

CO-PRODUCTION CASE STUDY

Our Service User forum for the Tenancy Support Service in Swansea – Client Inc - Wales

The project

We decided to set up a group of current or recent service users who would form a panel, and we would weave this panel into our decision making process.

Our regular monthly service meeting is where changes to our service are discussed. All staff attend and it is a meeting where we make decisions about new processes, talk about what problems are arising and share important information. We wanted to ensure that people are part of this process and so we could explore ways to work collaboratively together. So the service user panel meets, and then a representative from the panel attends the service meeting.



The service user panel chose the name “Client Inc” for themselves. When Client Inc meet, the minutes from the monthly service meeting are read through, to keep the group abreast of developments and to see if there is anything they want to pick up on.

We also set up a similar panel for the volunteers involved in the service, and they too had a representative who attended the monthly service meeting.

When we held our first meeting, we asked the clients how often they would like to meet, when they would like meetings to be held and how long they thought they should be. We also asked what sort of refreshments they would want; whether they would prefer cakes and biscuits or a light lunch at the start of each meeting. As such, we put the emphasis from the start on the group being led by its members.

Why we involved people - expected benefits

We were aware that co-production was a movement which has been gathering speed, and felt that the principles aligned with our own client-centred attitudes. We wanted to find a way to engage people in the decision making of the service and so started the group as a way to start this process.

We feel as though we are making changes to the service and the way the support workers work

Member of the Client Inc. service user forum - Independent Living Wales

How were people recruited?

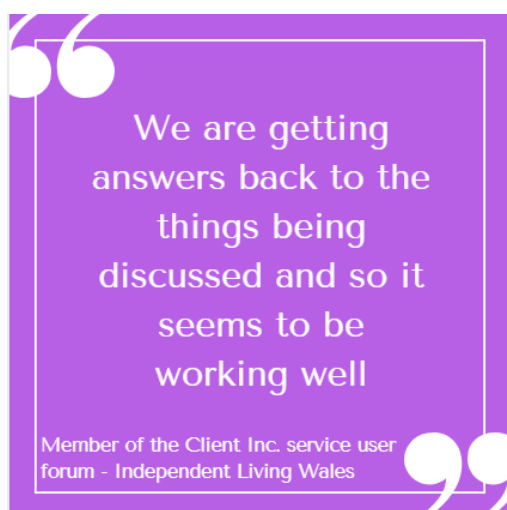
The first meeting was held on Thursday 15th February 2018 in Swansea. We had two clients come along to the group run by two staff members; over the next 2 months, another 2 clients also joined.

We created a temporary flyer inviting service users to the new group which we asked all support workers to take out to all active clients. From this we had some interest from service users.

How people were involved and influenced the process

Amongst other things, over the past 6 months:

- The forum has reviewed the pack of information given out to all clients at the start of support and made multiple changes that have now been implemented
- One of the forum members was on the interview panel when appointing a new support worker. Recently we asked for someone to join an interview panel again and every single member volunteered, so they are now taking it in turns.
- The forum was involved in the property-free pilot, having one of the meetings in a local library instead of the office
- The forum has discussed collecting client case studies and said that they should be done in person where possible using a variety of techniques, such as writing, videoing or voice recording – this will be the basis of collecting client case studies in the future
- Two of the forum members represented the service during a visit by Suzy Davies, a Welsh Assembly Member
- We have also put together a new poster, using a photo of the members, to draw new interest and hopefully expand the group. The group contributed to the design and wording of the poster.



Support and preparation provided

The minutes are circulated beforehand – this is something that the group requested and is important so everyone feels able to participate.

We also provide travel expenses, out of petty cash. It is coded as volunteer expenses, as the members are volunteering their time. However, we think there might to be a new category for them in the future. Refreshments are also provided – usually cake and biscuits, and tea or coffee. This allows everyone to feel at ease and recognises that no one should be out of pocket for their time.

The clients understand that they are valued, because their opinion counts. They know we are taking them seriously. They really value the opportunity to be involved as a result.

Key insights from members and staff

Clients have said that they have grown in confidence and enjoy the meetings. It helps them have a sense of purpose and we really value their input.

“It’s been nice seeing them grow and contribute more as the meetings have gone on.”

“Client Inc. meetings are very informative and enjoyable”

Challenges

Sometimes clients disagree with each other, and things can become a bit heated. The meetings need careful chairing by experienced staff. Facilitating skills and reaching consensus are important skills.

The process is quite resource intensive. It takes time for a member of staff to organise and hold the meetings, to go and buy the refreshments, to type up the minutes, and follow through on actions from the meetings. You can't pretend that those things aren't going to take time and money so it has to be prioritised in order to do it well and see the most impact.

Key learnings

For others that wanted to do something similar we would recommend:

- Consider the scope of influence - think about the things that clients can have informed opinions about. It isn't everything. For instance, how volunteers claim expenses or what the disciplinary procedure is for staff. Think of the things which actually affect the clients in their interaction with the service: manners, timing, the paperwork they see such as action plans, the leaflets and service user guides they see. Some of this is national, so cannot be addressed at service level, but some is created at service level and therefore they can have a impact.
- Expectations - in order to manage expectations, say at the beginning that clients can join the panel for a period of 12 months. This enables you to give others a chance and keep the group moving.
- Decision making - Weave the group into whatever your decision making process is. Explain to the group that the manager retains the ultimate decision-making power, but will take their suggestions seriously. When you can't implement their suggestions, explain why – honesty is key.



What you need to do to set up a strategic group in your project?

- Problem/ issue/ project - where is the scope of influence? How can people be involved in the group and the decision making/ work? Are all of the decisions made?
- Practicalities – how many people to attend? Where, how and when will the group meet? How often? Travel and subsistence arrangements?
- Voices to include – consider any voices which you would like to include or is this a space to be determined by those with lived experience? Think about diversity and accessibility? How can we ensure we are involving a depth and breadth of voices?
- Connecting – how are you going to connect with people to attend? How will you induct, train and support them?
- Working together – how will you support them moving forward? How will you support any psycho social considerations?
- Exit – how will the group end or people be able to step back?