Comensus
Sharing personal experiences of Health and Social Care to educate future professionals.

Winner—‘Behind the Scenes’ Award
UCLan Golden Roses.
By Keith Holt

Being nominated for the UCLan students’ Golden Roses award is an achievement in itself. With so many worthy nominees this year, winning was extra special.

Lisa, the Comensus Co-ordinator, asked me to accept the award on behalf of all the volunteers and the staff. This was a privilege to represent the Comensus community group.

I would like to thank all public members of Comensus, the staff team and all the staff who have given their unequivocal support over many years. I hope that Comensus will continue to enrich the learning experiences for students in the future. A very big thank you to the students who voted for Comensus in this year’s awards!

Comensus staff are Lisa Malihi-shoja (Co-ordinator), Janet Garner (Facilitator), Chris Essen (Facilitator) and Steven Seymour (Facilitator).
Being on Placement with Comensus

By Melody Coffie, Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care student

I have thoroughly enjoyed my placement at Comensus as it has allowed me to identify the skills needed for my future practice: including building on my communication skills and working as a group to build effective teamwork skills.

I have attended presentations and meetings to improve my knowledge of Comensus and how it empowers service users. It also showed how the staff members support each other, particularly when it comes to working with volunteers. Having one-to-one sessions with service users has also allowed me to gain insight about them as individuals and has opened my horizons on care, which I will cherish forever. The staff and service users are extremely welcoming, and it is a pleasure to be around them as they provide the vital support I need.

Volunteering with Comensus

By John Crossley, Comensus

Hi, I’m John and this is the end of my 7th year as a Comensus member. Being an active member has involved using my experiences of mental health services, my condition and my time in care. When I first came here it was a lot about keeping myself busy and in a way a form of therapy! I have been involved in many amazing teaching sessions both talking about my expertise and as a willing participant in examinations for medical students. However now it’s about what I can do for the students, staff and community here at UCLan. I love what I do and wouldn’t change it for the world. I would like to mention 2 recent highlights:

- Act Of Kindness (AOK) day last October was an amazing experience and gave me so many memories. Thinking about all the staff and students that pledged to perform Random Acts of Kindness really makes me smile. One student even said they would pay for the next person’s cup of coffee in the refectory! Hope it was you! An amazing day, amazing company and above all a day filled with Kindness, love and laughter and even a hug or two.

- Last year I also volunteered to help at the Lancashire Science Festival with the Faculty of Health. Led by EJ (a fab lecturer and person to boot), I found myself talking to lots of teachers, parents and most importantly the amazing kids, who make the three days so fantastic. Being a Comensus member has changed my life, literally! Might sound strange, but its true!
7th Service User Academia Symposium

By Heather List, Comensus

Last November Comensus was invited to speak at the 7th Service User Academia Symposium in Wellington, New Zealand on the subject of ‘Service users and carers in the classroom.’ As a volunteer I had the honour of attending along with Lisa Malihi-Shoja, Comensus Co-ordinator.

The conference was well attended and quite an eye opener in regards to how service users and carers (or ‘consumers’ as they were often referred to) engage with our antipodean universities. The majority of the presentations seemed to be focused on the benefits of exposing students to service user and carers lived experiences. Many of the delegates were extremely interested in our presentation and the service user and carer-led module that we teach at UCLan, which is designed, delivered and assessed by Comensus members. They were also intrigued in how our opinions as volunteer are valued in regards to marking students work, giving feedback and interviewing new students. In the afternoon break a number of people approached Lisa to ask for more information and a few even suggested visiting UCLan to see Comensus and its volunteers in action. I was personally approached by one of the delegates who said ‘I was very brave to fly so far to talk at the conference’. I was very nervous presenting in front of so many academics; however it was my volunteer activities with Comensus that made me brave enough to co-present at an international conference.

Other highlights of the trip for Lisa and me were watching a lioness in Wellington Zoo undergo dental surgery and visiting the WWI Gallipoli exhibition at the Papa museum in memory of the 3,000 New Zealanders who died fighting the Turks.

Considering I had never flown anywhere in my life I will never forget looking out of the airplane window and watching the coastline of Australia pass slowly below as we flew above the clouds.
In early February, months of hard work for the MA Social Work students came to fruition with their poster presentation on ‘Collaborative Working’.

An enthusiastic group of students greeted me upon arrival, many of them already deep in conversation with visitors and judges explaining the merits of their work.

They had been asked to incorporate a game element into the poster which led to some very creative displays that included jigsaws, Fish a Duck, and Twister, which Debbie Ford Senior Lecturer in Social Work expertly displayed her talents for.

The students had put a lot of effort into developing posters that demonstrated their understanding of collaborative working and how it benefits service users and carers. One of these utilised a delicious layered cake, stuffed with smarties and another had large spiders hanging from a web.

After some careful deliberation, slices of cake and game participation, the Comensus poster award was presented to the giant spider group whose analogy between colony ants and collaborative working was felt to best demonstrate an understanding of holistic social care for the service users and carers who took part.

Jo Cunningham Award for the best written reflection

By Peter Sullivan, Chair of SUCAG (Service user, carer and academic group)

On 14th March 2018 I had the pleasure of presenting the Jo Cunningham award for assignments produced by the first year BA Social Work students at UCLan in Preston.

Jo was very special for the service users and carers at UCLan. Despite her onerous duties as Head of School, she always had time for us. Jo also had the wisdom to be a Burnley supporter and on the day we had plenty of snowy Burnley weather which made getting to Preston a challenge.

The standard of the assignments was very high and reading them was a pleasure. I was delighted to see how much the students had absorbed in the Time for Talk and the Congress sessions. I see Time for Talk and the Congress sessions as mini placements and I have met Social Workers in practice who remembered some of the words of wisdom from these sessions. Having been here for quite a few years I have actually met ex students in practice who recall something we said in Time for Talk and have found it useful - ‘If you involve the carers you will make well rounded decisions’.

It was very difficult to choose a winner but the inaugural winner of the Jo Cunningham award was Gemma Freeman. I would like to thank all the students for their efforts and for making the service users and carers feel so valued and appreciated.
My name is Joy Gana-Inatimi and I am a Senior Lecturer and Course Leader for the Foundation Entry programmes for Health and Social Care, Counselling & Psychotherapy and Sexual Health. I first heard about Comensus during my staff induction when I first started with the Health and Social Care team. During my induction, Comensus had been described as an invaluable resource within the school and an additional resource to support student learning. I first made contact with Comensus as I was about to start my first module leader role of a module about managing long term conditions and end of life issues. As a clinician, I was quite keen to incorporate the patient’s perspective into the delivery plan for the module and discovered the value of working with Comensus by involving them in the module. I was amazed by the open-minded approach to collaborative working, the organisation of their input and the strategic approach to ensuring constructive alignment with the learning outcomes for the session.

The level of student engagement and interaction between the Comensus volunteers and the students was unexpected and it quickly became apparent that the Comensus team had brought theory to life for the students by giving the patient a voice in their learning journey. Their individual patient stories were inspiring, thought provoking and emotive. The emotional learning experience helped to enhance the students’ learning and solidify core components of the theory the students had been taught as part of the module. The feedback from students was overwhelmingly positive and as a result, I have worked in collaboration with Comensus since then to deliver the “patient’s story” as part of any clinical education programme I am delivering. I feel very strongly that this sort of collaborative approach adds value, dimension and detail to our student’s learning journey. I also think it provides an important perspective by giving the patient a voice, which is often not found in the theory. I believe that incorporating the patient’s voice in clinical education is vital to successful clinical education as I think that without the patient’s perspective, it is impossible for clinical educators to provide a fully comprehensive overview of clinical care in practice for their students.
“Life is a series of changes, we all need to make, to move on in life. Never fear change, always embrace it”

My journey into Comensus made me nervous, when I arrived, as my understanding of higher education was non-existent, having left school at 15. An important lesson to learn is you never move forward unless you accept each step you take, and that every aspect of life is about new experiences and constant changes.

Now at 74, looking back over life, I can see it has been exciting and happy and that whenever sadness visited me, I was blessed as friends and new beginnings swept me along. It is strange how absorbing progress is. I only joined Comensus to give something back to the NHS, as without the love I received and the wonderful care, I would have missed so many things, opening my eyes and mind has given me so many gifts.

At UCLan we speak about equality and diversity in regards to our roles in Comensus. I have found a constant fountain of knowledge to feed my hungry brain and I know I would be totally lost without new things to learn. My thanks to everyone for including me into this world, I hope it never ends.

I used to feel bad going into hospital, but now it never fazes me if I am admitted, because I meet nurses and pharmacists who I have met at UCLan and they always have a kind word and a smile, which helps me until the storm passes by. My consultants always provide me with a few junior doctors to do histories with, when I am recovering, and it is very rewarding and helps pass the time. Last time on my departure from a ward, the nurses gave me tea in a china cup and some biscuits, as thanks, but I am the one who is very grateful and sings their praises.

The best thing I ever did was come to join you all at UCLan, my life is very full and interesting now, and the wonders of medicine are never ending.

Bring on new challenges, they help me grow.
Putting the patient at the ‘centre of their care’ is what I think the National Health Service should be all about and I certainly heard that tonight—at the Royal Preston hospital. The Da Vinci Xi Robot is being used for operations on cancer patients in Lancashire and Cumbria. The Rosemere Cancer Foundation, established 20 years ago, which has funded the robot, and raises money for the care of cancer patients. The Robot consists of 4 arms (so called multi quadrant access) and makes four small incisions into the body, controlled separately by a console. The Robot enables the surgeon to have 3DHD vision and a greater capability to operate successfully on patients.

The 4 incisions means that patients recover quickly and there is less likelihood of infection. One patient, a farmer, was concerned about time lost on the farm. His recovery after the robotic surgery was swift and he was back at work much sooner than using Open or Keyhole surgery. All the consultant surgeons during the presentation used plain English and it was clear that they placed the patient at the centre of their care. A number of patients who had received surgery since the introduction of the Robot (July 2017) spoke about their journeys and it was quite moving.

**Innovation at Royal Preston Hospital**

By Maggie Low, Comensus

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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.