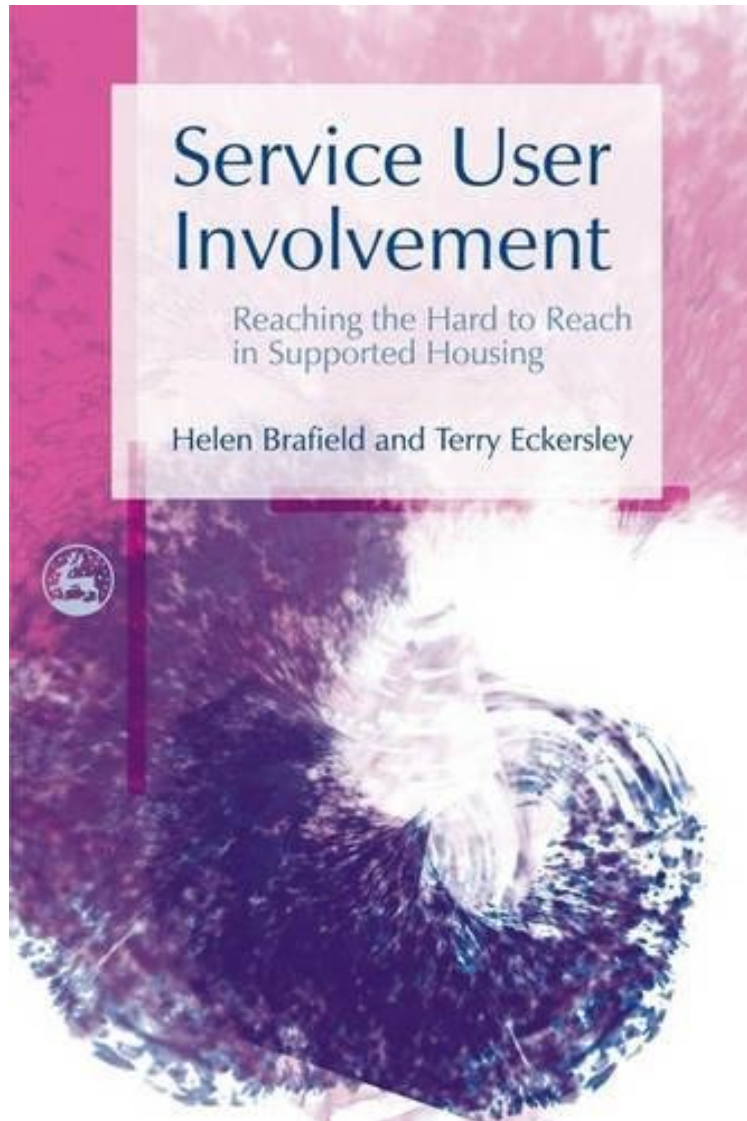


Service User Involvement: Reaching the Hard to Reach in Supported Housing

Helen Brafield, Terry Eckersley
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Helen Brafield, Terry Eckersley : Service User Involvement: Reaching the Hard to Reach in Supported Housing before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Service User Involvement: Reaching the Hard to Reach in Supported Housing:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A must read on Involved, empowered Leadership Reviewer: Martin Whiteford, PhD Student, Bournemouth University By Mr. Terry Eckersley Reviewer: Martin Whiteford, PhD Student,

Bournemouth University Review date: 20/06/2008 In contemporary social work practice and education service user involvement has become an iridescent concept. This concern has brought innovation and insight to our understanding of the service user/social work relationship, and has opened up new paths for service users to gain a formal 'voice' and a legitimate right to actively participate in the organisational structures and day-to-day delivery of social care. Despite this recognition and interest, the service user involvement literature on supported housing is remarkably sparse. In an effort to begin to redress this gap, in *Service User Involvement: Reaching the Hard to Reach in Supported Housing* sets out to facilitate a dialogue about how to promote service user involvement, so as to provide the tools with which participatory and inclusive services can be forged. Inspired by their own experiences of the Supporting People programme, Helen Brafield and Terry Eckersley have produced a much needed insight into how voluntary organisations working with disadvantaged and marginalised groups in housing need can begin to overcome potential barriers to 'successful' user participation. *Service User Involvement: Reaching the Hard to Reach in Supported Housing* consists of eight chapters that provide simple yet cogent examples of good practice and practical suggestions which, taken together, have the potential power to improve service provision through empowering service users. Each chapter also contains questions and exercises that follow a simple but structured framework. The book goes on to introduce a short selection of websites and list of publications, thus enabling the reader to explore in greater depth many of the discussions and debates that inform this small volume. More specifically, I particularly admired Brafield and Eckersley's astute use of case studies and personal insights. The empirical core of this book illustrates the breadth of service user groups accessing housing-related support services while also ably attesting to the fact that hard-to-reach service users (with sufficient support and opportunities) are both capable and willing to contribute to the development of future policy, practice and service delivery in new and exciting ways. If there is a weakness, it is that *Service User Involvement: Reaching the Hard to Reach in Supported Housing* is curiously atheoretical. In policy terms, Brafield and Eckersley write knowingly about the link between the Supporting People programme and service user involvement, but show too little concern for the importance of wider debates about the contested status of the dominant user involvement discourses within contemporary social work and social care. This leads to a certain imbalance in the book. Notwithstanding this criticism, the importance of Brafield and Eckersley's work cannot be denied, and where they score is that *Service User Involvement: Reaching the Hard to Reach in Supported Housing* covers a lot of ground in an accessible format, supported by a wealth of original empirical research, that is ultimately grounded in a desire to see deeper and greater service user involvement. With *Service User Involvement: Reaching the Hard to Reach in Supported Housing* Brafield and Eckersley have produced an excellent introductory guide. Although it will have little, if any, direct purchase for an academic audience that expects a more fine-grained and developed analysis, the book does possess the potential to stimulate discussion and debate within an undergraduate or postgraduate seminar context. As a teaching guide and learning resource, it is conceivable that lecturers will be able to utilise the questions and exercises format of the book as a basis for role play and group-based activities. As such, this small but insightful resource will be of particular value to social care professionals interested in the Supporting People programme and the wider service user involvement project. Overall, *Service User Involvement: Reaching the Hard to Reach in Supported Housing* is a powerful book, which provides an up-to-date resource for a topic that has generally been badly served by conventional social policy and social work commentaries. It is therefore a contribution that should be noted, even celebrated, and certainly not hidden from view.

Involving service users in both day-to-day and long-term strategic planning is known to empower clients and result in improved services, yet there is a lack of practical guidance on how this can be achieved. Drawing on original research, this book offers imaginative and effective strategies for consulting with service users who have been historically difficult to engage with, including homeless people, care leavers, ex-offenders, travellers, women escaping domestic violence and black and minority ethnic groups. The authors explore traditional consultation methods such as meetings and questionnaires, as well as informal and creative activities such as writing, art, photography and video work as ways of gathering clients' views. They make practical suggestions as to how organizational structures and individual attitudes can be changed to overcome the barriers to successful consultation. Including many real-life examples of good practice, the book is a step-by-step guide to creating a complete service user involvement strategy and also contains exercises for managers to use with their teams. It is an essential resource for social workers, housing officers and other professionals working with disadvantaged and marginalised groups in supported housing.

This densely packed book provides a wealth of information and a host of well researched and clearly documented initiatives aimed at targeting and encouraging marginalised service users to participate in consultations intended to improve their quality of life. The authors, who together have a wealth of experience in working with homeless and otherwise dispossessed individuals, have clearly retained an enthusiasm and commitment to the task which illuminates every chapter. -- *Seen and Heard* The homeless, women escaping domestic violence, people with addictions, offenders, the young and those marginalized by their ethnicity are often hard to reach because they prefer to remain excluded, they are not directly involved in local care, or they are transitory. Consultant Brafield and practitioner

Eckersley draw from their own experiences in empowering people by getting them involved in day-to-day and long-term strategic planning. They describe traditional recruitment methods, such as public meetings and questionnaires but also offer such methods as creating a gallery of writing or art or conducting video interviews. They describe models of service user participation and their research project, barriers and enablers to effective service user consultation, a two-tier model for strategic planning, and methods to use in creating your own consultation strategy. -- Book News

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About the Author Helen Brafield is an independent consultant and trainer working with organisations in the voluntary sector. She worked for 20 years in the not-for-profit sector, managing and developing staff and services predominantly for homeless people. Terry Eckersley has worked at YMCA for 11 years and is currently CEO of Woking YMCA, UK.