

The following journal essay is all based on my experience at a placement with and advocacy service that helps, supports, and guides vulnerable adults in Carmarthenshire (Carmarthenshire Peoples First, ND). I had the pleasure of being allowed to interact with the organisation for one day a week for a six-week period. This organisation had several advocates dealing with issues ranging from service users access to bank accounts, work related problems, mental health issues, family matters, housing disputes and even financial concerns resulting from a will (Carmarthenshire People First, ND). This organisation had a mental health advocate, a multifunctioning advocate, a health advocate as well as two advocates that were in training. The people that worked for this organisation all seemed to have backgrounds mainly from working in the social work sector (Carmarthenshire People First, ND).

I mainly observed the service users within their group activities on a Tuesday, which would range from preparing and cooking a dish, an exercise class with a physiotherapist, that would attend the group regularly, some work with one of the members of the organisation, that was working on different web sites for outside organisations, in order for the websites to be accessible to vulnerable(people Carmarthenshire Peoples First, ND).

The group included a pregnant woman in her late 20's who was autistic, but was high functioning, a woman who had had a brain injury which constrained her thought processes, mobility and speech. There was a young woman, late teens early 20's, who had learning difficulties, a teenage boy who also had learning difficulties and another couple of men that also had learning difficulties. The group was very mixed in age, sex and disabilities. The main four people that attended every Tuesday was the woman who had suffered the brain injury and in line with the Data Protection Act (GDPR,2018) she will be known as Jane, the pregnant woman who was high functioning autism and again due to the Data protection act (GDPR,2018).

The next situation that I will be reflecting back is a woman in her late 40's who also has learning difficulties and she will know as Sue and her teenage son, again has learning difficulties , and he will be known as John. Also I will be talking about the woman that had suffered a brain injury and she will be known as Jo All these people have false names so then their identities are kept private and confidential in line with the Data Protection Act (GDPR,2018).

The organisation I was on placement with had Data protection information and policies that I had to read and agree with (GDPR,2018). Along with their constitution (Carmarthenshire Peoples First, ND), I had to adhere to the confidentiality policies that this organisation had created in order to keep their services users and themselves safe. I felt this was my induction into the way the organisation ran, what their expectation were from a person like me, who was observing, but making sure that I understood that they are a holistic organisation. It really gave me an insight into how advocacy worked for them and their service users. I could see at first hand how an advocate would use Arnsteins ladder of participation (Arnsteins, 1969). in every day working life. I was also able to see how advocacy was needed with the very vulnerable people to create a safe way for these people to have social inclusion.

I will be using the Gibbs model of reflection (Gibbs G ,1988) throughout this journal assignment as the experiences I will be reflecting on have a lot of emotion involved. Gibbs best suits the reflection required on my experience in this organisation as his reflective model focus is on how a person feels and reactions due to feelings (Gibbs G,1988). It is a very emotional model of reflection. I will also be using Aristeins ladder of participation (Arnsteins, 1969). in order to critically reflect on some of the actions of this group of people and how this organisation seemed to use this model of participation in order to get their service users issues resolved and their lives back on track.

This organisation was almost like a family that would support each other with relationships created so then trust could be gained, as working with vulnerable people a relationship of trust is needed in order to advocate, support and help the service users. Without trust the organisation would not be able to help their service users and I felt this is when the Airstiens Ladder of participation could be used (Arnsteins, 1969). The organisation had to get the service users to go up the ladder from being manipulated by their situation to gain confidence and belief in themselves (Arnsteins, 1969).

3 experiences/events of my time on placement, will be used in this reflection essay. Using the Gibbs model (Gibbs G,1988)to : Describe the event, Feelings on how the event happened, Evaluation on the event, Analysis the event, conclude on how I could have reacted compared to how I did react and then Planning how on if this situation/event happened again what my reaction would be (Gibbs G,1988).

The first experience I will be looking at will be a discussion, that turned into two people trying to help a mother and her teenage son, that had problems with anger issues. The teenage son's father had anger issues and physically abused his wife and the teenage son. This young man was following in his fathers foots steps and was verbally abusing his mother, most days, but also when his mother, who also had learning difficulties, started shouting at him in frustration, as her son was not helping in the family home, he also physically abused her. He was a strong person and had a lot more physical strength than his mother. The three women, Sue (the mother) Jo (woman with the brain injury) John (the teenage son) and Jane (the pregnant woman with high functioning autism).

Using the Gibbs reflection Model (Gibbs G,1988), I will start with the description of the event:

The group was sat around a table in a safe environment where everyone could just be themselves. John was sat opposite his mother Sue and the two women, Jo and Jane, were sat

along side one another. Sue was saying how her son John had behaved the evening before. His behaviour when she asked for some help. She said how he had become very verbally aggressive towards her when she had asked for some help with tidying up the house and doing the washing up. The atmosphere had turned from a light-hearted lunch time to more of an atmosphere of shaming the son. The three women's conversation was now turning more into a description of what had happened. The mother was becoming increasingly angry at her son as she could see he was ignoring the conversation, even though it was directed at him. Jo then started asking John why he was behaving in this way towards his mother, almost interrogating him. Jo then also joined in. The situation escalated into the two women, Jo and Jane, telling him how he shouldn't behave towards his mother in that way. Asking him if he thought that he should do more in the house to help his mother. The mother was now getting upset and was crying. The son was in tears also and the two women were getting more and more frustrated that John, the son, was not responding to their interrogation. The other people sat around the table were all very quiet and it could be seen that they were not comfortable at all with this line of interrogation. Arnsteins Ladder of participation (Arnsteins, 1969) could explain how these young women were trying to help their friend, the mother, explain and engage with her son. They were trying to get the mother off the manipulation and therapy section, which it could be said that she is in that state of mind now, through a consultation phase and up to taking back control over her family life and regaining partnership with her son (Arnsteins, 1969) .

Next in Gibbs model is feelings (Gibbs G,1988):

The feeling now of the son, John, was of up set as he was obviously upset at the grilling that he was involved in (Gibbs G,1988). The two women were now starting to get louder with their questioning, asking john question after question, which was not their place to do so. John was obviously embarrassed by the questioning and the openness of this personal questioning from people that were outside of the family and who had not seen what had happened at home. One

of the women, she had a brain injury, was now getting angry at the lack of response from John when she asked him a question. She even slammed her hand down on the table and shouted at him. The mother was now in tears and was physically shaking. The two women interrogating the son were also getting more and more angry and the situation was making the rest of the people in the group worried and upset, as two of them walked away into the kitchen. I was also very shocked that this was happening and feeling that something should be done to stop these women ganging up on this young lad. The atmosphere was of anger and humiliation. These were grown women, mothers themselves, both ganging up on a teenage lad who seemed to be getting more and more upset and angry by their questioning.

I did feel that I was not able to stop the interrogation due to my position as only a placement student. I did have to adhere to the policies of the organisation and those policies stated that I was not qualified to intervene in a situation and that I had to get a member of the staff if there was situation I was not comfortable with. These women were trying to advocate for their friend and help her gain back control in her family life. I felt that these women, as well intentioned as they were, could be trying to manipulate the son to agree, in a public space, that he was aggressive towards his mother (Arnsteins, 1969) And so they were trying to elevate their friend in order that she may gain back power, regain back the dominance within her home, but whilst increasing their friends ability to finally gain partnership in her home, they were in fact taking away the voice of the son. It was not their place to question him as they did, as they did not have permission from the son to speak in such an open manner about his private family life (Arnsteins, 1969)

If I now look at Analysing the situation (Gibbs G,1988):

Maslow's hierarchy of needs can be used to explain how the mother needed to feel physically safe as well as mentally safe in her home. She had food and shelter but did not have safety (McLeod S (March 2020). It can be understood that the mother was frustrated by the actions of her son with his lack of respect for his mother, as he was verbally and physically abusing his mother, and that the mother felt that she was in a safe place with people that she trusted who, so it would appear, she could trust to speak openly about her home life. The two women defending their friend both also had good intentions as they felt they could question the son and try to make him see how his actions had affected his mother's well being and mental state. It would seem that the two women were trying to be the mother's advocates, that she had asked for their opinions on the situation which then turned into them pointing blame at the son. The two women didn't ask the son why he had hit his mother or verbally abused her. They were just asking him if he thought it was the right thing for a son to do to his mother. It was mentioned that the sons father, who was no longer in the family home, was physically and verbally abusive to the mother and that the son was a witness to this on a daily bases when the father lived in the family home. The two women pointed out that the son was acting like his father, which then made the son very upset. This is when the situation got out of control and voices started to get louder. At that point I went to find the manager of the organisation to seek her help to stop the situation from becoming explosive. The manager did come down into the room and stopped the women speaking. She told them that it was not their place to be judge and jury and that the mother and son should and can seek professional help.

Using the Johari Window (Luft, J.&Ingham, H. (1955) to explain what had happened with this mother and son scenario: The mother had made the abusive situation known in the public way, this is the open/public window (Luft, J.&Ingham, H. (1955). But she had not allowed her son to give his side of the situation and so this would be the Blind window (Luft, J.&Ingham, H. (1955) known to the mother and to the son but not made public. The feelings of the son could be put into the Unknown window (Luft, J.&Ingham, H. (1955) as he did not openly tell his mother or the two women how their cross-examination had made him feel. The Hidden box could have been the dispute that had happened in the family home the night before, as it was unknown to others (Luft, J.&Ingham, H (1955). Planning (Gibbs G,1988): If it happened again what would I do?

If a situation like this happened again, I would try to defuse the situation by asking the mother and son to have such discussion at home and not in the building where others feel is their safe space. I would also find information on councillors for the son to see but also for the mother to see. I would ask the two ladies to refrain from making judgement on a situation they did not see for themselves, as they are not qualified to council the mother in the way that they were.

I would also have asked the women to step outside, where they could get a little fresh air and thinking space. It could be seen that they only wanted to help their friend, but that it was not their place to do what they did. In one way the organisation did create a safe place for a discussion to take place and so it did encourage social inclusion from all the group service users, but maybe it required a little more attention from the organisations manager instead of the dependence upon the service users, policing their own safe space. In reflection, upon this situation, it could have been more reflective to have spoken to the organisation's manager, in private, in a de-briefing manner, in order to gain knowledge and experience into how to defuse a situation like this, if ever I came across it again.

The second experience I would like to reflect upon was when I helped the group with cooking a chilli con carnie. Using the Gibbs Model of reflection (Gibbs G,1988), I will start at a description of what happened that morning. The usual group of people had arrived at the organisation and all seemed in a positive mood. It had been decided the week before that the group were going to make chilli today and that one of the members would take lead role and would also buy the ingredients necessary. This morning a new member, new to me, arrived. In order to keep to the GDPR his name will be Joe (GDPR,2018). Joe was dropped off at the organisation by his carer, Joe has cerebral palsy and due to this he is wheelchair bound. He is fiercely independent and so he asked his carer to leave him at the group and to collect him later. Once the group had settled down, approximately 6 people, not including me, the person leading the group, Sue, started explaining what they were going to cook and asked who needed what equipment. To my surprise Joe said that he did not want to get involved with cooking and said he would just watch. Chopping boards and knives were handed out, after each person had washed their hands, and people started to chop vegetables.

I went over to speak with Joe to see if I could find out why he did not want to get involved with the group's activity. After a 5 minute chat I found out that in fact Joe would like to get involved but that he felt that due to the lack of his cooking equipment, specially adapted so then he could better control over what he was trying to chopping, that he would not be able to chop the vegetables and that he may cut himself or worse embarrass himself in front of his friends. Faced with a lack of Joe's kitchen equipment but as I had experience of not just cooking, I am a qualified chef, but also having the experience of working in a mobility shop, demonstrating mobility aides to people, I felt that I would be able to over come this problem.

In the next stage of Gibbs Reflective Model (Gibbs G,1988) Feelings: Reflecting at the situation in hand I did feel very sad for Joe. I thought he was very brave by telling me that he felt he was not physically able to use the knives that were available to him in the organisation's

kitchen. I felt that we had already built a bond that he could open up about how he felt to me, a person who he had only known for an hour. It made me want to help him even more. I wanted to enable him to do what he wanted to do and get involved with the group's activity. The physical challenges faced by Joe every day could be incomprehensible to anyone that does not understand the disability that Joe has. The lack of controlled motor function, as his hands can shake vigorously and sometimes uncontrollably, can impact on how he thinks about himself. In order to gain his trust, I suggest I walk with him to the local shop to buy some ingredients that had been forgotten. The smile he gave lit up the room. He had a cheeky grin on his face and once I had had a quick discussion with the manager of the organisation, off we went. He gave me the impression, from his positive body language and the massive smile on his face, that he felt a lot more positive about the group's activity. I was with him only to support him in the shop, it was physically small and with the dimensions of his powered wheelchair he needed an extra pair of eyes so not to destroy the shop's shelving. He said how grateful he was that I did not take over the shopping and that I just helped him when he needed to get the money out of his wallet. I was grateful that I was able to help, in the very small way that I did. When we got back to the organisation, I got Joe a chopping board and the pepper, that he wanted to chop up. He was very unsure how he was going to be able to cut up the pepper without it either sliding off the chopping board or him cutting himself. After a moment of thought I got Joe a fork, placed it in one hand and the knife in the other. I showed him that he could cup up the pepper, using the fork to guide his knife. He was so very happy! I could see how empowered he had now become.

With Arnstein's ladder of participation ((Arnstein, 1969) in mind I took Joe from informing and consulting, once explained how we were going to attempt chopping the pepper, to partnership, with the joint effort and with a partnership formed, Joe was able to participate in chopping his pepper and his contribution to the chilli!

Analysing (Gibbs G,1988) Joe's reaction to the support given, it could be considered that a double learning loop (Britton & Serrat,2013) could then be used in reflection of how Joe became empowered and gained confidence in his own abilities. He first made an assumption (Britton & Serrat, 2013) that he would not be able to chop up vegetables without his own adapted cooking utensils. With a little support his actions of using the fork meant that he could then gain the result (Britton & Serrat ,2013) of being able to join in the group activity. In conclusion (Gibbs G,1988) Joe gained confidence and leapt up Arnsteins ladder of participation from being on the rung of consultation (Arnsteins, 1969), he would now be empowered by participating in the activity (Arnsteins, 1969). If when planning (Gibbs G,1988) an activity like this in the future the group should have more inclusion of the disabilities that people suffer from and possibly take into consideration of the physical restraints that group members battle with every day.

The third and last event/experience, reflection shall take place (Gibbs G,1988), when I supported a young man, who attended the organisation but did not actively participate with the group activities, was asked to evaluate a section on a web site that had been created with vulnerable adults usage in mind. Using the Gibbs reflection model a description of the event (Gibbs G,1988): The young man, in his early 20's, has learning difficulties due to a brain injury at birth. He has a speech impediment and is very cautious of people he has not met before. He does not speak to many of the members of the group, but stays in the back ground watching what is happening. The web site designer had asked the organisation if they would try out the web site to see if it was understandable for the vulnerable people it was aimed at. I was asked, by the organisational manager, if I would guide the young man through the questionnaire from the web site designer requested. We both sat at a PC in the general office and went through the very simplified website. I was mindful that I did not want to dilute the questionnaire and was just sat to support the young man. Carrying on with Gibbs reflection on

feeling (Gibbs G,1988): The young man seemed to be enjoying the responsibility that had been bestowed upon him. I did not get the impression that he was overwhelmed by such a big task. I was made to feel very special that I was able to support this young man in such a special way. When analysing (Gibbs G,1988) the event I could see that the manager asked me to support the young man with this task she informed me that she thought I had a lot of patience with him. The manager said that she had been watching me with this young man, she noted how I would not finish his words or try to anticipate what he was trying to say. I have previous experience of a young man at my job that has a speech impediment. I find he gets very frustrated when people try to guess what he is trying to say and interrupt him. Arnsteins ladder of participation (Arnsteins, 1969). would put this young man on the participation rung, as the young man was willingly participating in the task at hand.

When again using the Gibbs reflection model (Gibbs G,1988) concluding on the event at hand, I can not see how I could have done anything different than I did. I supported the young man, reinforced his self-confidence. I could possibly have gone a bit quicker through the website, but I was afraid that I would upset or that the young man would get upset or get frustrated with me or the computer. I thought that going slow and then speeding up, if it was felt we could, would be the best way to proceed with the task at hand.

Lastly Planning (Gibbs G,1988) If asked to take on a task like this in the future I would ask the person who wanted the website tested if they wanted it done without any interference or support from me. I would ask for a separate computer in a smaller room by itself instead of in the main general office. It took approximately 2 hours in the main office to go right the way through the web site, due to our attention being lost halfway through by many disruptions, due to a busy general office. If we were in a separate office it may have been easier for attention to be out just into looking at the web site, instead of looking at what was going on around us and people

would not have come in and out of a smaller room. When using a double learning loop to reflect back to how I could learn from this experience (Britton & Serrat ,2013): Assumptions, no one asked the young man if he wanted me to support him. We should have asked him first, really sat down and asked him properly if he thought he would need me there to support him, instead it was just said in passing that I would be there to support him and go through the website (Cowley et al, 2013).

Actions (Gibbs G,1988) I didn't ask him if he wanted me there and I just presumed to carry on and turn the computer on, get him on to the web site and I found him the section of the web site that was need to be investigated.

Finally results (Gibbs G,1988) Reflecting back I feel that maybe I helped the young man too much, that really a true reflection of if the website was able to be used by vulnerable people and if it was easily understandable by the target users was not met.

In conclusion to my experience at this very special organisation, my eyes have been open as to what advocacy is. This organisation helped the people that are the most vulnerable people in society by, sometimes, just creating a safe space that people can come together and share their problems, but also feel that they are in a safe place to explain their problems without being oppressed by their disability, whether it be a speech impediment, high functioning autism, which means they are always over thinking every situation, to the teenager who has problems with his anger that, due to his fathers behaviours, he thought was the right way to deal with his emotions. This organisation opened my eyes to advocacy, taking me from a text book to the reality of people needing help, sometimes at the most crucial time of their lives, when they are being thrown out of their home or when they don't understand why their benefits have changed.

Advocacy is not just a word in a text book its in every day life, its helping a young man go to the shop to buy some ingredients for a cooking group, its helping a vulnerable person with a server disability to think outside the box and make sure that they can get participate in society. This placement has reinforced my want to work with vulnerable people, help them be the best they can be but on their terms and in their own time, with patience and with a bit of “thinking outside of the box”.

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