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The indispensable perspective of experts by lived experience in social work education and research

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Abstract: The indispensable perspective of experts by lived experience in social work education and research

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Theme: Development of curriculum and course content

This workshop is about sharing how including experts by experience benefits all those who are involved in social work (education) and contributes to change the nature and discourse of social work education and research. Participants in this workshop will learn about our learned lessons and are invited to contribute their own ideas, to further develop the employment of people with lived experience in social work..

Faculty members at the Applied University of Amsterdam, (one of) the oldest and largest universities for social work in the world, felt that social work education was lacking something very vital: the voices of the people that it's all about. Therefore, experts by experience, people who have been or are on the other side of the fence of social and mental health services and are able to use their experiences in a qualified manner, are invited to join social work education programs. Together with students and social workers they reflect on an extensive list of issues, for example, the importance of humane contact, the loopholes in the welfare system, the omnipresence of prejudice and power lingering in social and mental health services also, and the thin line between being an accepted member of the system and being a person in need. The overall positive responses affirm that hearing the perspective of experience helps students to gain a profounder understanding of the complex issues people in practice are facing and their own role as social workers.

Structurally collaborating with experts of experience, our university holds a unique position. We are regularly approached by other academic and social organisations to introduce our unconventional way of teaching whilst warranting a high educational standard. We believe that incorporating lived experience as an equal source of knowledge should be at the core of all social work education and research.