# Learning on the Go

Voluntary work and reflective study

Dr Marion Smith
School of Health in Social Science

# Learning from the Lives of Others: brief outline

- Level 8 course, designed for first-year students
- Students volunteer for 30-36 hours across the semester
- They attend weekly classes, part 'input' part discussion
- Class topics closely aligned with the kinds of difficulties service users may be experiencing
- 20 credits, assessed by:
  - a poster (30%, mid-semester), on their volunteering role and citizenship
  - and a reflective report (70%, post semester), relating volunteering experiences to their academic learning.
- Has attracted students from across the university since 2014/5

# **Course design**

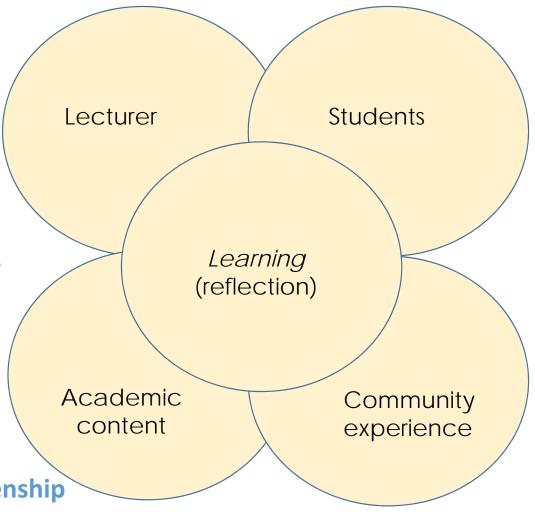
Why service learning?

Civic capacity, citizenship and social justice

Why reflection?

Taking the learning onward:

Transferable skills, employability and citizenship



From Cress, C.M., Collier, P. and Reitenauer, V. (eds) (2013) *Service Learning: A Student Guidebook for Service Learning and Civic Engagement across Academic Disciplines and Cultural Communities*. Sterling, V.A.: Stylus Publishing, p.10 (adapted).

# What is involved in running it?

- Needs attention throughout semester 1 to get the students through applications to volunteer, acceptance, induction, and ready for semester 2
- Checks throughout semester 2 to make sure volunteering is going well, is providing apposite experience for the course subject-matter/LOs, time targets can be achieved, and pastoral/duty of care ... + teaching
- Needs attention throughout the year to liaise with partner NPOs, navigate through changes of staff, maintain relationships, keep communication channels open so that mutual benefits are working well and continuing
- At the moment capped at 15 students
- Course is time heavy

## What the students like:

- I have learnt more from this course than other elective modules I could have done. What
  I have gained are life long experiences as well as a change in attitude for the better.
  Having a 'placement' provided such a new perspective on learning as I have only ever
  done so in the classroom. It was particularly valuable as my main course is 100%
  academic but this provided real life experience.
- I really appreciated being able to combine theory and practical learning. I'd like it if the university offered more courses like this one.
   Sometimes what we're learning can feel so detached from a practical, real-world setting. That wasn't the case here.
- The volunteering and free space to think. Not just clear cut answers, wrong or right.
- The way the course was structured each week with the classroom work was so helpful. I
  was able to apply the classroom learning to my volunteering sessions. And the
  experiences in my volunteering work were relevant when discussing different issues in
  class
- I'd describe myself as a seasoned volunteer. However, this experience of volunteering together with learning in the classroom has been quite different. I've learned new skills yes, but more than that, I understand now how policy decisions taken by others can impact on the lives of individuals and communities.

# Improvements students have suggested:

- More theoretical work, more than one seminar per week
- I don't think there was much scope for engaging with other students on this course in particular as it is mostly placement work- but my engagement with the public has been extremely valuable.
- I think I would require the weekly diary entries to be submitted online (even if the contents stay private). Just to make sure that students stay on track. I think with so much freedom it could be tempting to not do the required work.

### What the charities like about this course:

- [We] are delighted to have been part of the Learning from the Lives of Others project...The programme has worked really well and it has been straightforward to be part of.
- I have been pleased at the support and time that you have given to the students and us as an organisation hosting placements. Having a university staff member as a contact and liaison is particularly important in order to ensure the placements go well for both the organisation and students. Many universities, and even different course placements within the same university, are run differently and have a major impact on the organisation trying to do their best to support the students and give them the opportunity.

# What the charities like about our students:

- The students have been really keen to help out in our community development groups and we have certainly benefited from having new volunteers within the groups who have brought their own unique skills and ideas.
- Today was the last session ...and I wanted to a pass on how successful the placements were. We have received some great feedback from the people they have met and each of them really made an impact into each of the service users lives. I have just finished a debriefing session with them and have heard how positive they felt the placement was. In particular (names) explained how they are reflecting on what they have learned at uni to the experiences during placement and vice versa. This is great to hear that volunteering with us has been so useful for them.
- Ambassadorial triumph, real connection and utility to service users, real involvement in diverse communities and great learning outcomes

# A 'niche' course?

Valuing contact

Time

Quality student experience





### CARING SOLES FOOTCARE AT ERIC LIDDELL CENTRE





#### The Eric Liddell Centre

The Eric Liddell Centre in Morningside provides a number of services supporting local communities in Edinburgh. This might be for example supporting individuals and their families living with dementia or helping someone who needs a listening ear via the Befriending Service. The centre is used by many different groups, and individuals can attend classes such as Tai Chi or just have coffee and a chat in the cafe.

### **About Caring Soles**

The service:

- has 400 + users across four hubs: Marningside, Restairig, Wester Hailes and Craigmillar:
- Averages IDD appointments a month;
- □ has 20 valuateurs;
- Is currently funded solely by donations:
- makes a small charge to service users (£10):
- refers service users with problems beyond the scope of the service to NHS podiatry/GP.



### The Volunteer Role at Caring Soles

The volunteer at Caring Soles helps the service to provide affordable, basic, footcare to those needing it. Volunteers receive training by NHS Podiatry in collaboration with staff at Eric Liddell Centre.

As well as providing footcare, the service also caters for individuals who may lack social contact. It's an appartunity for some service users who may have little day to day contact with others to talk in a friendly, welcoming environment.

### What Caring Soles provides to service users and the community

Firstly, to care for and improve the feet by:

- inspecting feet and recommending future care;
- □ undertaking sensitivity tests; cutting toenalls.

Secondly:

- □ to make service users feel welcome and comfortable:
- to foster an environment where service users can talk to others;
- ☐ to *signpost service users*, where appropriate, to other services e.g. walking groups, carer support or dementia groups.

### **KEY MESSAGES**

- + Maintaining the health of the community +
  - + Providing social contact +
- + Giving service learning opportunities and

Mr. A was disabled after a stroke which affected his speech. This didn't stop us from having a lovely singsong in the treatment room while he was having his nails cut!

### Why this service?

The service is important to individuals and the community:

- ☐ Service users are mainly elderly, most with mobility issues. They may be unable to band to see and reach their feet or hold clippers.
- Lack of access to basic footcare can be problematic for some service users who may be unable to afford private treatment.
- Unable to get around, individuals may choose to suffer in silence and go out less. Cleary et al (2014) describe the effects of this marginalisation and social exclusion as contributing to inequality in accessing health resources.
- ☐ The service is well used. This need is unmet by NHS Podiatry, whose self-referral form states that "routine nail cutting, fungal nail infections and skin corns will not be treated in healthy patients" - (https://services.nhslothian.scot).

### Service Learning, Caring and Citizenship

Service learning (community-based learning):

- Involves an element of learning by students via volunteering within a
- Provides the student with a good understanding of issues within the community and wider society (Cress et al., 2013).
- Caring Soles provides the volunteer with:
- an understanding of why users need the service in this case, NHS Scotland policy:
- ☐ first hand evidence of the difficulties older and less mobile individuals might have in managing footcare;
- an understanding of a need that goes beyond cutting toenails the social

an understanding of health inequalities in society today.

Support groups such as Caring Soles are viewed as:

- an arena where the idea of active citizenship is employed (Turner 2001. p.200 as cited by Milligan and Fyfe 2005);
- understandings of the meaning of active citizenships can range from helping out a friend or neighbour to being involved in a larger campaign (The Institute for Citizenship as cited in Lawson 2001). There is no one overall and encompassing understanding of citizenship however and it can mean many things to different people, with individuals from all backgrounds participating in community or wider areas:
- civic engagement and a "concern for the common good" is fostered via the creation of networks (Milligan and Fyfe 2005, p.418).



Service learning and higher education

### Conclusion

- Key aspect of this course is that students are receiving as well as giving
- Being open to otherness
- Positive interdependence and mutual trust
- Real contribution to local communities, not just practical intervention but relationship-building, developing capabilities on both sides
- Volunteering site becomes a place where people meet and do things together, and everyone learns.

Thank you!