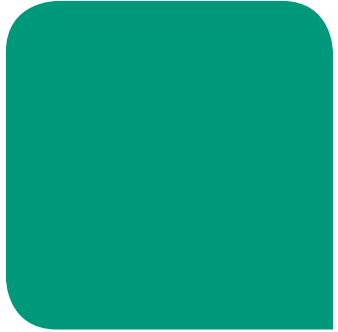


Seldom heard: Developing inclusive participation in social care



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Introduction

Ensuring that the voices of seldom heard service users are not marginalised is a key challenge for practitioners and managers. It is crucial that people from seldom-heard groups are able to take up the opportunities presented by the personalisation of social care services. SCIE's Position paper 10 shows how through an integrated way of working the participation of people from seldom-heard groups can be enabled. The report is based on findings from previous research and primary case study research.

Debates about participation have tended to talk about 'hard-to-reach' groups, suggesting that there is something about these individuals that prevents their engagement with services. 'Seldom heard' is a relatively new term, which stresses the responsibility of agencies to reach out to excluded people, ensuring that they have access to services and that their voices can be heard.

This position paper focuses on four groups: homeless people with addiction problems, people from black and minority ethnic communities,

people with communication impairments and people with dementia. The position paper does not describe in detail specific access requirements for each group, instead it outlines an inclusive approach to participation. Therefore the findings may be applicable to a range of groups who are considered to be seldom heard.

This summary includes some tools and a visual model (see pages 8-9) outlining how to enable the participation of seldom-heard groups. The practice framework and the model are offered as a starting point, for others to test and develop.

Approaches to participation

The services and projects taking part in this study operated within different policy and funding environments, and approached participation in different ways. The research identified two polarised approaches to participation. The first approach viewed participation as a discrete activity which staff attempted to plan and carry out in addition to delivering services. The second approach made no distinction between service delivery and participation: participation was part and parcel of everyday activities and relationships. It is suggested by the position paper that it is an integrated approach to participation that is most effective in engaging seldom-heard people who use services.

Values that support the participation of seldom-heard groups

One of the key components of the integrated or 'everyday' approach is its value base. Efforts of staff to build strong relationships with people who use services, developing trust, mutual understanding and respect, provided the foundation for an integrated approach to participation. Staff did not make assumptions about why or how an individual could be involved. People using services were at the centre of the process. Interviews with people who use services highlighted the importance they placed on staff who acted in ways that were inclusive and non-judgemental, and who were positive about the potential of the people using services. Strategies for overcoming practical barriers to participation flowed naturally from the value base. People using services and staff recognised the need for effective practical arrangements, ensuring access to information, services and debates. This way of working became second nature for staff committed to an everyday approach to participation

Resolving differences

The experiences of staff and people who use services in the case studies revealed a number of tensions which often occur in participation activity. Resolving these tensions required staff and people using services to negotiate how they work together. The box below outlines some of these tensions.

Table 1: Tensions

Clarity of purpose	↔	A variety of choices
Clear expectations of people using services	↔	Flexibility and adaptability of services and projects
Meeting output-based external expectations about participation	↔	Respecting priorities of each individual using services
Meeting management demands for consultation	↔	Focusing on the process of developing relationships and trust
Encouraging people who use services to get involved	↔	Being realistic about individual capacity and motivation
Expecting staff to be 'experts' and make decisions	↔	Recognising expertise of people using services and sharing responsibility
Participation allocated to specific staff, with targets set by funders	↔	Participation as part of everyone's work

Barriers

The research revealed a number of barriers – attitudinal, organisational, cultural and practical – to achieving everyday involvement of people from seldom-heard groups.

Barriers to good practice include:

- a perception that some staff do not believe in the potential of the people they are supporting
- not enough thinking time or communication time for some people with impairments
- an emphasis on meetings and on computer-based communication
- a perception that a service or group is 'not for me', or concern about being labelled a 'person who uses services'
- fear that complaining or criticising services will jeopardise the service or an individual's access to it
- lack of interpreters, accessible transport, or information in appropriate formats
- poor acoustic environments for communication
- difficult group dynamics.

Good practice to overcome barriers includes:

- treating people with respect and valuing individual contributions
- describing clearly what someone can expect from getting involved and what they are expected to contribute

- making sure people know they can say 'no' to getting involved
- offering a variety of activities and ways to get involved, such as helping others, learning, socialising
- allocating sufficient resources for communication, transport, meetings, support and payment.

Table 2: Putting yourself in the shoes of a person using services

Questions that people may have in mind when deciding about getting involved:

Will I be treated with respect?

What will I get out of it?

What can I offer?

Can I make a difference?

Are these opportunities relevant, interesting and enjoyable?

Will I be of help to others like me?

Will I have problems with communication, transport or other support?

Can I talk to someone to find out more?

The practice framework

The model on page 8 shows how the practice framework can become a practical reality. It summarises essential elements that will enable practitioners to help people using services from seldom-heard groups to engage with services and projects in ways that suit them and lead to positive outcomes.

Conclusion

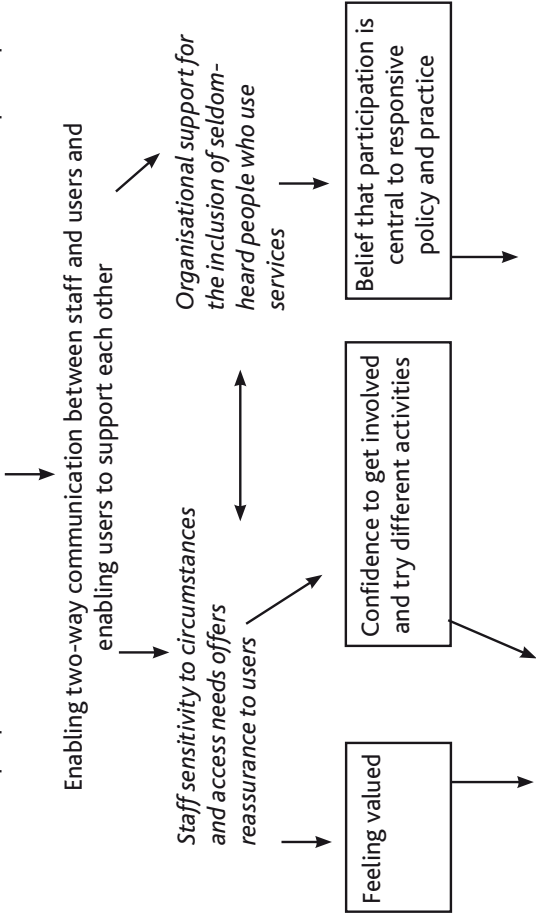
Social care services are going through a period of rapid change. As the implementation of the personalisation agenda proceeds the issues discussed in this report will take on a renewed urgency. Everyone has the right to be involved in planning and decision making about their everyday lives and the services they receive. The voices of some people, however, are less likely to be heard. During periods of rapid change and innovation, seldom-heard people who use services may find it even more difficult to communicate their requirements. This position paper suggests that seldom-heard users of social care services can become engaged if practitioners and managers adopt an integrated, “everyday” approach to participation.

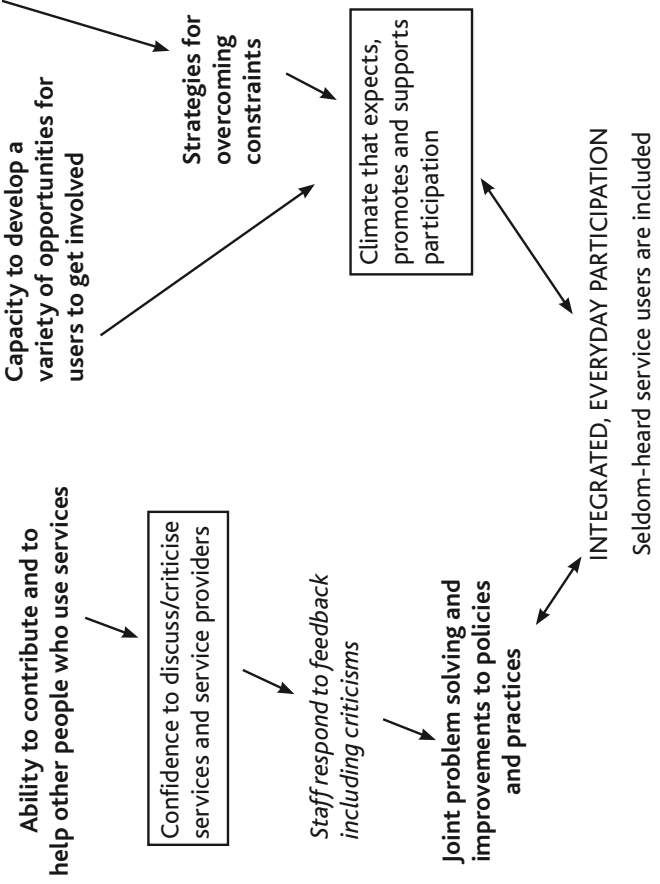
Practice model for everyday participation

In the model below, the sentences in the boxes are the factors which enable services to achieve everyday participation. The sentences in *italics* are how the service providers and users work together. The sentences in **bold** type are the responses to the positive attitudes and activity.

PARTICIPATION AS AN 'ADD-ON'

Seldom-heard people who use services are often excluded from service user participation





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