

1. Getting started

1.3 Involving service users



The value and capacity of service users as key decision makers in their voluntary organisation and informing how it can most effectively deliver its services is increasingly recognised as a way to increase accountability.

User involvement in decision making can operate at multiple levels within the organisation. However, there are often many practicalities to be overcome in order to achieve genuine user involvement in a voluntary organisation.

Often the best models of user involvement are to be found within services for people who were formerly assumed to be incapable of contributing to their own or other peoples' welfare regimes. Many voluntary organisations working with people with learning disabilities, with mental health problems and frail elderly people now demonstrate the best practice with service users participating in decision making at all levels.

The growth of user-led networks and organisations further ensures recognition of their role at all levels of decision making. Welsh Assembly Government guidance issued to local authorities can give strong emphasis to authorities' statutory requirement to consult users in drawing up community care plans.

It is often a statement in the organisation's constitution that outlines the ways people become involved in decision-making:

'Services must demonstrate involvement of users in their service design and delivery and through the operation of a complaints procedure.'

Voluntary organisations are increasingly drafting or redrafting their constitution to include such statements and increase user involvement.

Organisations need to look at all levels at which decisions about their service design and delivery are made - planning, managing, monitoring, evaluating. Questions that need to be asked include:

- Does the service at point of delivery enable the user to make his/her own informed decision about if and how to use the proffered service?
- How may we take users' views into account in all identified areas and levels of decision making?
- What are appropriate arrangements for facilitating our users to give us the benefit of their views?
- Are there some processes within our service where it would be mutually beneficial to have user participation?

Key points to consider at each stage:

- Is the information we give accessible - clear, comprehensible, relevant to their purposes and ours and is it attractive?
- Are the arrangements proposed convenient, comprehensible, supportive, and relevant to their purposes and ours?
- What are the resource implications - of time and finance, for the organisation and in compensating users for time and expenses incurred?
- How do we take forward users' contributions and feedback the results? .

It is important to act on the responses of your service users and keep them involved of any changes so that further feedback can be obtained.

Further information

Participation Cymru
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www.participationcymru.org.uk

Community Development Cymru
www.cdc.cymru.org

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