



Participation in services for people involved in the criminal justice system

Why we have written these notes

These notes bring together the things we have learned about developing and encouraging participation by people who have offences in their background in the support services they use.

The notes have been developed through:

- Conversations with people with offending backgrounds who use services and people who provide services
- Our experiences from encouraging participation in services for people with offending backgrounds
- The experience and comments from workers who participated in a series of workshops
- Established best practice in encouraging and supporting vulnerable people to participate in the services they receive.

We hope staff in these and other services will use the notes to develop and encourage participation in the services you deliver. Please share the notes with people and organisations who will find them useful.

These notes also support a series of workshops with staff from statutory organisations and third sector providers who are exploring ways to encourage and develop greater participation. Thank you to everyone who took part.

“In criminal justice settings - we’re expected to be tough/robust”

What do we mean by participation in services?

“Participation just means people being part of decisions that affect them”

Participation is about people who use services being involved in the decisions around the how the service is delivered and organised. For some this is a new way of working and developing services for people. A broad definition for participation is that people who use services are involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of services they receive.

It can and does include many things such as, asking people about information produced by the service and also how the service could be improved or delivered better to meet the needs of people using the service. It is about asking people who use services things like

- How does the service work for you?
- What could we do to improve the service?
- Would do you think of this idea or plan for doing things differently?

“They (service users) have opinions but aren’t used to being asked”

Why participation is useful

There many reasons why participation is useful for organisations, staff and people. These are the ones we think are important

- Things like buildings, services and systems work better for the people concerned and achieve what was intended.
- It’s a good way to develop ideas and different ways of doing things
- People take part and engage in services and activities if they are asked what works for them
- It makes better use of all the available resources.
- People feel more confident and have improved wellbeing when they are contributing to things
- It makes us more accountable to current and potential people we support, partners, funders and others – showing that we have listened, sought people’s views
- It demonstrates how we want other people to behave

“They are adults who deserve to be heard”

Ways in which people who use a service can be involved

There are four different situations in which people can participate in services.

1: The support each person gets and their own situation

For many this is the starting point for participation and is a simple conversation or ongoing conversations between people who use services and people who provide services. Asking everyday questions such as

“How do things work for you?”

“What would help you and your situation?”

“Has this helped you, shall we try something else?”

Generally people do not only get involved and interested in the other areas when they feel they have influence and are listened to and supported in their own situation first.

2: How an overall service works

This could be an ongoing conversation between people who use services and staff or it could be a group conversation. And because it's about how the overall service works, views and opinions from more than one person is needed.

“Information is something we provide”

3: How a range of services work – such as all the activities of an organisation, or women's health services provided in a Health Board area.

Again this is a situation where a range of views and opinions is needed. They can be sought through one to one conversations or in a group setting. People generally need to see that there is some relevance or impact on their lives before they get involved.

People are more likely to get involved if they feel their views will make a difference. They may also need encouragement to develop and give views.

“They want their ideas to be heard (and we're listening)”

4: People participating in wider issues that affect them or affect people in their circumstances

This could be about changes to things that are happening locally like a hostel closing, a bus route changing, activities in a community centre, and housing issues. Participation here is about working with other groups of people to make and support changes.

Levels of Participation

David Wilcox described a framework for participation which shows how different types and levels of participation work for people using services. It works well for public services and the ways in which people participate in services and activities in Britain. It includes situations where there are many organisations involved – such as a partnership between a local authority and a NHS Board and third sector provider.

The key issue is what `stance' the people managing a participation process, or controlling resources takes, and their reasons for doing so. There are 5 levels - or stances - which offer increasing degrees of control to the other people involved.

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| Information | The least a public body can do is tell people what is planned. |
| Consultation | A public body or several partners offer a number of options and listen to the feedback they get. |
| Deciding together | The public body encourages other people and organisations such as community groups to provide some additional ideas and options, and join in deciding the best way forward. |
| Acting together | Not only do different interests decide together what is best, but they form a partnership to carry it out. |
| Supporting action | The public body helps other people or groups by supporting community initiatives and things they do what they want - perhaps within a framework of grants, advice and support provided by the resource holder. |

The 'lower' levels of participation keep control with the initiator - but they lead to less commitment from other people.

“At TWG - We’re up and down the ladder depending on the activity and the individual”

What do we bring to service user involvement?

We asked people at the workshops what positive things they brought to service user involvement. This is what they said



Ten top tips to encourage and support participation

This list has been compiled from our work exploring service user involvement for services and activities that help vulnerable people with offending backgrounds.

Tip 1: Make it easy - ways in and ways out

Keep things simple and easy for people to participate in activities. We have found that activities and sessions that people can attend as and when they feel able work well for people. Popular practical activities such as walking and talking groups and arts and craft projects, where you can still ask about the service and how things are and participate in something active.

“Every day is different - not planned work”

Tip 2: Keep it simple

A popular way we have come across is a suggestion box on the coffee table where everyone sits and chats. It takes hardly any time to jot an idea or suggestion down, and put it in the suggestion box. It's quick and easy, you don't have to attend a meeting and you don't have to speak up in front of other people either. The box can then be emptied out and read out every few weeks and plans made to put the ideas and suggestions into action.

“Information can lead to participation”

Tip 3: Choice and opportunities

We all like different things. Offering a range of opportunities and different choices helps vulnerable people to make decisions in a safe environment. For example, at TWG, as part of the White Ribbon Campaign we organised a display about the impact of domestic violence and encourage people to sign a pledge against violence towards women as part of the white ribbon campaign. Women choose how they wanted to participate, such as creating and designing the display, blowing up balloons, moving the display around talking to people on the day, asking for the pledge book to be signed.

“TWG - choice is part of the process”

Tip 4: Try things out - not everything works

We don't always know if new ideas and suggestions are going to work. Not everything is going to work and that is OK. Often the only way is to try them out and see. We generally learn more when things don't go quite as we expected than when it all works well. So be brave and give it a go.

Tip 5: Use activities and events

Holding service user meetings can be very useful but for many people they can be too formal, boring and intimidating. Another approach is to talk to people, while they are doing other more practical things. We found people are more likely to chat whilst gardening, taking photographs, sewing and walking.

“When the women are actively involved - PARTICIPATING - they contribute good ideas”

Tip 6: Make it fun

The more enjoyable and fun activities are the more likely it is that people will come along to things. We all like different things so having a range of options helps. Ideas that came from the suggestion box are

- Pamper days
- Film shows
- Karaoke
- Halloween fancy dress
- Christmas party
- Easter hat decorating competition

“Group experience but without added stigma!”

Tip 7: Have a framework and structure

This is the formal bit. A framework for participation is important because this is how you fit all the suggestions, views on the services and opinions into the system and it enables you to act on the comments. It is also a way making sure ideas don't get lost.

When you ask for peoples' opinions on the service you need to be clear about what things you can change, what things are compulsory or have to stay the same and who makes the final decisions. A framework showing how it all fits together helps everyone and makes it work better.

Tip 8: Resources

Resources are things like money or a budget to spend on activities, equipment, rooms and space. It can also mean staff and partner organisations who may be able to help you or share resources.

Tip 9: Budget

“Staff needs money/ resources support and time”

A budget just for participation type activities will support the things you want to do. It may include items that support and encourage people to participate such as tea and biscuits, travel expenses, childcare costs, room hire, and equipment for activities.

Tip 10: Time and support

Having time allocated to participation within workloads helps staff to prioritise participation activities in a busy work environment. For some people this can be a new way of doing things and they may need support to make changes and do things differently. Seeing the impact of increased participation for individuals and to the service can help.

“Roles can be problematic”

For more information

Louise Willson
Outside the Box
louise@otbds.org
07706 433938

