

Link Person Handbook

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

As a Link Person you have a special role in this training and facilitation process. You are a link between the training and the 'real world' of user involvement in your health and social service. You also facilitate relationships between participants and key people in your service to build a foundation for future user involvement work. By doing this while participants are still training they start to see user involvement in action. They gain a better understanding of what it may mean for them personally, for other users, carers and the public, and for health and social service staff.

This handbook will support you in this role. In Section 1 of the handbook you will find information on:

- the purpose of the training and facilitation resource
- the main sections in the resource
- how the training and Link Time sessions fit together
- what is in the Trainer and Participant handbooks
- guidelines for your role

In Section 2 of the handbook there is information on each Link Time to match each Core and Theme unit in the resource. For each Core or Theme unit three areas are covered:

1. A brief background on the Core or Theme unit
2. A summary of the content for each unit and its parts - this includes what personal exercises participants have been asked to do
3. Guidelines on how to prepare for Link Time meetings and what information to cover with training participants

Hopefully you enjoy your role and gain as much from this training and facilitation resource as the participants will gain.

1. The training and facilitation resource

1.1 Why has this resource been created?

This resource has been created for several reasons:

- to help people learn more about user involvement
- to link people directly with health and social services
- to identify people who can train others in user involvement
- to learn about the impact that training in user involvement has on people's skills, confidence and opportunities to do user involvement work

The resource will help users, carers and the public learn more about user involvement in health and social services. While it was initially developed with a focus on the NHS, it can also apply to health or social service agencies or organisations in the private and voluntary sector.

A key feature of the resource was designing it to link users, carers and the public directly with health and social service organisations - this is your role as the Link Person. This is what the 'facilitation' part of the name means. By connecting to the 'real world' of services they can start building relationships where they may do user involvement work. This is important because stand-alone training may not be effective, particularly for users, carers and members of the public who do not have existing or strong links with a service. Rather than wait for a phone-call to be invited into user involvement work, the direct linking creates opportunities while they are still training that can carry on once the training is finished.

The resource will make it possible to identify people who would like to train other people in user involvement. This will increase the number of users, carers and the public who feel able and are available to do this important work.

Finally, it is vital to continue evaluating user involvement work and learn about what is working, what is not working and why. This resource includes evaluation tools that can track participants' experiences before, during and after the training, and any shifts in their knowledge, skills and

confidence. This contributes to the evidence base for user involvement in general. It also creates a baseline that any organisation or group can use to compare the outcomes of user involvement training and activity as part of long-term evaluation.

The resource covers three main areas:

- core knowledge and skills in user involvement
- user involvement in service planning and improvement
- user involvement in research and development activity

Training participants attend training and 'Link Time' meetings in one or more of these areas. The trainer will tailor a training programme to meet the needs of the particular group of participants based on the units and unit parts that are available. The programme may provide an introduction as a basis for people to start getting involved, or they may choose sections that add to participants' existing knowledge and experience.

1.2 Who is the resource for?

The resource is for any service user, carer or member of the public who believe they would benefit from attending the training - from beginners to experienced people who want to expand their role. NHS and social service staff may also benefit from sharing the learning experience through shared training. The trainer may decide to do this as part of a training programme.

1.3 Main sections of the resource

The training and facilitation resource has three main sections:

1. The **Training Handbook** - this is for people who conduct the training for participants. These people will be service users, carers or members of the public who are experienced in user involvement. There may be a combination of health and social service staff and service users involved in the training, but most of the trainers will be users.
2. The **Participant Handbook** - this provides information that participants will use during the training, including space to write notes on all the different activities.

3. The **Link Person Handbook** - this is for people who hold the Link Time meetings with participants.

1.4 What happens in the training and facilitation?

1.4.1 Training units

During training meetings, participants come together as a whole group for teaching sessions with trainers. There are five training units - three core units and two theme units. Each unit will focus on a particular topic and include important information that participants need to know about user involvement and health and social services for that area.

1.4.2 Unit 'parts'

Each training unit has been divided into several 'parts.' This gives trainers the option of using a training unit as a whole unit of learning, as each part is designed to build on and expand the previous part in that unit and previous units. Alternatively, they can choose those parts that the participants need to learn. This 'pick and mix' approach allows trainers considerable flexibility in tailoring the training to a specific purpose and the level of experience and ability of the group. As the Link Person, ask for a copy of the specific training programme that the trainer is running so you know which of the Link Time meetings you need to facilitate.

Each part has one or more training activities. For each activity, there are two or several activity options to add another layer of flexibility. Recommendations for combining the activity options are provided so that any combination will achieve the learning objective for the training activity. The activity options allow for different levels of interaction between group members, and between the trainer and participants. Trainers can choose those options that fit with the style of learning preferred by the group or their level of experience.

1.5 What happens in the Link Time?

Most people will do the training because they want to be involved in a particular health service, social care service, or an agency or organisation from the private or voluntary sectors. The training units provide general

information that is valuable, but by themselves they are not enough. Participants need to know about the specific activities and interests of the service or organisation with which they could be involved. As described above, they also need the opportunity to build a relationship with health and social service staff, and identify possible user involvement activities. This is the focus of the Link Time meetings that you will facilitate. It is a very important part of the training and facilitation resource.

Trainers will arrange for participants to be directly linked into the service or organisation that they want to be involved with. This will happen before, during and after the training. The information in the training units becomes more 'real' through the Link Time meetings that you facilitate as participants start applying what they learn.

You are the person in the health or social service who will have the job of being a 'Link Person.' You will meet with people individually or in small groups depending on your and the participants' preferences. During these meetings you will introduce participants to information that helps them understand how to be involved in **your specific** health or social service, or organisation. This includes negotiating their user involvement role, the support that can be provided and the different opportunities for involvement. Through Link Time meetings participants will build a relationship with you and other people from the service to whom you introduce them. This can form the basis of an ongoing partnership between participants and your service or organisation in doing user involvement work.

1.6 How does it all fit together?

Figures 1 and 2 on pages six and seven provide an overall picture of the three 'core' units and two 'theme' units of the training and facilitation resource, including each of the unit parts. Most units have four parts, but due to the different stages of the research and development cycle Theme 2: Unit 5 has eight parts.

If participants have limited knowledge and experience of user involvement and health and social services, then they will start with the core units. Those participants who are already involved may do less of the core units and focus more on specific theme units and parts.