Building Understandings: Child, Youth, Family and Disability 10th & 11th June 2014 Glenside Campus, UWE.

Katherine Runswick-Cole. Senior Research Fellow, Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), invited us to host the 7th Child, Youth, Family and Disability Conference at UWE and we were delighted that 63 people attended from Newcastle to Cornwall. Participants enjoyed the “vibrant, friendly, supportive environment” thanks to CUSP team, finance and Glenside reception, porters, catering and IT support and social work student volunteer!

The 18 presentations were by young disabled people, parents of disabled children and disabled adults, researchers with lived experience and professionals, academics and students in social work, education, health, mental health, physiotherapy and music therapy. We heard how families focus on enjoyment of life and learnt how disabled children participate being an advocate, mentor, advising on service information and staff recruitment and being involved in research. Projects included employment in the NHS and MMU, peer support in mental health and disabled children’s access to cycling and recreation spaces. We understood more about experiences of discrimination that included complicity with bullying, trauma from ‘being done to’, escalated crisis putting all family members at risk, the considerable demands made of families and at the same time low expectations held of their children. How people can decide on their own ‘mountains to climb’ and how can we build understanding communities in a culture of ‘blame’ and a preoccupation with diagnosis? ‘Don’t make us feel bad’, a young person said. When professionals were listening, honest and confident to give change a go, it made all the difference.

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