Exploring Social Care Policy and Provision

Defining poverty is not easy and there are several reasons for it and again in different countries levels of poverty differ depending on culture. Dallos, R and McLaughlin, E describes one reason for pov erty being 'the welfare state, and calls for fundamental changes in its operation'.   I will be exploring how poverty and the welfare state are linked how it has emerged and what has been done to help eradicate this for those immersed in this lifestyle. One of the ways people can be helped and poverty can be targeted is though through welfare rights Bateman, N (2005). I will look at the role of the welfare rights unit where I had my first practice placement and will look at their role in the continuous str uggle against poverty.

'Welfare rights practice is one way of empowering and protecting people living in poverty' Bateman, N cited in Blackwells (2002). The placement I was on was the welfare rights unit mainly offers service to those already accessing s ocial services, and consists of the adult population. The clients are supported through Care Management.   The aims of the welfare (welfare rights has many aims) rights unit is to assist on the take up of benefits as per their policies which are driven thro ugh the National Health Service, (NHS).

All humans have basic needs like food shelter clothing and also have the right to have a part in society at whatever level that person wants to fit in. To assist in this and the idea of social inclusion and to mee t these needs the welfare state was created after the compilation of the Beveridge Report 1942 which is the main ideal of the British welfare state it was to create a vision of how there could be a better society and a better way of living. This was the drive for change and the way forward for the welfare state it actually identified. 'Five major problems that needed to be tackled in post -war Britain 'want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness' Pierson, J and Thomas, P (2002). This report made several recommendations to combat these issues and the benefits system was created, several policies were made to support the recommendations like the Family Allowances Act 1945 the National Insurance Act 1946 and so on. The Beveridge Report though did also have several failings in it, which concentrated on the more vulnerable members of our society like those who are disabled and sick, as it was targeting those who could work and maintained benefits at low levels so to encourage the return to

work. Though the National Assistance Act of 1948 did assist to help solve some of these issues as it imposed a duty on local authorities to provide accommodation for those in need for people over 18 who are ill or disabled Beveridge, J (1954). This is still an ongoing tren d today that these people are still disadvantaged by the system and by the means tested way it works. The welfare rights process though helps those who are disadvantaged in several ways like assisting as advisor and advocate Marshall cited in Banks S (200 2) 'recognised that the aim of the welfare state is not to remove inequalities of income, rather than to eradicate poverty and give everyone equal status as citizens in society', as was William Beveridge's aim and vision for the welfare state. However Langan, M (1998) argues that 'the welfare state has gone too far, and turns state dependence into a badge of exclusion rather than a guarantee of inclusion'. This argues against the original thinking behind the welfare state and Beveridge Report of a vision of a better society Beveridge, J (1954) describes her husbands work as 'a contribution to the history of British way of living based upon unique experience and a comprehensive study of facts' the report is referred back to as a milestone for the welfare st ate and has been the basis for consistent improvement and changes in the welfare state today. The problems that we have now in society are due to the changes that are occurring in the population. That people are living longer due to medical technology an d birth rates are at decidedly lower levels than what they used to be. We have more of a population and more of an elderly ailing population that the government is finding it difficult to subsidise and not enough working age people to put money back into the economy Dallos, R and McLaughlin, E (1999).

These clients already have existing issues, which are then deepened by poverty. The 'Social work dictionary', (2002) describes poverty as 'a condition in which people are inhibited from participation in soci ety because of a serious lack of material and social resources' this is demonstrated by the information collated from the Acheson Inquiry 1998 which goes on to describe poverty and inequalities and how this can be tackled, 'Policies which increase the income of the poorest are likely to improve their living standards, such as nutrition and heating and so lead to improvements in health. This can be done by improving social security benefits, specifically for families with young

children and pensioners, by increasing employment opportunities and through changes in the tax system'. Poverty is categorised into two types, absolute poverty which looks at conditions that will not sustain physical life and relative poverty that refers to having access to resources that others have on a daily basis like type of diet, activities standard of living conditions. Social work is largely made up of working with the poorer part of the country those people who are disadvantaged and at risk of poverty oppression and discrimination. There are various ways of measuring poverty and the causes of poverty the client group dealing with welfare rights are living on means tested benefits and as people are unable to obtain the same quality of life as others. As 'most forms of social security payment have fallen further behind average wages' as stated by Franklin, J (1998). 'Social work in Britain and elsewhere is immersed in poverty and social exclusion' Davies, M (2002). Exclusion can be identified in different ways it covers finances, that is poverty, work choices, which are choices in labour market and social exclusion, the choice to participate. Those who deal with welfare rights can fall into some or all categories.

When Labour government first came into power in 1997 one of the key issues targeted by Tony Blair was the welfare state and the creation of a new modern welfare state and to reform the system as it is due to the size of expenditure which at that point in 1995 was about 95 billion pounds 'labour first raised the idea of a more personalised benefit system when in opposition. The gateway idea will reinforce the government's philosophy there should be work for those who can and security for those who cannot work' www.news.bbc.uk/1/hi/uk_politics. Labour wanted the reform bill to look at all agencies working together to help those who can to claim their benefits and exact entitlement and to support those into getting work or for those who are disabled and on incapacity to support in getting work and via choices and training. Today the government has managed to provide some support to people but it just does not seem enough. Labours last few years has according to labour 'created low inflation, steady growth and high unemployment' www.news.bbc.uk/1/hi/uk_politics. Labour's new economic to move more people from welfare to work, the savings on unemployment benefits go towards investing more in education but is this pledge enough can

it be sustained . Labour has several pledges but does not tackle those who are really in poverty how can thay afford to buy their own home as this is one of the targets when they can barely live. There is nothing to mention those who are unable to work due to ill health and those who are older and retired he does not mention the take up of benefits fo those in need as explained at www.labour.org.uk/ourpolicies. The amount of beneifts also is maunliy unchanging the Beveridge Rpeort had stated it would review the amount of beneits and increase these as required around about every five years, Vaux, G in his article on welfare rights states 'how would you feel if you hadn't had a pay rise since the 1980's? and the levels of what are called earned income disregards for people who receive welfare benfits are almost unchanged since the 1980's', people do not have an incentive or assistance to get out of the poverty trap. The government is targeting specific areas yet more is needed to make people aware of their rights and their needs.   The labour government since 1997 has been targeting poverty and exclusion, amongst other issues there has been a decrease in unemployment and children i n poverty they also have generated the green paper to reform adult care to assist in 'ending pensioner poverty and looking at 'health inequalities' following analysing of the Acheson Report 1998. It looks at areas, which will assist with social inclusion, independence and choice, to empower people to purchase their own care to do their own self-assessments and encourage voluntary work. These are positive moves forward but there is still nothing to look at those people who are on the poverty line it does n ot directly tackle poverty which creates exclusion. The Labour government created the 'White Paper Modernising Social Work Agenda' in 1998, which describes the plans that the government has for social care. Its emphasis is on promoting independence to the client and including the client. It covers improvements for both children and adult services. It also has standards for Social Services and quality and skill of the workforce to assist clients.

Clients are supported in many different ways to help com bat poverty, discrimination and inequalities of life. The welfare rights unit offered non - judgemental support and advice and had a clear understanding and knowledge in this area, which as a client I would want. They offered information and choices and wh ich led to empowering the client and giving the

client confidence to make decisions. 'Organisations for advocacy have pre -dated the National Health Service (NHS) & Community Care (CC) Act' states Coulshed, V and Orme, J (1998). There is a long -standing argument about welfare rights and how this form of assistance through advocacy is a positive part of social work practice. Bateman, N (2000) believes that 'the relationship between poverty and other social problems together with the need to inject independence into a benefits system that is frequently badly administered, means that many human service professionals have become involved in this field' he then goes on to add that 'poverty heightens stress and reduces peoples ability to live fulfilling lives.   It is thus inevitable that social workers and other care professionals have to act as their advocates' Coulshed, V and Orme, J (1998) agree that Care Management is about 'users and carers', 'advocacy is now seen as a central principle of care management' . Advocacy aims to ensure that the voices of clients are heard. This needs to be done by skilled workers who can aid and empower clients and form an effective working relationship in order to help themselves as Lishman, J (1994) agrees that ' Advice, guidance, advocacy and activity on the part of the worker are seen by clients as essential for effective work. This is the assistance that clients need to help empower them, to improve their quality and standard of life. 'Clients want better access to welfare rights advice and debt counselling' as stated by McLeod, E and Bywaters, P (2000), which from my practice experience I concur with this statement. This is being done and supported by 'the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 which requires wide consultation of users in drafting of community care plans and in the process of assessment, and the concept of advocacy is being taken on board by many social services departments' Banks, S (2002). The act re -enforces the need to involve and empower clients so they have a say in their quality of life this includes clients participation of the decision -making processes.

On going support and changes in government policy are continuously needed to support and maintain people out of the poverty bracket a nd continuous research is needed to find viable ways to do this. It is important tot be aware of poverty and how it does impact on people. To eradicate poverty all benefits must lift people out of poverty also education and training people for employment so they can contribute to society and have a quality of

life. To have an open and holistic approach to supporting people and to remember that people have rights and that is of choice and to live equally without prejudice as the Human Rights Act of 1998 d escribes to us Kallen, E (2004).

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