Welcome to our newsletter

The Comensus Community Involvement Team have been working with students for over twelve years, our aim is to enhance health and social care education through sharing personal experiences. Comensus now work across several Schools and as such are kept very busy. It’s often hard to take the time to share what we do or celebrate the work of our volunteers. We hope that this newsletter will serve to promote our service and keep you updated on our recent success stories.

Staff members are Lisa Malihi–Shoja (Co-ordinator), Janet Garner (Facilitator) Chris Essen (Facilitator) and Steven Seymour (Facilitator)
**Uclan welcomes a new cohort of Physician Associate students**

*By Angela Melling*

On the 5th January, Peter and Angela travelled to UCLan's Westlake's Campus, WECEMC in Whitehaven.

We had been invited to interview a final round of prospective students for the Physician Associates programme. As only 5 candidates attended on the day, this gave us time to network with other interviewers and admire the beautiful surroundings around the Campus.

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**Volunteer Christmas Social Event**

At the end of 2016, we invited our Comensus members out for a festive lunch at the Ribchester Arms. It was a very enjoyable day with wonderful food, fun and lots of laughs. All our members commented how much they appreciated the gesture and thought the venue was very warm and welcoming. Thank you to everyone for a perfect day!

**Comensus ‘patients’ address 3rd year Pharmacy students**

Our Patient and Public Engagement strategy in the School of Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences ensures service users help develop and deliver a new curriculum that is centred around the patient. In a session on Medicine Optimisation, one of several delivered to 3rd year students, David and Kim talked about their health conditions and issues with managing medications.
Goodbye to Linda Sanderson, Principal Lecturer in Children’s Nursing

Linda has worked with Comensus for many years and has championed service user and carer involvement in nursing programmes. We wish her well for the future and for her new role with a children’s charity in Yorkshire. Linda had the following message for all our volunteers: ‘Please say goodbye to everyone at Comensus and tell them how much I have enjoyed working with them over the past twelve years. They have taught me a lot’. We will miss Linda.

16th Annual Preston Health Mela
By Lee Singh and Heather List

We attended the Health Mela on Saturday 1st April with Comensus volunteers and our facilitator Stevie at the University of Central Lancashire. It was a fantastic event that provided good information on various topics including stopping smoking, heart conditions, diabetes, volunteering and much more. Everyone was really friendly and polite and it was great to talk to them all. Students from Pharmacy and Medicine did health checks and helped people to think about how to be healthier. The food was also great!!

Overall it was a fantastic day where we all had fun and recruited some new volunteers too.
World Social Work Day
By Stevie Seymour

To celebrate World Social Work Day, the School of Social Work, Care and Community arranged a day of events! The afternoon and evening comprised of workshops, stands, activities, networking, music and ended with a comedy performance form Stand Up for Social Workers comedy Duo Jim & Debstar. Comensus volunteers held a stall providing information about the work they do in the school and asking, students, staff and the community to think about what involvement is and with the theme of the day in mind, how do we promote community and environmental sustainability.

We had the option of attending one of four workshops and networking with various agencies internal and external to the university.

The day was a huge success and brought together all stakeholders in social work to celebrate the fantastic work in the field! There was a fantastic atmosphere with people from all backgrounds and experiences coming together.

Thanks to all the organisers and all involved!

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Good News Corner
By Lisa Malihi-Shoja

We have recently met with the Critical Publishing editor Diane Page. We are pleased to announce that we have been given the go ahead to work on our second book focusing on our work with the School of Social Work, Care and Community and our dedicated service user and carer module. The book will be written by a combination of service users, carers, students, Comensus staff and academics from UCLan and other institutes. We will keep you informed of our progress!!
The theme of challenging prejudices has been one that has characterised Congress Day for over 10 years and is reflected in the types of community groups that we have invited to participate. These have often been people with seldom-heard voices, or people who cover topics that are difficult to discuss. For Congress Day this March, we invited community members to talk from their own personal experience in seminars about HIV, young people’s suicide, head injury, sexual abuse, laryngectomy, addiction to substances, transgender issues and life as an ex-offender. In addition, I facilitated three group visits to the Traveller site adjacent to the UCLan main campus on Leighton street. One of the ways in which we can challenge prejudice is by bringing ourselves alongside people and hearing their stories. At the start of Congress Day, during the opening plenary, we usually set some ground rules that we hope will make sessions conducive to our guests telling their stories. As is perhaps inevitable, this list covers a number of eventualities, from mobile phone use to respect for difference. However, it occurred to me this year that there was really just one ‘golden rule’ for how students should be conducting themselves. I described this as using their heads, hearts and feet. That is, I suggest that they would do well to think about how they might feel if they had to speak about something highly personal, to a group of strangers, and in doing so image what it would be like to stand in the shoes of the speakers they were about to hear from. How would they like to be treated? Moreover, is this not one of the ways in which we start to challenge prejudice anyway?
My name is Jo Cunningham and I am the Head of the School of Social Work, Care and Community. The School has offered social work education to undergraduates and post-graduates for well over 50 years. There are very many outstanding features to our provision and UCLan is increasingly regarded as the place to come to do social work. I am very proud of the School and everything that goes on in it. The staff team here are second to none and work consistently hard to produce an outstanding experience for our students. One of the shining examples of this is the involvement of service users and carers in every aspect of our degree programmes. Importantly, the service user and carer group are independent from the School, but supported by the School. Their involvement in admissions, teaching, assessment, and review is critical to ensure that our provision remains of the highest quality. My view is that we have a responsibility to ensure that social workers and social care professionals of the future have the right values, skills and underpinning knowledge to do the job and place service user and carer perspectives at the heart of what they do. Students on our courses get a privileged opportunity to meet frequently with service users and carers to hear about their experiences first hand. This supports students to fully appreciate a service user perspective and to ensure that they work respectfully at all times. Service users and carers work in partnership with the School and are our critical friend, holding us to account in order to ensure the best possible education for our students.

The world’s biggest coffee morning is back! In aid of Macmillan cancer support we will be holding our own coffee morning on Friday 29th September 2017 at 10:30! Venue to be announced.

If you would like to get involved in making or faking cakes, fundraising or just attending the day do let us know! Help us beat last years total of £377.00!!

The World’s Biggest Coffee Morning is Macmillan’s biggest fundraising event for people facing cancer. Macmillan ask people all over the UK to host their own Coffee Mornings and make donations. Last year alone Macmillan raised £25 million and this year we are aiming to raise even more.

Head of school thoughts on service user and carer engagement

By Jo Cunningham

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**Working with Comensus – a volunteer view**

By Maggie Low

Hello, I’m Maggie Low and have been a Comensus member for nearly two years. Other than talking about myself in relation to health and social care, I get the opportunity to be part of other things too! Recently, I was involved in the Health and Social Work Congress day, registering the students and then attending an Ex-offenders talk from the ACE Project. One by one, they stood in front of us and told their very personal stories. Drug, alcohol and crime involvement was normal for each of them. It was only through the ACE Project that they finally had the support and confidence to say ‘No’ to their previous lives. Now they had a group of people who became their FAMILY and their previous dependency was no longer important.

Another group I am involved in is the 1 in 4 Film Festival. As a group, we view the films and then decide and chose the films to be shown. The films are about different aspects of Mental Health. I have just viewed one about a teenage boy who was sent to a rehab unit. During the five days he was there, he met and made friends with people of differing backgrounds who had various behaviours, which challenged his previous thinking. At the end of his stay, he was a different person, more accepting of others and of himself. He was freed from his previous torment. I was a bit carried away with the emotion of the film and it was great viewing. I am also involved in the Marketing group, which targets our audience by way of the press releases, leafletting & social media.

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**Working with Comensus – a student view**

By Ashley Ryan

I first heard of Comensus during my first year as a Social Work Student (BA Hons). Members of Comensus shared their experiences of dealing with their illnesses, their caring responsibilities and the way in which they felt the services supported or oppressed them. Hearing some of these experiences helped me to understand how peoples experiences can shape their life chances.

I am now in the 3rd year of my degree and on my final placement, I am based within a Statutory Adult Mental Health team working with people who are socially isolated. One of the Service Users I work with, Sacha (not her real name) has a mental illness that has caused her to experience shame, fear, rejection and stigma. Through collaborative working and building a positive relationship with Sacha we identified that she would like to "give something back" and to help people understand mental illness. I immediately thought of Comensus and introduced Sacha to the team. Since meeting Comensus Sacha states she feels she has "found her calling".

Some of the stigma people face is shocking and I feel it takes a lot of courage to share personal life experiences. Comensus offers a wealth of knowledge to students and also a supportive environment for the people who are involved with them.
The 1 in 4 Film Festival dates have been announced so look out for more information coming soon!!

The festival will be held between the 9th—13th October 2017!

If you are a member of UCLan Staff incorporating the voices of service users and carers into your teaching who are not already Comensus members please let us know about it!!

The Comensus group are regularly looking for new volunteers, so if you yourself or someone you know would like to join us please do get in touch.