

Model: Service User Engagement Policy

INTRODUCTION

Service user involvement refers to the process by which people who are using or have used a service become involved in the planning, development, delivery and evaluation of that service. There is a growing recognition that because of their direct experiences of using services, service users have a unique insight into what works, which can be used to improve services to achieve better public engagement in the design, development and delivery of citizen-centred services.

PURPOSE

The aim of this policy is to provide guidance and principles of good practice for [*Name of organisation*] in order to ensure that Service User Engagement is integral to our practice. [*Name of organisation*] recognises that engagement should meet the needs and interests of participants, and be recognised as meaningful by all who choose to participate.

This policy covers all staff, trustees, volunteers, casual workers, contracted employees and supporters of [*name of organisation*].

POLICY

[*Name of organisation*] is committed to fully involving the people who use our services in both the development and delivery of those services. This policy outlines

- Our definition of service users
- Our understanding of engagement
- How we propose to engage service users in planning, developing, delivery and evaluation of services.

Who our service users are:

(Add as appropriate to the organisation's own definition of client group)

What do we mean by 'engagement'?

Engagement is about:

- Being in touch with those service users who have a stake in a particular area of our work
- Enabling service users to contribute to planning, developing and evaluating our services
- Ensuring that there is dialogue between service users and [*Name of organisation*]
- Hearing what people tell us and taking their views into account

Service user involvement in decision-making incorporates differing degrees of 'taking part' in the process and these include receiving information, being consulted and fully participating in the development and evaluation of a service or project. The different range of activities is set out below:

Information Giving: letting people know what is happening once a decision has been made, in situations where, realistically no choices are available.

Consultation: is an active process that involves having a discussion, either spoken or written, formal or informal that seeks to find out people's views. Essentially, it can be an information gathering exercise and a process of listening and responding to people. On most occasions the information collected through the consultation process is acted upon and is a catalyst for change.

These formal and informal communication channels might include:

- Open meetings e.g. service users are invited to come to an open meeting or a series of meetings
- Surveys e.g. service users are invited to complete a survey (paper or online type)
- Focus group e.g. a select cross-section of stakeholders, small in number, are invited to attend a meeting or series of meetings
- Invitation to send a written response e.g. service users are invited to submit comments in writing on a proposal or plan
- Informal meetings e.g. organisation management might mingle with people at an event a canvass certain ideas and see what response they get

The purpose of consultation is three-fold:

1. To invite service users to provide advice to the organisation about their needs, wants and expectations. In other words, tell the organisation what value it wants and how it can provide this value.
2. To invite service users to comment on plans that have been created
3. To ensure the organisation takes account of, or are listening to the needs of service users in developing strategic and operational plans and /or services.

Participation can be seen as a more intensive form of regular and ongoing consultation. It is a continuous approach, which encourages a greater involvement in the exploration of issues, and therefore an increased sense that people are sharing the process of decision-making.

Guiding Principles of Engagement

Effective engagement relies on trust and mutual respect. Consequently [*Name of organisation*] will:

- Treat seriously comments made by individuals and groups
- Work to facilitate equality of access, recognising difficulties which can be caused by age, disability, race, gender, religion, culture or sexual orientation
- Use a variety of mechanisms to communicate and engage with service users, including meetings, forums, focus groups, websites, social media platforms, email, leaflets, advertisements, surveys, telephone and audio and video recording

(For further and more detailed guidelines regarding principles of engagement your organisation may wish to adopt or incorporate the ‘National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales’, produced by Participation Cymru and endorsed by Welsh Government).

Benefits of Involvement for Service Users

- A chance to make a difference
- Personal development (e.g. increasing confidence, self esteem and taking responsibility)
- Feeling valued and respected
- Useful to evidence in a CV for potential employers
- Having fun and meeting new people

Benefits of Involvement for the organisation

- Improvement of existing services
- Designing new projects and services that are ‘right’ from the start (cost effective)
- Driving up quality standards
- Informing workforce development
- Identifying sustainable models of working and business development

Review:

This policy will be reviewed every two years as a minimum

Date adopted		Date for review	
Doc name/version			