Disabled adults and social workers

Position statement

Disabled woman and friend enjoy cup of tea.

British Association of Social Workers and Shaping our Lives
Foreward

This position statement was produced by BASW England (British Association of Social Workers) and Shaping Our Lives. It was written through discussions between disabled adults and social workers from June 2015 to November 2016. Some of these discussions happened when we met together and some of them happened virtually. All of them were about how we can change the way we, as disabled adults and social workers, relate to each other so that we can achieve more together.

We started with a blank piece of paper and we ended up with this position statement. We want it be meaningful and useful to disabled adults and social workers. We want it to make a positive difference to people’s experiences and to what happens to them. We hope that you will find it helpful.

“*We need to think big and be ambitious for each other.*”
*(Working Group, 29 October 2015)*

Shaping Our Lives
Board

British Association of Social Workers
England Committee
This position statement was developed by disabled adults and social workers working together as equal partners. It states how we can take action together to:

- Tackle physical, social, economic and other barriers to independent living, so that all disabled adults have the same choice, control and freedom as any other citizen – at home, at work, and as members of the community
- Help disabled adults and social workers work better together to achieve the outcomes people want.

We worked together using the following principles:

- **Co-production** – the statement has been jointly developed and agreed
- **Respect** – the purpose of the statement is to improve how disabled adults and social workers work together; everyone’s views and expertise has been used and valued
- **Impact** – the aim is not just to produce a statement, but to take action that will make a difference to people’s lives and wellbeing.

This statement was produced by disabled adults and social workers in England. It may also be useful to people in other countries of the United Kingdom and beyond.

*Disabled woman talks with colleague at work.*
Definitions

**Disabled:** In this statement *disabled adults* is used in its broadest sense to include all adults who identify as disabled, including with physical and sensory impairments, those living with long term conditions or illness, people with learning disabilities and those living with mental health issues. We recognise that people do not necessarily identify as disabled.

**Adults:** This statement was co-produced by social workers and disabled people between the ages of 18 and retirement age. The principles are likely to apply to younger and older people as well. A next step would be to work with these groups to create a similar statement for them. The statement does not specifically address how social workers and carers work together. Better social work with disabled adults is likely to support carers indirectly, and some disabled adults will also be carers.

**Social worker:** “Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.”¹

**Co-production:** “Co-production is not just a word, it’s not just a concept, it is a meeting of minds coming together to find a shared solution. In practice, it involves people who use services being consulted, included and working together from the start to the end of any project that affects them on equal terms to support their empowerment.”²

**Others:** We talk about the importance of sharing this statement with others and influencing others. By *others* we mean anyone who can make a positive contribution to our goal of ensuring equal and full citizenship for all disabled adults.
Why disabled adults and social workers need to work well together

We share common values, and a common purpose and approach, to achieve the best outcomes for disabled people through:

- Disabled people’s activism
- Social work ethics and capabilities
- A history of joint work.

(See evidence in Appendix 2, 1.1)

We can make better progress together

- There are benefits from pooling our knowledge, experience and expertise
- The Care Act 2014\(^3\) is an opportunity to work together to secure the statutory entitlements and elements of wellbeing, control and choice it promises
- We need to work together to achieve change in other key agencies and services, especially health, housing, employment and benefits.

(See evidence in Appendix 2, 1.2)
We don’t work well enough together yet

• Many disabled adults still have poor experiences and outcomes
• Disabled adults face extensive barriers
• Social workers experience conflict between being an advocate, an advisor, a risk-assessor and a gatekeeper
• Social work practice is not consistently excellent.
(See evidence in Appendix 2, 1.3)

We are in a difficult context

• A changing population and cuts across all public services have led to increased need for support and reduced support being available
• Social work and social care need to work effectively with other services, particularly health services
• Disabled adults are not always effectively involved in service planning and review
• Disabled adults do not always have choice of and control over social care provision and other aspects of independent living
• Society does not always view disabled adults as equal citizens
• Disabled adults experience negative attitudes, discrimination, oppression, hostility and abuse
• Inflexible social work processes impact on disabled adults – targets, paperwork, workload, lack of professional autonomy, lack of continuity, short-term input.
(See evidence in Appendix 2, 1.4)

We need to continue to strive for a more effective voice for disabled adults and for social workers. We need to work together to change the context.
What we are aiming for

All disabled adults and social workers work together to improve wellbeing, using the social model of disability to overcome barriers, and using a human rights approach to ensure equal and full citizenship for everyone.
(See evidence in Appendix 2, 2)

What we believe will help us

• Shared goals – co-producing solutions in partnership
• Striving for better relationships, and working in a way that promotes trust and respect
• Clarity about what good looks like
• Clear expectations
• Better ways of working together.
(See evidence in Appendix 2, 3)

How we intend to achieve this

Shared goals – co-producing solutions in partnership
• Using the social model of disability, whilst recognising that not everyone identifies as a disabled person
• Taking a rights-based approach – based on the United Nations convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, the Equality Act and the Care Act 2014
• Applying both the principles of Independent Living and the wellbeing provisions of the Care Act.

Striving for better relationships, and working in a way that promotes trust and respect
• Acknowledgement of shared humanity and experience
• Mutual understanding of each other’s situation
• Recognition of each others’ knowledge, judgment, skills and capabilities
• Not making assumptions.
Clarity about what good looks like, and what people should expect
• We have developed a charter to go with this position statement
• We will continue to co-produce resources that support disabled adults and social workers to work better together.

Better ways of working together
• We will use the charter as an agreement for how we will work together
• We will share the charter with others
• We will work together to influence others
• We will work jointly on resources that support disabled adults and social workers to work better together
• We will work together to challenge policies that undermine disabled people’s rights and make it more difficult for them to achieve positive outcomes
• The professional body for social work, the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), will continue to work alongside disabled people to ensure full citizenship.

Actions that people can take

- Use the social model of disability and human rights approach (see Appendix 1).
- Use the charter to lobby for change and improvement at national and local level.
- Get involved in developing, sharing and using resources that support disabled adults and social workers to work better together.
- Get involved in BASW’s work to make sure it is informed by disabled people’s experience and expertise, and by social work practice.
- Get involved in joint action to improve disabled people’s rights and outcomes.
We, disabled adults and social workers, will strive for relationships that are respectful, honest, transparent and consistent.

We will work in the following way so that we can achieve as much as possible together

Guiding Principles

• We will use the social model of disability and draw on social approaches to distress, whilst recognising unique identities and experiences
• We will take a rights-based approach – based on the United Nation convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, the Equality Act and the Care Act
• Social workers will promote Independent Living as the corner-stone of wellbeing
• We will always value the voice of people with lived experience of disability
• We are committed to opposing discrimination and to promoting social justice
• We will not be satisfied till everyone has full and equal citizenship.
A Personalised Approach
• We will start with the disabled person’s own views of their situation, priorities, aspirations and preferences
• We will be honest about what is possible and what is not
• We will have conversations rather than being bound by forms and procedures
• The conversations will be meaningful and will be about what disabled adults want.

The Process
• We will act like people, and not just follow mechanistic processes
• We will be ambitious for each other, thinking big and creatively
• We won’t be frightened of new initiatives and will work carefully to make them accessible and useful
• We will have open conversations about how things are going and what is possible
• Social workers will communicate in an accessible format
• Social workers will work in a timely, reliable and consistent way.

Relationships and Respect
• We will show respect for each other’s choices, preferences and cultures
• We will listen to and act on what is not working
• We will use our expertise to help improve lives and ask for help if we don’t know
• We will continue to work to overcome power imbalances between disabled adults and social workers leading to equal relationships and co-producing solutions
• Disabled adults will support social workers to learn and develop through full and equal involvement in education and training
• Social workers will continue to develop their understanding of the needs of disabled adults throughout their careers.

Rights and Welfare
• We will take action together to get the resources that are needed
• We will be prepared to talk about how the context is impacting on us
• We will talk about money
• We will look at all options to promote wellbeing, not just formal care services
• We will work to secure disabled adults’ entitlements to benefits
• We will work to increase disabled adults’ access to mainstream public, commercial, retail, transport and leisure provision
• We will work with disabled people’s organisations to enable greater voice, choice and control for disabled adults
• We will strive to ensure that advocacy is available for people who need it
• We will work together to plan for what may happen in the future
• Social workers will work with other professionals to ensure decisions are made in people's best interests if they are not able to make a decision themselves
• We will work together to ensure disabled adults are in control of what happens to safeguard them if they are at risk of abuse or neglect
• Social workers will join their work up with that of other services
• Social workers will enable people to take advantage of the Care Act duty to provide people with information and advice relating to care and support
• Social workers will seek to maximise access to resources from all quarters
• Social workers will be accountable for their practice.

The Wider Context
• We will highlight the barriers that prevent disabled adults from living full lives, including barriers to work
• We will be aware of the impact of policies across central and local government, and health and other services on disabled adults’ lives
• We will jointly gather and speak up about evidence of how the context impacts on disabled adults
• We will work for diverse and inclusive involvement of disabled people
• We will advocate for solutions to overcome the barriers that are highlighted by disabled people, practice experience and research evidence
• We will gather evidence about what is helpful and share this
• We will tackle poverty and discrimination together
• We will look for allies to work with us.
Social Model of Disability

Traditionally people have been viewed through a lens of what is wrong with them, for example they are visually impaired, they are mentally ill, they have a long-term condition. This is referred to as the medical model. The social model turns the tables and says people are disabled because of the prejudice they face. Using the social model helps identify solutions to the barriers disabled people experience. It encourages the removal of these barriers within society, or the reduction of their effects, rather than trying to fix an individual’s impairment or health condition.

The social model is the preferred model for disabled people. It empowers disabled people and encourages society to be more inclusive. The social model of disability is the framework for social work practice, whilst recognising that medical issues impact on disabled people and that medical support is important. It is also important to note that a recent report *From Mental Illness to a Social Model of Madness and Distress*\(^4\) found that mental health service users and survivors do not all relate to the social model of disability but may find social approaches helpful.

Human Rights Approach

“A human rights based approach is about empowering people to know and claim their rights and increasing the ability and accountability of individuals and institutions who are responsible for respecting, protecting and fulfilling rights. This means giving people greater opportunities to participate in shaping the decisions that impact on their human rights. It also means increasing the ability of those with responsibility for fulfilling rights to recognise and know how to respect those rights, and make sure they can be held to account.”
Social work is a human rights profession, which recognises that people may face particular hardships arising from the disregard of their rights, or the particular barriers they may face giving effect to their rights. Social work needs to be at the forefront of addressing social and economic policy issues in society that will impact on the social wellbeing and safety of those with whom we work. A more explicit human rights approach to practice should enable social workers to maintain their values and deal with issues of conflicting rights and risk.”

**Independent Living**

“Independent Living is a philosophy and a movement of people with disabilities who work for self-determination, equal opportunities and self-respect. Independent Living does not mean that we want to do everything by ourselves, do not need anybody or like to live in isolation. Independent Living means that we demand the same choices and control in our every-day lives that our non-disabled brothers and sisters, neighbors and friends take for granted. We want to grow up in our families, go to the neighborhood school, use the same bus as our neighbors, work in jobs that are in line with our education and interests, and raise families of our own. We are profoundly ordinary people sharing the same need to feel included, recognized and loved.”
Appendix 2: Evidence to support this Position Statement

The working group identified the following evidence in support of this position statement.

1. Why disabled people and social workers need to work well together

1.1 Common purpose and approach

Disabled rights campaigners have worked for decades to obtain:
- A change in social attitudes towards the social model of disability
- Independent living
- The same choice, control and freedom as any other citizen.

Disabled people identify the need:
- To advance health, work and democracy
- To make human rights real and ensure citizenship
- For fully inclusive processes.

The United Nations Declaration of Rights of Disabled Person states the principles of:
- Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one’s own choices, and independence of persons
- Non-discrimination
- Full and effective participation and inclusion in society
- Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity
- Equality of opportunity
- Accessibility
- Equality between men and women
- Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.
Social work is a human rights profession. Social workers need to work with service users, communities and other agencies for social justice. Social workers need to address poverty and discrimination.\textsuperscript{10}

Social workers must promote and protect the interests of service users and carers.\textsuperscript{11} Social workers should “work co-productively and innovatively with people, local communities, other professionals, agencies and services to promote self-determination, community capacity, personal and family reliance, cohesion, earlier intervention and active citizenship.”\textsuperscript{12}

Social workers should:
• Address issues that affect ability to do good practice
• Work in partnership
• Address power and discrimination
• Integrate the principles of and entitlements to social justice, social inclusion and equality
• Apply the principles and entitlements of human and civil rights
• Understand welfare.

Social workers need to work ethically and transparently when self-determination may be constrained by law.\textsuperscript{13}

1.2 We can make progress together

If social care was based on the evidence of what people who use services want then it would include full user involvement:

“My vision for user involvement, advocacy and co-production is one where their definition, policy and practice is strongly in the hands of service users and our organisations, and where we as people who use services play an equal role in their conceptualisation and associated action for change.” (Peter Beresford)\textsuperscript{14}

Making It Real: Marking progress towards personalised, community based support sets out statements for how people want services to work. These include:
• “I can speak to people who know something about care and support and can make things happen
• I have access to a range of support that helps me to live the life I want and remain a contributing member of my community
• I have care and support that is directed by me and responsive to my needs
• I feel safe, I can live the life I want and I am supported to manage any risks.”

User-Led Organisations can play a key role in supporting the transformation of adult services. They have legitimacy and can enable greater voice, choice and control for disabled adults.

A recent review of *the effectiveness of social work with adults* found that there are positive examples of empowering social work.

There are examples of social workers working in empowering ways when they:

• Promote the skills, abilities and knowledge of the person with care and support needs and their carers
• Promote individual wellbeing by encouraging independence, self-care, support and learning opportunities for informal carers, before specific service solutions are sourced
• Challenge those services to align themselves with the contribution, knowledge and skills of the individual and their support network.

1.3 Issues with how we work together

A range of recent reports by Disability Rights UK, In Control and SCOPE identify significant issues with how services currently support disabled adults:

• The challenge of increasing demand and reducing budgets
• Services often don’t support independence, meet needs, enable inclusion and work
• Many people have experienced cuts
• Choice and control are reducing due to lack of funding, including closure of the Independent Living Fund
• Information provided to disabled adults does not fully set out the principles and rights of the Care Act
• Processes and cultures need to improve.¹⁹

A recent report on social work practice identified issues that people who use services can face:

• Cuts leading to lack of social work time or service provision
• Frequent changes of staff
• Inconsistent communication or recording
• Lack of acceptance of choices
• Sharing information inappropriately.²⁰

“Some groups, particularly from minorities often experience inferior access to and support from services. The same groups are likely to have inferior opportunities to get involved in schemes to strengthen their voice. The combined effect of these two factors is likely to be to exacerbate and perpetuate inequalities faced by some of the most disadvantaged groups in our society.”²¹

1.4 Difficult context

A range of recent reports by Disability Rights UK, In Control and SCOPE identify significant issues that affect disabled adults:

• Disabled people find it hard to access credit
• There is a need for flexible workplaces, creative job creation and personalised support
• Negative attitudes to and avoidance of disabled people are widespread
• Portrayal of disabled people in the media is unfair.
“The adult social care sector continues to experience financial strain. Further efficiencies are difficult to achieve, due to staffing being a high proportion of costs, and profitability is reducing, leading to some services exiting from the market. The potential impact of these exits are people having less choice or experiencing a lack of continuity of service, and delays in securing them a package of good quality care that meets their needs and preferences. It is also likely to lead to greater use of unpaid care.”

2. What we are aiming for

Making It Real statements cover the following areas to say what good practice is:

• Information and Advice: having the information I need, when I need it
• Active and supportive communities: keeping friends, family and place
• Flexible integrated care and support: my support, my own way
• Workforce: my support staff
• Risk enablement: feeling in control and safe
• Personal budgets and self-funding: my money.

BASW Human Rights Policy states that principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work.

Making Safeguarding Personal aims to ensure that adults, who are at risk of abuse or neglect, remain in control of what happens to safeguard them.

“It is about having conversations with people about how we might respond in safeguarding situations in a way that enhances involvement, choice and control as well as improving quality of life, wellbeing and safety. It is about seeing people as experts in their own lives and working alongside them. It is about collecting information about the extent to which this shift has a positive impact on people’s lives. It is a shift from a process supported by conversations to a series of conversations supported by a process.”
3. What we believe will help us

Evidence points to the following:

- Improved process comes from genuine commitment to personalisation
- There is a need for the right support, the right tools, the right systems and the right attitude
- We need to aim high
- There is a need for transparent and honest relationships, a ‘whole-person’ offer that builds on strength and community capacity, and person-centred services with real choice and control
- The values of transparency, simplicity and inclusion are important
- Choice and control is a solution not a problem
- There is a need for strength-based approaches
- The human-rights based approach supports ethical practice.  

Disabled people bring:

- Expert experience
- Skills that arise from resilience.

Social workers can support people in complex situations, when they are disempowered, when they are excluded, when their independence is limited.

We need leadership, involvement, culture, accountability, professional standards, workforce development, co-production, coordination, and to use evidence.

Social workers need:

- To empower people and recognise their particular needs or ways of working that work for them
- A better understanding of people’s experiences.
1. The definition of social work was approved by the International Federation of
Social Work General Meeting and the International Association of Schools of
Social Work General Assembly in July 2014 as the global definition

is and how to do it


4. Shaping Our Lives (2016) From Mental Illness to a Social Model of Madness
and Distress

http://cdn.basw.co.uk/upload/basw_30635-1.pdf

6. Dr. Adolf Ratzka, www.independentliving.org

7. Jenny Morris blogs https://jennymorrisnet.blogspot.co.uk/2013/09/welfare-
reform-and-social-model-of.html
https://jennymorrisnet.blogspot.co.uk/2014/01/if-you-dont-know-your-history-
youre.html

8. (Disability Rights UK (2014) Inclusive Communities A guide for Local
Authorities; A Research Report)

9. United Nations Declaration of Rights of Disabled Person
www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-
persons-with-disabilities/article-3-general-principles.html

http://cdn.basw.co.uk/upload/basw_30635-1.pdf

11. Health and Care Professions Council (2016) Standards of Conduct,
Performance and Ethics http://www.hpc-
uk.org/aboutregistration/standards/standardsofconductperformanceandethics/

Workers in Adult Services
411957/KSS.pdf
13 British Association of Social Workers Professional Capability Framework – Social Work Level Capabilities https://basw.co.uk/pcf

14 Research in Practice for Adults (2016) Reimagining Social Care, Dartington

15 Think Local Act Personal Making It Real: Marking progress towards personalised, community based support www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/_assets/NEWMakingItReal.pdf

16 Research in Practice for Adults (2011) User-Led Organisations: Key Issue, Dartington

17 Manthorpe J and Moriarty J (2016) The effectiveness of social work with adults A systematic scoping review, King’s College London


19 www.disabilityrightsuk.org
http://in-control.org.uk
www.scope.org.uk

20 Shaping Our Lives on behalf of the Health and Care Professions Council (2015) Service user and carer input into the review of the standards of proficiency for social workers in England


23 Think Local Act Personal Making It Real: Marking progress towards personalised, community based support
http://cdn.basw.co.uk/upload/basw_30635-1.pdf

www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/5854661/Making+Safeguarding+Personal+Guide+2014/4213d016-2732-40d4-bbc0-d0d8639ef0df

26 For example http://in-control.org.uk  www.shapingourlives.org.uk


28 Think Local Act Personal (2013) Driving up Quality in Adult Social Care, What is Quality?
www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/_assets/TLAP_What_is_quality_WEB.pdf