has moved into a new impact phase - Writing your life. The aim of this phase is to transform the published research literature into useable knowledge and resources for practitioners. Drawing on the findings in order to influence educators, social work agencies and policy makers, this phase aims to bring the voices of frontline practitioners, service users and students to the fore.

The impact group (Dr Lucy Rai, Dr Gillian Ferguson, Ann Flynn and Lindsay Giddings) have worked with members of The Open University's service user and carer group to develop a strategy for this phase and an initial easy to access written resource which will be available in late summer 2023.

A number of further workstreams are underway, all of which will be reported on to ensure that as well as sharing the knowledge gleaned, all processes will be discussed for the learning this brings too. These workstreams include:

- looking at how the findings from WiSP can be embedded within the OU’s social work curriculum, to support social work students in developing their writing skills for practice, with a view to working with other Higher Education Institutes to support this area of development,
- creating a free OpenLearn resource based on the resources, enabling open access to a bespoke course centred on social work writing aimed at students, practitioners, practice educators and academics across the four UK nations,
- development of a pilot scheme in one area within the UK to look at how the resources and findings from the research can be used to support social work practitioners within their work,
- considering how service users and carers can be kept at the heart of writing in social work practice

The next steps
One of the current goals of the project is to update the WiSP and WiSPeR websites (link through QR code below). This work, led by Dr Gillian Ferguson, will ensure that the website is accessible, dynamic and enables relevant resources to be located easily.

Further information

Lindsay Giddings, The Open University