

Volunteer Coordinators Forum

Thursday 16 March, 2017 (2.00 – 4.00)

Approaches to empowerment

In this session we will explore how to include service beneficiaries within volunteering programmes, as volunteers including peer supporters or services user groups.

“We can’t do well serving communities... if we believe that we, the givers, are the only ones that are half-full, and that everybody we’re serving is half-empty... there are assets and gifts out there in communities, and our job as good servants and as good leaders... [is] having the ability to recognise those gifts in others, and help them put those gifts into action.”

First Lady Michelle Obama

Introduction to Erasmus+ programme – Can Do Empowerment

For the past couple of years Community Works along with five other partner organisations who are all skilled in the areas of cultural understanding.

- VIA Bayern
- The Dutch organization RADAR ICA-
- ICA Spain
- The Austrian organization ZEBRA.
- And finally Umtapo a South African non-profit development organisation.

The project brings together six organisations committed to confronting discrimination and exclusion and promoting equality and diversity within society. We are one of these organisations and the representative from the UK.

The main objective of the programme is to empower trainers as **change agents** to empower people and challenge discrimination. The programme aims to develop a training approach which will be used to produce practical tools which others can use to create social change.

Using the concept to change agent as a starting point, participants introduced themselves to each other and shared examples of when they have acted as a change agent, both in their personal and professional lives.

The first session of the forum was a presentation by Fulfilling Lives project who presented a positive example of volunteer empowerment involving service users as volunteers. The project has a **volunteer action group**; made up of people with lived experience of multiple and complex needs and who have had experience of using local services. The group involves service users as volunteers who are ‘supported to identify gaps and barriers in local systems and help to develop improvements in the way services work for people with multiple and complex needs’. The project uses the asset based approach in supporting service users to become volunteers in the Volunteer Action Group.

The main part of the presentation was given by members of the Volunteer Action Group who shared their experiences of the impact that their involvement in Fulfilling Lives has had on their own personal development and on local services and on the lives of others by instigating changes in local and city-wide services.

Fulfilling Lives concluded their presentation with a question and answer session where they continued to highlight the positive impact of their involvement in the project. The talk clearly highlighted the benefits of taking the step of involving service users as volunteers.

The second part of the session focused on how we can better include service users as volunteers and use the Asset Based model to help overcome some of the barriers to service user involvement and to be able to demonstrate how services and service users can be brought together enable the two to be mutually beneficial.

The forum addressed two questions.

1a. Create an inventory of the assets of your service users (what service users bring to the table)

1b. How can these assets be tapped/utilised/encouraged/enhanced and benefit service users and your group.

2a. What barriers/considerations do you have when considering service user involvement?

2b. What organisational assets do you have to enable you to overcome these barriers (what your group brings to the table?)

1a - Service user assets	1b
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lived experience • Skills • Life skills • Personal connections • Diversity • Different perspectives • Technical knowledge of the systems, services and rights • Passion • Commitment • Motivation • Authenticity • Time • Positive role model • Creativity • Inspiration • Financial Benefits for group • Giving back – Passion • Empathy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills and assets form (example attached) • Creating spaces to allow assets to surface: - committees, team meetings, specific forums • Engagement in interview panels. • Give time and space and encouragement to grow • Ensure services attract volunteers/service users • Ensure people feel valued • Service user feedback forms • Provide feedback as well as collect it • Feedback on actions from feedback collected • Harness skills outside the volunteer role and service users experience • Safe space • Give people time to develop

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strength as a survivor • Hopefulness • Experience and understanding of being a service user • Belief in change • To will to something/ make a change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support sessions for volunteers • Encourage training • Mapping
2a	2b – Organisational assets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of physical resources • Lack of premises • Accessibility issues • Staff capacity • Bureaucracy/red tape • Managing expectations • Brief contact time • Safety • Support needs • Time • Time/ability to commit • Technology • Lack of resources • Staff-service user divisions/mentality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free online platforms/resources/social media • Offer choices of roles – range of opportunities and interests for people to become involved in • Create roles • Draw on service user ideas for roles • Existing volunteers • Training • Support • Service users participation group • Assisted technology • Accessible premises or home working • Clear roles and boundaries • Volunteers to support volunteers • Recruitment group • Being involved at services users level can meet expectations better.