

Unity 12 film transcript

Narrator: Unity 12, in Southampton, is home to half a dozen organisations, some of which have been in existence since the mid eighties. Together, they allow disabled people to access all their independent living needs under one roof. We spent the day finding out about one way that the local authority and local user led organisations have worked together to improve networking and enable a constructive dialogue between users, carers and the local authority.

Kate Gurner (Head of Customer Care and Engagement, Hampshire County Council, Adult Services): The historic ULOs in the area have been involved in quite a lot of the major projects around direct payments for example and there's a long history of involvement there. Back in the summer of 2008 we had our Commission of Enquiry into personalisation, which was set up by our leader Councillor Ken Thornber and offered the opportunity for members of the public to come and hear pieces of evidence really, about people's experiences of using services within Hampshire. That really gave us a huge wealth of information and set us on the way of where we were going to take our personalisation agenda. Out of that was born the Personalisation Expert Panel or what we know as the PEP. They're self-named, they are exactly that, they are experts by experience. They don't set themselves up to be representative of all client groups. I think that would be unfair for them to kind of think that they could do that. But what they do do is drive forward the user experience of our services and they're there to ensure that we are meeting our targets and aspirations in delivering the personalisation agenda. They have been hugely influential and I think over the last 18 months, have really grown in the way that they've been able to take things forward.

Robert Droy (Independent Living Team Leader, Southampton Centre for Independent Living): The PEP meet on a monthly basis and we discuss a whole range of topics, mostly around personalisation and self-directed support and how independent living can be facilitated for a wide range of disabled people and carers.

Kate Gurner: What I really want to be able to achieve is to get user led organisations and other groups to work together and not in isolation. It's very easy for those groups to work in isolation because, perhaps, they haven't had any support in the past from the local authority or just the fact that they don't know each other exists. Obviously, there is the business element as well, so some people are small social enterprises so there is that money-making aspect as well. So, all of those things needed to be taken into consideration. We shouldn't shy away of getting everybody in a room together and having a discussion about where we can take this. I could design a user strategy that would look all-singing and all-dancing but actually, it has to do what it says on the packet and we need to decide how we do that. I can't do that, I need to hear it from the people that it will affect in the long run.

Iain Speed (All Inclusive Disability Consultants CIC): I get two things. Firstly, I get my chance to put my point of view and secondly, it's interesting to see what other people's points of view are. I can see PEP having a permanent position in council authority because it will always require a consultative platform with disabled people.

Kate Gurner: In terms of developing other user groups, developing the PEP as we have it, one of the things that you need to be absolutely clear about is what exactly it is you want that group to do. If you just want them to be a group that you engage with, or you have them along because you feel that you should, that's fine but be upfront and be honest about that. If you want them to influence your decision making and to drive forward your agenda then you have to be really clear about what you're asking them.

Robert Droy: We hope that, in the future, the PEP will become a really strong way that user involvement can be ingrained into everything that Hampshire County Council does around promoting inclusion for disabled people within the wider community.

Kate Gurner: I thought I could 'do' user involvement within a few months and I'd get it and understand it but actually, it's bigger than me, it's bigger than any local authority and as an organisation you have to listen to that. You have to accept that, listen to the people who are experts by experience. Take those bite sized chunks and do what you can in an area, learn from it, move to another area. Look at the models that are being developed in other organisations and in other local authorities because one size won't fit all.