

Wheelchair User Group

Tips on setting up (and maintaining)

- Devise an information/launch leaflet with a draft constitution, meeting schedule etc. to give to users at assessment and attach to all equipment on delivery.
- Manager to ensure a recurring budget allocation to contribute to attendees' travel costs – re-imburement should happen on the day of the meeting.
- All staff to inform users/carers, at assessment for example, that they will be part of a User Group regardless of their ability to attend.
- Invite users and carers who are motivated to influence change – these may be people who have not had the best experience of the service.
- Know your local groups e.g. Access Groups, Volunteer agencies – ask the Chair to raise the launch of a User Group at their meetings.
- Try to get a cross-section of your catchment area - geographical, age and disabling condition.
- Agree a regular time, date and venue to meet, so members who are not regular attendees can re-join at any time i.e. 12.30pm 1st Thursday in the month.
- Secretary of the group to devise a mailing list so minutes can be sent out to interested users who are unable to attend – these to be posted before the next meeting, so any comments can be discussed.
- Any User Group should be 'owned' by the users and so officers are to be elected – Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and agree the constitution, AGM schedule etc.
- Invite Guest speakers e.g. local MP, Commissioners etc.
- Be aware that the first few meetings will inevitably focus on the members' personal issues as these will be their only real experience of the service which they are able to comment on, until they become more knowledgeable – be patient! A wider view will emerge.
- Initially the support of Admin may be helpful for minutes etc. whilst a confident secretary from the group is established.

- Try to gain ‘quick wins’ in the early days, so the group can be confident in their sphere of influence i.e. a change in service practise initiated by the users. This will establish that the group is not just consultative and will motivate the members to continue.
- Manager of the service to attend all meetings as a member – this gives an assurance that the group is valued and the views of the group are heard and acted upon – only by exception should another member of staff deputise.
- Manager to keep the group informed of pressures in the service, changes in staff, proposed changes in service delivery – the group is only effective if they have the knowledge to offer an opinion.
- **Manager needs to acknowledge that a well established User Group is likely the most important meeting they will attend, being a powerful influence for positive change.**

Devised by:-

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