

# Equity, Diversity and Inclusion: Culture and Voice

## Note of breakout session

**Hannah Opie, Homeless Link**

The group heard from **Sunny Dhadley**, Lived Experience Partner on the Homeless Link leadership programmes, and **Helen Hodgson**, Operations Director at Hope at Home, who presented her organisation's case study.

The group then had a Q&A and open discussion on the topic.

### **What steps can we take to ensure our lived experience is more diverse?**

The new EDI maturity tool will help organisations to monitor and engage with where you are. Some practical tips: where is your service visible, where are you promoting? Look at yourselves as an organisation, does your staff-force reflect the people accessing your service? Important to have staff/volunteers that can speak the same languages and there is a diversity in the workforce. Need to be conscious and intentional about making change. Important to think about what you offer and offer a wide range of activities i.e. not just meetings, but getting more creative.

### **What role does volunteering play?**

Often this is a gateway for people to activate their lived experience, great to increase confidence and get maximum results out of their experience. Ask questions about how this experience can add to their journey and help them progress rather than just 'using' volunteers for what they can bring to the organisation. Important to take the time to understand where the volunteer is at when you first meet them. Important to upskill people with literacy and numeracy.

### **Importance of not being too directive in expectations; being open to opinions and advice of people accessing services**

"Something we've had to overcome is the urge to approach any of this work with set expectations. For example, we set up an Advisory Board made up of graduates of our programme. We had all sorts of hopes and expectations of what the board would achieve, but they came with very different ideas and plans."

### **How to avoid staff becoming frustrated/losing momentum when it feels like systems aren't changing quickly enough?**

Important to be honest about this and listen to reflections, making sure that we can be honest about our limitations and have open conversations. Also vital not to rush things and to take time to get things right. Focus on what you can control in your role in the interim.

### **What systems can be used to ensure that information gained from people with lived experience is maximised?**

Ensuring that there is a variety i.e. ensuring that it is noted that they have inputted into meetings/work; ensuring that the emotional labour is accounted for too. Make sure all admin is taken care of, logistics are important – embedding use of evidence throughout rather than at the end.

### **What are the most productive ways to include the voice of people accessing services within work?**

- Theatre productions; high energy ways to involve people. Drama allows you to say what you want to say and express yourself. Important to really commit yourself to the work, balancing between commitment and giving people the space they need.
- Creating client focussed teams – found that when the client is the focus of the work the views of colleagues have changed.
- Lived experience on recruitment panel.
- Important to recognise emotional labour of including people with lived experience. Also recognising the fact that there is a power imbalance when working with people with lived experience – good to offer financial remuneration (in forms of vouchers for instance) for their time and effort. Important to understand that other's story is not our story to tell; important to protect people's lived experience and avoid traumatisation.

### **What have the challenges been?**

- Many challenges about the pace at which work happens.
- Ensuring that they are doing things right and it is properly embedded and getting the balance right between meeting commissioners' expectations and actually embedding the work.

### **How to avoid being tokenistic/tick box exercise?**

- Some people shared that they find this very difficult; balancing the need to do this work with why the work is being done. Ensuring that people are part of an organisation and the culture is inclusive and included in workplace activities.
- Ensure that it is threaded throughout the work – it is part of the organisation rather than something that we are doing – it is a value and there is constant review and ongoing training rather than a one time thing – the golden thread running through the organisation.

### **What more could be done?**

- “In my view, it would be good if management would speak more with front line workers, as they are the bridge between complex need clients who often have daily struggles in their lives going on and organizations”
- Understanding trauma and trauma informed ways of working can also be really helpful to make those first steps in assertively engaging those who experience those multiple needs.