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Project LIGHT: an interprofessional student and staff partnership providing health promotion to the homeless population of Leicester.

Background

Project LIGHT has developed from participatory action research between medical students, medical school staff (University of Leicester), health faculty (De Montfort University) and a voluntary sector provider (Action Homeless). The first cycle began in 2010 with a special study module where medical students were inspired by interprofessional student teams in Canada (Project SWITCH). In the second cycle, students completed research to assess the possibility of providing health promotion clinics to homeless people. This work has recently been accepted as a student publication.¹ In the third cycle, students shaped the content of a new interprofessional module to gain the knowledge and skills to set up, run and sustain Project LIGHT.

Today Project LIGHT is an interprofessional staff student partnership. The students have set up LIGHT as a registered charity and the board consists of students and staff from both universities including voluntary sector providers. The final outcome is a student designed module which prepares students to work with homeless people. Trained students subsequently volunteer to deliver high quality health promotion in local hostels in their own time.

1. Goodier et al. (Impress) Students make international links to further interprofessional learning: LIGHT a student lead initiative for the homeless population, *Journal of Interprofessional Care*

Student benefits

"Hearing peoples' stories first hand, via the training and health promotion sessions run by LIGHT, has provided a different perspective of care from that experienced during my training and allowed me to reflect upon how I may make a positive contribution in my future career as a Mental Health Nurse.

By helping to plan and run sessions, not only have I expanded my skill sets and grown in confidence, I have also seen how beneficial student contributions can be to supporting services during these times of austerity and the difference that this can truly make to peoples lives."

Martine, Mental Health Nursing

"I found Project LIGHT at just the right time... having become a bit disillusioned by medicine, it reignited my passion to be active in the community and work with people who could really benefit from our skills and experience. It has been a fantastic way to integrate students from all disciplines into the community and I'm excited to see the difference these relationships will make in the future."

Becki, Medical Student

"One of the biggest deterrents for this population seeking help from health and social services is stigma. LIGHT aims to reach students before that stigma develops... Opening students' eyes means that we have educated clinicians prepared to help them."

Ruth, BSc Research Student

Staff benefits

"My pharmacy students have gained a tremendous insight into working alongside students of other professions. This amazing opportunity has helped build their confidence and apply their learning to their future careers whilst appreciating the importance of holistic teamwork in improving health for marginalised groups."

Dr Neena Lakhani, DMU

"The enthusiasm of students to help and serve the local community, while advancing their professional knowledge skills and attitudes, has been overwhelming to observe. Student views challenge systems and have driven us as staff to go beyond routine learning; opening doors for new innovations for the undergraduate healthcare curriculum in the UK. We are delighted to see students using their new competence to work with homeless people outside of the curriculum."

Prof. Liz Anderson, UoL

As a result of this ongoing partnership, every month students work together to deliver two health promotion sessions in one of the city's hostels. In this last year alone there have been eleven sessions reaching over fifty homeless people. Students are responsive to the needs of the residents and these sessions have included smoking cessation, basic first aid, harm reduction with alcohol and drugs, and sexual health. Our next steps are to collect and collate evidence of the impact of students helping this group, to grow student volunteering numbers via the curriculum module which runs twice every year and fundraising to enable more work to take place.



The LIGHT team 2011