

Service User Engagement Policy

North Staffs Mind's approach to engaging people who use our services in what we do

This policy applies to staff, volunteers and trustees within North Staffs Mind.

Statement of intent

North Staffs Mind is committed to ensuring meaningful service user engagement in all aspects of its work. We regard service user engagement as vital because services that reflect and consider the experiences, needs and wishes of their users are much more likely to be effective in promoting better mental health and supporting the personal recovery of the service user. We believe that service users are the best people to determine how their needs should be met. We recognise that not offering people with lived experience of mental ill health the opportunity to contribute in substantive ways merely reinforces negative views of service users' abilities, can have a detrimental effect on service users' view of themselves and can affect the quality of the services we provide. For engagement to be meaningful, it must make a tangible difference and lead to improvement in our services, measurable through the impact on the mental health of those who use them. We recognise that meaningful service user engagement takes time and effort to develop and requires constant monitoring and improvement to meet changing needs and circumstances.

This commitment requires all staff, volunteers and trustees to encourage and support service user engagement.

Equality and Diversity statement of intent

North Staffs Mind believes all people have the right to be treated fairly and with respect and is committed to taking positive action to fight unlawful discrimination in every aspect of its work. Fundamental to this is the commitment to ensure equality of opportunity both in the provision of services and as an employer.

Ensuring equal opportunities does not mean treating everybody the same – rather, it means recognising people's differences and adapting the way we work in order to ensure that everyone is provided with a fair and equal chance.

North Staffs Mind will challenge indirect discrimination which induces an adverse disproportionate impact on an individual or group of people because of their race, colour, ethnic or national origin, religion, faith, gender, disability or mental health problem, HIV antibody status, AIDS status, marital status, sexual orientation, age or occupational/economic status.

Definition

A service user is defined, for the purpose of this policy, as 'someone who has direct personal experience of mental ill health'. This could be a current service user or previous user of North Staffs Mind's services, or someone who has accessed statutory or other voluntary sector mental health services. We recognise that not everyone will self-identify as a user of mental health services and may prefer the

term 'expert by experience' or see themselves as someone who has lived experience of mental ill health.

Context

The core values that inform North Staffs Mind's work and service delivery are:

- We continually aim to improve the quality of our services
- We aim to improve the mental health, wellbeing and personal recovery of our service users
- We aim to make a difference and be innovative
- We support personal recovery and independence
- We support social inclusion and value equality and diversity
- We are a flexible and enabling organisation, supporting individuals to make choices

- We engage proactively with service users and focus on their needs in a variety of ways
- We use our experience as a deliverer of services to influence others
- We provide added value through the involvement of volunteers
- We are independent and prepared to challenge
- We work collaboratively and in partnership with other agencies.

North Staffs Mind is committed to ensuring meaningful service user engagement in the various aspects of our organisation and activities, namely:

- Governance – strategic direction, overall policy setting, monitoring, financial oversight
- Planning and policy development
- Service delivery, including volunteering
- Design and dissemination of information materials
- Recruitment and selection of staff, volunteers and trustees.

Effective user engagement provides tangible, worthwhile benefits, resulting in development, learning and improved services for service users, staff and the organisation as a whole.

Approach: spectrum of engagement

North Staffs Mind has demonstrated its commitment to increasing service user engagement throughout the organisation by the creation of the discrete role of User Engagement Co-ordinator. North Staffs Mind provides a range of different services, which in turn create a number of opportunities for engagement of, and on the part of, service users. In medium-long term services and interventions such as Partnership Housing and our long-standing Social Support Group, it can be relatively straightforward to increase engagement and participation. North Staffs Mind realises that a large majority of individuals who come into contact with our services – namely, our counselling clients – have a finite, time-limited relationship with the organisation. However, opportunities exist for former counselling clients to remain involved with the organisation. We recognise that, given the specialist nature of some of the services we provide, there are circumstances when it is not realistically possible for service users to shape and change the way we operate as a service provider, and will be honest and open with service users about this.

Users of mental health services clearly have a valuable contribution to make to the development of our organisation; individuals do not need to have direct experience of North Staffs Mind's service delivery in order to be involved. For example, Changes Health and Wellbeing is an active user-led mental health organisation in the local area: we recognise that there can be significant benefit to North Staffs Mind in utilising the skills, expertise and experience of their staff, volunteers and trustees.

Co-ordination of service user engagement

The User Engagement Co-ordinator is the focal point in ensuring that user engagement is embedded and integral across the organisation as a whole. The Co-

ordinator is responsible for leading on user-led activities and supporting colleagues to understand and benefit from users' experiences of services.

Via the Co-ordinator there needs to be continued development and monitoring of:

- A set of 'engagement/involvement values' for the organisation as a whole;
- How we inform service users about involvement opportunities, i.e. via events, publicity, word-of-mouth, or online and on social media;
- How we support service users to improve or develop the skills needed for genuine and meaningful engagement
- How we support service users taking part in engagement activities to manage their mental health and wellbeing, e.g. through supervision, line management or training

- How we identify with service users any boundaries or restrictions to engagement and strategies for removing such barriers;
- How we recognise and practically involve people who use our services whose first language is not English or who have a sensory impairment (speech, hearing, sight and/or mobility issues), thereby addressing issues that might preclude an individual's active engagement in our work. The Co-ordinator has produced both an Accessibility Strategy and Accessible Information Policy for the organisation; these will continue to be monitored and updated on a regular basis.
- Fair remuneration practices to ensure that service users are not out-of-pocket by working within current guidance and in accordance with our Business Expenses policy.

Service user engagement values

North Staffs Mind service users should have the opportunity:

- To be able to have a say in and make informed choices about the individual support they receive and determine how their needs should be met;
- To be supported by staff who work in an anti-discriminatory manner;
- To have information available about their services and rights, including our complaints procedure, the counselling agreement, Health & Safety issues, etc.;
- To be listened to by North Staffs Mind staff, volunteers and trustees;
- To have a say in and be able to influence North Staff Mind's existing service development and the development of new projects and services, i.e. planning, delivery, monitoring, evaluation, training and recruitment of staff.

Service users' involvement in their own service

Individual support is planned in partnership with people who use our services, particularly with respect to our Partnership Housing and our Social Support Group.

To promote good practice, staff in these services must ensure that all service users:

- Fully participate in drawing up any support plans, and agree action plans in order for support to be effective;
- Know they can ask for the involvement of significant others in developing a support plan, i.e. a partner, close friend or relative;
- Have an explanation of any unfamiliar terms used in the support plan and be clear about the plan's aims and outcomes;
- Know who their support workers are and how to contact them, including emergency arrangements, where appropriate;
- Are involved in regular reviews of plans;
- Are aware of the mechanisms for making a complaint and how the complaint will be dealt with, including the timescales involved.

Areas for increased service user engagement

Recruitment and selection:

North Staffs Mind involves service users in the appointment of paid staff and placement counsellors. We are working towards building on these positive foundations to increase opportunities for engagement in all aspects of the recruitment process, including recruitment to the board of trustees; decisions regarding job descriptions/person specifications; wording and placement of advertisements; the shortlisting of applicants, and throughout the interview process.

Evaluation and monitoring:

North Staffs Mind aims to work with service users to continually improve service quality. To build on existing knowledge and experience the organisation needs to work with service users to determine appropriate ways of monitoring each service area/project and support interested service users to develop skills to achieve this.

Techniques for evaluation/monitoring may include: questionnaires and online surveys, interviews, facilitated feedback sessions, exit interviews and discussion meetings/forums.

Governance:

North Staffs Mind believes it is of fundamental importance that service users have a substantive and not just tokenistic voice on the board of trustees and that creative ways of enabling and supporting service users should be employed to achieve this. We recognise that people with lived experience of mental health issues bring different and valued perspectives to contribute to the governance of North Staffs Mind. Service users who wish to become involved in the organisation's governance arrangements are able to be supported in this by the User Engagement Co-ordinator to understand what it involves, as well as having continuing access to the Co-ordinator's support while serving as trustees when required. Service users should also be actively encouraged and supported in performing this role by the Chief Executive and other trustees. Advocated support/engagement involving the User Engagement Co-ordinator can be provided to service users who are interested in being trustees as part of their induction process. This could involve trustee mentoring/shadowing within North Staffs Mind or other agencies where appropriate. Resources will be made available for training service users to acquire the skills necessary for performing their role on the board as effectively as possible.

Service users becoming staff/volunteers:

North Staffs Mind believes that service users can bring unique understanding, insight and empathy to staff/volunteer roles and encourages service users to apply for posts and opportunities. Every application is subject to our Equal Opportunities processes.

Involvement in training of staff:

Service users may access internal/external training opportunities to support them to develop the skills to plan, participate in and monitor services. Opportunities exist for people with lived experience to contribute to regular training for relevant outside agencies as well as in workshops for staff and placement counsellors. Involvement of service users in the delivery of training to staff, and training received by staff in engagement approaches and techniques remains a priority area for further development for the User Engagement Co-ordinator and the Training and Development Manager.

Complaints

If a service user or group of service users feels that decisions are being made without their consultation, or that they are not being properly involved in the decision-making process, they have the right to use this as grounds for making a complaint against staff, the board of trustees or other service users.

Expenses

North Staffs Mind will reimburse approved expenditure incurred by service users in supporting the development of the organisation or with the recruitment of new staff and in accordance with our Business Expenses policy.

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