

Barriers and Bridges to Engagement

There are many challenges to be overcome in making engagement activities accessible to as many service users and carers as possible. Some of the barriers are listed below.

- Lack of visibility of opportunities
- Lack of strength to search for opportunities
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of self-belief, and own ability to influence change.
- Not feeling skilled enough to undertake a representative role
- Low income – need advance help to buy travel tickets, accommodation and food
- Lack of access to IT/digital exclusion
- Lack of faith that services will listen or change for the better
- Fear of loss of benefits
- Rurality, transport issues, and connectivity
- Past bad experience of engagement
- Past experience of services not listening
- Not being treated well
- Lack of interest, from service users and carers who might be involved or from other stakeholders in the service user and carer input
- Not hearing what happens after contributions
- Person not well enough to engage
- Opposition from decision-makers questioning the role of service users and carers on decision-making groups
- Staff barriers are related to workload, interest in engagement, competing priorities and insufficient resources to make engagement accessible
- Stigma
- People fearing their ideas are too 'different' to be taken seriously by professionals

- Format and language of more formal meetings
- Lack of support to engage
- Access issues such as visual impairment poor hearing or the need for interpreters
- Third sector tend to reach people in an inconsistent way rather than targeted

The solutions to these barriers need to be identified. Some ideas for 'bridges' to involvement are listed below.

- Third sector and statutory sector engagement workers who act as a contact point for those interested in getting involved
- Provide a point of contact for people to bring their views to the attention of service user and carer representatives on national, regional and local decision-making groups
- Third sector led engagement groups which give people an opportunity to talk about their experiences of services and their views about how they need to change, building skills and confidence. (Examples include 'Engage to Change' in Powys, The 'Service User Engagement Group' or SUEG in Cardiff, 'Involve to evolve' in Cwm Taff, the Stronger in Partnership group in Bridgend and Swansea.) These groups can also be an avenue through which people can be appointed to more formal role
- Clear requirements for representation on key groups such as the Local Mental Health Partnership Boards, in Government Mental Health strategy, where there must be at least 2 service user and 2 carer representatives appointed by their peers including deputies for each to ensure representation
- A straightforward process to get involved
- Get buy-in for engagement and co-production at a local level, including with front-line staff
- Greater investment in co-production and engagement to reduce barriers and increase visibility of the opportunities available
- Provide support to get involved, for instance with the application process, with contributing at meetings, with understanding papers, etc.
- Buddy for people who are newly involved
- Helpline for finding engagement opportunities

- Access through information given at conferences, through 3rd sector involvement, and through front line staff in statutory sector services
- People may look for opportunities. Therefore, opportunities must be easy to find
- Make sure that people don't have to search for information – be proactive
- Keep in touch through phone calls, emails, social media
- Put all opportunities in one place e.g. Forum website and advertise this widely
- Talk about involvement within clinical relationships
- Advertise involvement in all service delivery areas
- Opportunities for widening access through social media.
- Have a bigger presence on social media – use of re-posting of good outcomes, and celebrating success to get the message out to more people and raise awareness of the work being done
- Use of storytelling to develop confidence and presentation skills
- Access to a welfare benefits advisor
- Have a constantly open recruitment process for engagement opportunities e.g. Forum membership
- Leaflets to give information about engagement opportunities and how to find them – put in GP surgeries and other service delivery waiting areas
- Services identifying mistakes and learning from them. Sharing evidence from learning across organisations, regionally and nationally (across UK) encourages people to believe the service can learn from them too, and hence encourages engagement
- Training for staff in the importance and benefits of co-production and in how to support co-production in a way which builds service user and carer confidence (co-produced and co-delivered by service users and carers)
- Address digital exclusion by providing training and the tools needed to connect, and/or running hybrid events and meetings which combine face to face and digital access
- Support people in formal roles to better understand jargon and acronyms, plus using plain language and not using technical language when communicating with the public

- Provide training for service users and carers (potentially also with staff) where this will improve skills and confidence
- The environment and culture for engagement is safe and friendly
- Information is bilingual as well as meeting needs of other cultures and languages e.g. sensory impaired
- Being very aware of access issues and maximising access, accordingly, including by creating multiple possible ways for people to engage, and by making documents accessible
- Transport and mobility barriers may be addressed using virtual meetings, or face to face meetings with additional virtual access
- Expenses paid on the day (when notice is given of meetings) and/or help with any forms on the day
- Senior involvement in engagement processes to demonstrate commitment by organisations and to ensure learning is embedded in the organisation

Reducing barriers to engagement is everybody's responsibility. This includes professionals in the frontline and at all levels of management, academia, inspection, regulation, and policy making. However, some individuals have a greater potential due to their role. This would include people who chair meetings. Service users and carers are also responsible for making each other welcome, supporting each other and being respectful of each other's opinions.

Staff, carers and service users, who are under pressure, should get praise, recognition and support for what they do.

A change of culture where engagement becomes a part of everybody's job, would facilitate a running conversation with service users and carers all the time (in line with the requirements of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014).

Service Users and Carers need to be able to routinely share their feedback in multiple forms (anonymous, online, paper survey etc) and have an avenue to put their name forward to work with services on service design and change, staff recruitment and so on.

Everybody and anybody can provide support for engagement.

Where support is locally commissioned or provided in house it would be helpful to have an independent organisation through which to resolve concerns and complaints about the support offered, where concerns are not adequately addressed

locally. This might be a similar role to the Public Service Ombudsman. This organisation must be free of any vested interest and be able to challenge poor practice and stimulate resolution.

Below is a list of best practice examples of overcoming barriers to engagement.

- Storytelling to improve confidence and presentation skills
- Animated videos – based on service user stories
- Time to Change Wales – champions have blogs
- Service User and Carer champions, benefits of getting involved, meeting other likeminded people, gaining confidence through developing skills
- ‘Shared Power’ training PTHB
- Using ice breakers to start meetings and keeping in touch with representatives
- ‘Standards of Wrexham Service Group’ is a mixed disability group, who look at services to see if they are fit for them. They go out and talk to local businesses about being safe for people who are vulnerable. They look at the environment to make sure it is dementia friendly. The group want people to be involved in tender exercise as well and have developed policy/guidelines on getting them involved in the process. The LD section is fully involved in recruitment, in panels, workshops that involve people with LD, and family members are invited to meet and greet their potential support worker. There is a range of people with different disabilities involved in this group in Wrexham.
- Preparation, clear instruction, active listening and understanding why someone wants to be involved.
- Gwent Area Planning Board (APB) gave funding for 23 service users of Gwent Drug and Alcohol Service to attend training including confidence building, Meeting management, Understanding the system training, What your rights in treatment are etc.
- Treat service users and carers as equals, check in with them from time to time, and arrange coaching if wanted
- Engage to Change (Powys) – a forum to voice opinions and raise concerns
- Community Agents/social prescribers
- Tide’s training to empower carers – supporting carers of those living with dementia
- Citizens Cymru training to support engagement