



Possible Strategy for Creating a Regional Structure for User Consultation

Stage 1. Run a Capacity/skills course in locality for interested service users – Assertiveness / how to manage committees / public discussion, etc

Course to take place fortnightly ? To last for 3 months ?

group is advertised widely beforehand across locality's mental health facilities, 2/3 users/members invited from each facility. The advertising would need to be thought about carefully and either done through visits from course facilitators or a particular local person or via close co-ordination from steering group working through staff on site.

Max. no. in training group I think 12

group works partly for mutual support

Stage 2. This trainee group, or some of it, might choose to become core user forum for the locality. It might be very small at first. It might be augmented by word of mouth or from further training courses.

At the end of the course the group would be invited to continue to meet on fortnightly basis, still partly for mutual support, with facilitation, a budget already allocated and venue already available, and with outlay on some initial equipment catered for.

It would work together to produce some sort of constitution and select issues it might like to campaign on, or further training it might like to commission.

Stage 3. The group would find its own reasons for inviting managers to consult with it, on its own territory, according to its own prepared agenda. Managers in turn will no doubt be keen to visit the group from time to time to hear its views on their concerns/plans/strategies. The mechanics of this would be negotiated. The "tame handful" approach should be avoided.

Stage 4. It is fair for the funders to expect something back from the group in return for their money. It is not treatment, after all.

ie *financial book kept properly (training/personnel provided if required) ;*

*genuine system of accountability to the wider user/member constituency,
ie a strategy for visits by group members to mental health
establishments, a newsletter, open meetings, etc*

The idea proposed here of beginning with a support/skills-building group may simply come to nothing first time around. It might need a second go or to be reviewed and re-shaped. In other words, there may need to be several courses before a solid user group is operating.

The idea relies on an experienced trainer, and assumes there will be a support worker available to take over facilitating the group once the course is over. Ideally the prospective support worker should be working with the trainer during the course.

The incremental approach suggested here would suggest that the trainer should be joined by someone local at some stage, with a view to the course being repeated elsewhere in the area, with that local worker now acting as trainer.

*Rogan Wolf
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