

SWU Member **Dr Peter Unwin** highlights some key issues experienced by IMPACT, the University of Worcester service user and carer group



The University of Worcester has a 40 strong service user and carer group, IMPACT, whose members contribute to the teaching, recruitment and research activities on social work and other vocational courses. IMPACT members have also contributed a range of SWU/BASW activities with

Jodie from IMPACT sitting on the Austerity Action Group, alongside Stephen from the National Survivor User Network.

Lockdown has been a mixed experience for members, whose backgrounds cover a range of issues from serious physical illness, mental health and survivors of domestic violence. Some have found lockdown a time to reflect and have taken on new roles, such as offering telephone support to isolated people and become adept at social media. Others have found the lockdown reminiscent of darker times in their lives, for example when they have been sectioned or were in a relationship where they had no control. Only about 15 out of the 40 members have been able to participate in the weekly support sessions held on Zoom, illustrating that not everybody can afford the requisite technology or do not have the cognitive or fine motor skills to participate in such forums.

Peter Unwin, SWU member, facilitates the IMPACT group and is currently conducting research in co-production with Joy, also an IMPACT member. The lived experiences of the group so far shared with the researchers include a female carer of a multiply-disabled adult son who needs night-time care seven days a week but whose care package has dwindled away, as has the carer's yearly respite week; several members whose anxiety conditions have worsened; a member whose mental and physical health plummeted after being moved at short notice from his own room in a nursing home 'for financial reasons' - this latter case is shocking and makes a mockery of all policies surrounding human rights and dignity. Group

members have rallied to support the member concerned and their family, the lack of being able to visit in person making a bad situation so much worse. On a more positive front, several members have started cooking, gardening, writing and doing more walking; several commenting that it has made them realise how much they truly value true human contact and genuine interpersonal contact.

There are several poets in the IMPACT group - Claire (the Poet with Passion) wrote the poem *Safe* to reflect her feelings about lockdown:-

Safe?

*Two metres away
We must obey
Just to stay
Safe*

*Don't shake hands
Cancel social plans
Across the land
Safe*

*We must isolate
Try to meditate
It feels great
Safe*

*Silence all around
Barely human sound
Beating heart pound
Safe*

*Sunshine spring sky
Birds tweeting nearby
I'm gonna cry
Safe*

*Time is endless
Anxiety so effortless
Living such stress
Safe*

*The phone rings
Your voice brings
Secure, warm feelings
Safe*