



USER INVOLVEMENT POLICY

1.0 Introduction:

Disability Equality North West (DENW) is a Disabled People's Organisation (DPO), which is led and controlled by disabled people, who are also service users. Our governing document states that 'at least 75%' of the trustee board should be disabled people, we aim for a higher number and our board is typically made up of 90%-100% of disabled people. DENW ensures that the Social Model of Disability and user involvement shapes all that it does, from the Strategic planning process through design and delivery of services, this may include: engagement, policy, campaigning, service provision, volunteering, research and representation. The Social Model, DENW and DPO history/culture training is mandatory for all volunteers, trustees and staff, to ensure that everyone involved fully understands the 'social model of disability' and the importance of user involvement.

2.0 Policy development

"In a voluntary organisation providing services for disabled people, one user of its services thought that getting involved meant "being able to voice opinion, being heard and acted upon" and another user said that involvement meant "making friends"..¹

User involvement at DENW starts with the strategic planning process – with each plan lasting a minimum of 3 years, we aim to involve at least 100 disabled people, usually more, in the planning process – this ensures that the key aims in the final plan, meet the needs of local disabled people – and

this gives the Board of Trustees, Chief Executive, Volunteer and Staff teams a clear focus for their work and fundraising.

To achieve this, we use a wide variety of approaches and methods to develop user involvement. All embrace the following key principles and attitudes:

- A commitment to listen and acknowledge service users opinions and concerns
- A commitment to the development of opportunities for user involvement and active consideration of this in all work
- A willingness to explore different user-involvement relationships in line with specific project needs and service user concerns and a recognition of barriers to these (e.g. user-forums and structured feedback; user leadership; peer support; co-production).
- User involvement should be simple, direct, relevant, and purposeful.
- User involvement is not a product or a destination (c.f. 2.3)

2.2 DENW definition of a service user:

DENW's definition of a service user is anyone who considers themselves to be a disabled person i.e. with a physical or sensory impairment, learning difficulty, mental health issue and/or long-term condition) or, at times, an informal carer of a disabled person who uses services, including DENW services. This means that DENW's understanding of "service-user" covers the experience of disabled people in dealing with services generally not just ours.

2.3 DENW's understanding of user involvement:

In the voluntary sector, research into existing practice has shown that most organizations tend to use approaches which fall into (or between):

User-centred user involvement: where user involvement means that service users are able to set and pursue their own objectives and priorities

and have opportunities to organise and meet in ways that suit them. Examples at DENW would include support and facilitation of disabled people's initiatives where we provide physical resources, advice and our networks (e.g. social/support groups, campaigns etc.) but do not direct the activity.

Management-centred user involvement: where user involvement means that service users take part in existing structures and within the agenda set by the service-providing or campaigning organisation. Examples at DENW would include formal consultations; user involvement in project planning; and directly elected service users as Trustees (an important point; it makes DENW significantly different in its commitment to user-involvement compared to organisations without this fundamental aspect of user/provider accountability).

As a disabled people's organisation, DENW is run and controlled by disabled people, ensuring that the voice and lived experience of disabled people is a constant, rather than just at the design stage of a project/service.

3.0 Why do we need user involvement?

To provide expertise and knowledge based on the lived experience of dealing with disabling barriers in daily life and in the use of services available to disabled people (e.g. information provision, direct payments, individual budgets, education, employment services, transport, local authority services etc.).

3.1 Other reasons for involving service users

- To promote the confidence of disabled people/service users
- To ensure that we are providing appropriate services making them more cost effective and efficient.
- To think together and work in partnership.
- So we can use service users' ideas to improve our services and develop the skills of disabled people/service users.

- User involvement is increasingly important in official policy, in the conditions set by statutory and charitable funders, in quality assurance checklists and in central government policy and guidance.

3.2 How do we provide ways for service users to do this?

- All DENW services have a lead member of staff responsible for reporting service user feedback regularly and for the design of an appropriate user involvement approach. In addition, service users are welcome to give their feedback – both positive and negative – suggestions and opinions by letter, telephone, e-mail, in person or any other reasonable method.
- Our website www.disability-equality.org.uk using 'contact us' page
- Our social media sites

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/Disability Equality NW](http://www.facebook.com/Disability%20Equality%20NW)

Twitter: [www.twitter.com/Disability Equality NW](http://www.twitter.com/Disability%20Equality%20NW)

You Tube: [www.youtube.com/channel/Disability Equality NW](http://www.youtube.com/channel/Disability%20Equality%20NW)

- Regular events for members. These are an opportunity for user involvement, peer support and feedback on any concerns or issues.
- Events and Forums for the general public, wider disabled community and our partners. Forum work with many public sector bodies to improve service delivery and in reviewing policies. Key representatives will come to the Forum meetings to discuss any barriers to service delivery or new initiatives. Forum members also get involved in external consultation exercises, typically this may be with the local authority on planning issues or changes to service.
- DENW frequently uses formal consultation mechanisms in project work.

3.3 Recruitment & Selection of paid staff:

All posts within DENW, either new or existing are recruited in line with the recruitment policy, which covers best practice in recruiting the right person into the right role and putting appropriate support in place. They are advertised as “disability. Disabled people are fully involved in the short-listing and recruitment process for new staff.

3.4 How do DENW Volunteers fit into this?

DENW volunteers who wish to raise issues or feedback about a service they have accessed, will use the same routes and mechanisms as service users described above.

However if volunteers have suggestions or feedback regarding their volunteering experience with DENW, they should use the procedures outlined in the “*DENW Volunteering Policy*”.

1 ROBSON P, BEGUM N, and LOCKE M, (2003). “*Developing user involvement: Working towards user-centred practice in voluntary organizations*” Joseph Rowntree Foundation/The Policy Press ISBN 1 86134 537 2