

Transforming Social Care – Putting People First Service User/Carer Engagement in the North West

Issue

With the introduction of ‘Putting People First’ Directors of Adult Social Services were expected to implement new care arrangements against a backcloth of anxiety and important questions about raised expectations versus limited resources:

- ‘What does Personalisation really mean?’
- ‘If it is successful, what results will it deliver for local people?’
- ‘How might it reflect the important differences across communities?’
- ‘How can people who use services and their carers be included in a meaningful dialogue about these questions?’

Our work with Directors in three Regional branches highlighted these key questions and led to consultation with senior DH representatives. From there it was agreed to proceed with piloted approaches, bringing together the views of people who use services/carers, social care staff and DASSs/senior managers in the North West.

Approach

Six authorities were identified as pilot sites and some JiP funding was used as pump-priming for the dialogue process. Each of the first three LAs included 30 service users/carers and 30 staff; in the subsequent cluster 60 people from each of these two groups took part.

The process works by structured facilitation of:

- The differing perspectives relating to Personalisation, from senior managers, people who use services /carers and staff across a range of roles and services.
- Bringing their distinctive views together incrementally.
- A ‘large-scale dialogue’ in which all groups work to build shared understandings, then together work to agree priority areas for further joint action.

Results

The North West dialogues, together with subsequent experiences elsewhere, have helped clarify a number of factors that increase the potential for successful results.

- **Commitment/involvement of leaders.** There were marked differences in the results achieved by those LAs who had the direct involvement of the DASS. There was greater willingness among staff, people who use services and carers to fully commit to the process when the most senior managers were involved.

- The **leadership style** is highly significant. The process offers DASSs and their leadership teams the opportunity to incorporate the views of service users, carers and staff. The LAs who were willing to expand their vision based on these viewpoints saw the results as far more powerful and built stronger links with staff, service users and carers. Conversely, where these additional views were regarded as 'telling us what we already know' opportunities to strengthen relationships for the future were missed.
- The **willingness of DASSs and their teams to learn** from the process is key. In one LA where early elements did not work so well there was a rapid response from the local senior managers that provided a turning point. They arranged further workshops in which they were able to add the views of people who use services and carers to their own views creating a shared vision of the Department's strategies for the future.
- While the multi-stakeholder dialogue process can appear quite loose, in reality it employs a **tightly structured design and disciplined facilitation** based on the Mobius Model™. The logistics for the dialogue workshops make a substantial difference so initial planning, invitations to participants, the choice of venue and its set up are highly important.
- The Process lays **foundations for further developments**. The dialogue process was described by participants as 'the beginning of a new way' for stakeholders in social care to communicate and learn together, not as a one-off event.

**Does this ring any bells re. the challenges you face?
We're more than happy to help.**