



Personal Outcomes Stories during COVID: Learning from practice

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How have you been able to keep a focus on what matters to people during COVID?



Our organisation has responded effectively to the pandemic. We have been able to reorganise our programmes and activities to deal directly with the needs of our community at this time. This includes new activities, adapting previous work and developing new partnerships based on discussions with our service users, wider community and service delivery partners.

What have you had to do differently and what made this possible?

We are a grassroots organisation, based locally, with little bureaucracy and with a bottom up approach to service delivery. Because many of our staff live locally, we could quickly identify what the community needed and how to deliver. Our flexibility meant staff could support one another on key projects and collaborate on new ideas.

There is a significant Somali community in the South Side. We reached out to see what they needed and found members of their community needed support to access food. They needed reliable halal food but didn't know where to turn. We have responded and our staff have developed new relationships with that community too.

In terms of supporting staff, we introduced new ways to do this and to value their work. We now meet weekly, have a buddy system, support staff with resources to help them work at home, offer flexible hours, additional pay/vouchers and counselling services.

We are now working more strategically with our partners. Previous partnership work with NHS/Social work, schools, housing association tended to be project based and short term.

Our role in Health, Women's and Integration Networks has changed from mainly listening and observing and instigating small projects (monthly because funding was limited). We are working more effectively, with smaller themed groups emerging, with funding, to tackle specific issues around food poverty, racism etc.

What have you noticed that has been better?

- Less bureaucracy within social care, statutory organisations, large anchor organisations has freed up staff to work quickly and more efficiently with community groups like ours. We have enjoyed working more closely with the health improvement team.
- Quick decision-making processes from funders has helped address issues more efficiently and positively. Our staff are able to pilot, try out and be creative in responding to need.
- Additional funds have helped us as well as other organisations respond more creativity to people's needs. We can deliver higher quality activities. ie buy data for service users, buy phones for volunteers.
- Supporting service users and community partners with funding, resources and dedicated staff has built capacity and confidence in people to deliver projects themselves. We've seen a blossoming of skills and confidence in service users to help, contribute and run things for themselves.
- Partnerships between the public and voluntary sector has been positive, a less, 'me first' attitude and more around unity and joined up delivery.

How did this make you feel?

We feel like our own views have been confirmed. Community groups and service users have been saying for a long time that grassroots organisations can make a real difference to service delivery and have the ability to respond to seismic problems at a local level. It's good that the evidence is there to show this.

What have you learned through this?

We have learnt that we play a highly important role within the community. An organisation that people can trust and will offer support.

We have learnt that we can be flexible and adapt very quickly in a crisis.

We have also learnt that we were unprepared for the amount of pressure on our staff and organisation to deliver for the community.

We have learnt that funders, statutory organisations can move quickly and have the resources to commit if they wanted to.

Anything else you want to tell us?

On the negative side-

- staff are exhausted, often feel isolated, miss social contact with each other and with service users/wider community.
- Staff are working longer hours

I would like to be more optimistic about what funders, statutory organisations, local and national governments have learnt from this. I think we have demonstrated now more than ever that we can be trusted to use resources effectively and with good outcomes for people. Where are the avenues for us to inform future policy?