



TPAS Cymru Information Sheet

SERVICE USER INVOLVEMENT

What is Service User Involvement? (SUI)

Service user involvement is about providing a range of ways for people who use support services to influence how those services are provided, and to hold their support provider to account on its performance.

User involvement at its best will provide a range of methods that enable service users to give their views and opinions (and be involved in decision making) in ways that suit them i.e. formal and informal; regular or ad hoc contributions. These will include methods that give service users *real influence* on service delivery, such as involvement in setting service standards and service monitoring groups.

Organisations that value user involvement will have a culture and practice where service users' views and opinions are sought at all available opportunities. They will also provide training for staff to ensure there is a shared understanding of why SUI is important.

Benefits of Service User Involvement

- Improved support services for all
- Development of skills and knowledge of service users (which could contribute to their work prospects)
- Improved accountability and openness of organisation
- Increased confidence of service users (and staff)
- Increase in skills of service users (and staff)
- Increased health and well-being of service users and the community
- Services are commissioned (or decommissioned) having taken account of users views and opinions
- Increase in service user satisfaction with the service
- Service users feel part of an organisation – helps to build self-confidence and esteem
- Improvement in communication between service users and providers. Involvement can break down barriers between users and staff and increase understanding of the issues faced by both sides
- Improved Value for Money for the organisation
- Improvement in staff satisfaction
- The Regulation Team of Housing Associations look for evidence of service user involvement during their assessments

SUI Strategy

All support providers should ideally have a Service User Involvement Strategy and Action Plan that outlines the organisation's approach to involving service users in the work of the organisation and the wider community. It's good practice to involve the service users in the development and review of the strategy and Action Plan enabling them to contribute to its contents and monitoring.

The strategy should also include reference to the budget for the involvement activities along with their intended outcomes and how they will be measured and monitored. These intended outcomes should be widely advertised to service users and staff.

Issues that may prevent involvement

Apathy is often used as a reason for lack of involvement: this may be too simple an excuse! We need to consider what issues the service users may face and whether we are creating barriers that prevent them from getting involved. For example advertising events in the written word and/or using complicated language is a potential barrier to people with poor literacy skills from getting involved. Similarly, meetings may be a barrier to involvement for people with low self-confidence or anxiety.

Understanding who our service users are, and thinking about the issues they face can help us to reflect on whether we're building and/or maintaining barriers to involvement and consider how we can remove them. The variety of methods of involvement may need to be altered so that service users are able to get involved in a way they feel comfortable with. Consultation with them about their preferred methods of involvement is essential.

Historically there's been a lack of feedback given to service users about the result/outcomes of their involvement; positive or negative. This again is a potential barrier to involvement as service users may feel 'nothing changes' or they've not been listened to in the past. This may dissuade them from future involvement.

Good practice standards checklist

- Service users can choose to be involved in a way and at a level that is right for them
- Service users can choose not to get involved and can change their minds about involvement if they want to
- Service users get the right encouragement and help to get involved and to develop or stop their participation, as they choose
- Service users are involved in developing and reviewing information for other service users
- Service users are involved in developing service standards
- Service users are given opportunities to get involved in decision making

- Service users have opportunities to develop policies and procedures
- Service users can expect respect for their contributions
- Service users have the opportunity to give their views and opinions
- Service users are provided with feedback on the results of their involvement
- Service users have an opportunity to work collectively with staff on e.g. user panels; monitoring panels



Top Tips

- ✓ A positive message about the importance of SUI from the senior manager/management team/board is very important and key to successful involvement
- ✓ Be clear about what the intended outcomes of activities are and promote them widely
- ✓ Provide relevant involvement training and support for staff and service users so that they can understand the benefits of SUI
- ✓ Recognise and understand the potential barriers to involvement and try to address them
- ✓ Be sure to incorporate service user involvement in support planning processes
- ✓ “You said, we did” is a way of telling service users about changes and improvements made as a result of their input
- ✓ “You said, we couldn’t because.....” is a way of telling service users why their suggestions can’t be acted on
- ✓ Be creative and share ideas and good practice and lessons learnt across the organisation and beyond
- ✓ Don’t give up if things don’t work out the first time, review and adjust if necessary and try again in the future

For Further information

If you have any other queries or for further information please contact your nearest TPAS Cymru Office:

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