

Building support: influencing the next government and other stakeholders

Workshop at the National Multiple Needs Summit, 22 April 2015

At the first national multiple needs summit, Opportunity Nottingham and Voices from the Frontline held a joint workshop on how to build support and influence stakeholders.

People working with both projects described their experiences, and others shared good practice from their own areas and organisations.

The session was chaired by Claire Richmond from Opportunity Nottingham and Sam Thomas from Voices from the Frontline, who took the following rough notes on the day.

Session 1: Opportunity Nottingham

- We're all people - not a diagnosis. People who've lived it are the experts.
- Working together on policy created initial scepticism. But if we can make noise, we can make people listen.
- Working with funders - coming to a charity without relationships. Getting endorsements is key if you have no track record. Brought in lots of funding and opportunities.
- Ask "why did you fund us?" Helps make the case to other funders.
- Make yourself really visible – to commissioners, stakeholders. Make it relevant to them.
- Decide whether you want to influence policy or practice. It's not always true that one follows the other, because of localism. Do you really need a change in the law? Where is the change needed?
 - e.g. local welfare assistance payments. National policy, local discretion.
- Get the right people in the room, and you'll get the right answers. Go into a room feeling confident. Get people to listen to what you say (even if they roll their eyes.)
- Listen to them – help solve their problems.
- Government shadowing scheme – led to work through connections. Connecting Policy with Practice (Institute for Government / BLF)
- Bring people together and get them to talk about a real case study - they realise that languages are different, and there are other worlds they very rarely think about
- Terminology: how to use language to explain what's different. People have heard the same words over and over again for years.
- 'Innovation fatigue': explaining Fulfilling Lives, met with people saying 'you're just another person coming to my meetings – we'll never see you again'.
- Sometimes the bad news and bad stereotypes that exist can make it really difficult. It can help to capitalise on them, though. "If I don't address those stereotypes, we haven't had a conversation."
- People do believe the myths, and if you say you're going to bust them, some people will just stop listening. Have to go some distance to them.
- Need to catch people's attention.

- When you start with an earnest approach to challenge people, there can be a conflict with organisations that are competing for funding. They might say 'we're not ready for that' - we want cash back, and we need the evidence.
- The higher people are up, the less they know about what's happening down below... build relationships based on helping them see what's happening. How do you bring things that don't work to their attention?

Session 2: Voices from the Frontline

- Starting from the beginning, changing the way we think, making people feel human
- Don't know who to turn to, I was out on the streets with nobody to talk to
- Why is nobody talking about it
- Expert citizen can be a bit patronising
- We need to move away from defensive practice. They can help people raise their voice, but services are not really listening if they're only defending their own position.
- Be a critical friend. Don't throw a strop.
- Example of the campaign re: cuts to services. 'You are killing people'. Not effective – instead say: 'We know you well enough to know you'll be upset to hear that somebody died recently.'
- Services are obsessed with closing cases. Should keep them open until the person closes them. WE could change that because it is a service issue.
- You need to put things back into people's lives.
- People take this to mean you don't care. And that brings a whole set of other problems, e.g. depression.
- Credit where credit is due. Don't assume a divide between policy people and lived experience. There can be an overlap.
- Listen to multiple views. We need a different way of listening. It is hard to listen to lots of voices.
- Cabinet Office – not defenders of the system, want to make it better, but you are part of the system.
- Unintended consequences. They don't want to be there, commissioners don't want them to be there, services don't. It's about discretion here – there are exceptional circumstances. Defensive practices are an unintended consequence of a competitive environment.
- Government doesn't always think in the way you need for system change. They would just change it to a similar system. Better to focus on the ground.
- The system is class-based and stratified. People feel threatened. Policy makers make policy based on their experiences and their fears.