

# Dartford Gravesham and Swanley Mind

## SERVICE-USER AND BENEFICIARY INVOLVEMENT POLICY

### 1. Overview

#### 1.1 Definitions

The term 'service-user' within the Mind network of organisations often refers to someone who has had experience of mental ill-health, whether or not they are currently using any services. The term 'beneficiary' refers to those who are currently using services, and for the purpose of DGS Mind, and this policy, therefore refers also to Carers who, potentially without any mental health issues of their own, also use services. It includes also clients of the counselling service, some of whom, while experiencing significant life difficulties, would not wish to describe themselves as a person experiencing mental health issues.

#### 1.2 Rationale for an Involvement Policy

DGS Mind believes that the organisation should promote the involvement of those who use our services for the following reasons:

- Where people who use services are involved in planning and running of them those services will be more responsive to the needs of the people they should serve, and better quality services will be the result.
- People with mental health issues are in a very real sense the experts on their own mental health experiences
- Participation and empowerment improve mental health because of the improvement in self esteem and feelings of self-worth, self confidence and coping skills. Where people have been significantly involved in their own recovery and growth, these gains are more likely to be sustained.
- Our ethos of respect for the individual leads us to respect people's wish to be involved
- Where beneficiaries can run elements of the service themselves, this frees up time and thus extends the scope of what the organisation as a whole is able to accomplish
- The organisation places value on working in a non-paternalistic and democratic manner

### 2. Implementation

#### 2.1 The levels of involvement

We recognise different levels on which service-user and beneficiary involvement are manifested:

Involvement in setting up one's own individual recovery.

Involvement in commenting on services.

Involvement in planning services.

Involvement in the delivery of services.

#### 2.2 Involvement in setting up one's own individual recovery

Within **Counselling Services**, the organisation will work broadly on person-centred or integrative models, and counsellors will be encouraged to consider aspects of power relationships between counsellor and client through the internal supervisory process.

Within **Housing Services**, each tenant will have full involvement in the creation of their own individual plans.

Within **Community Services**, all individual programmes will follow participative models such as the Social Inclusion Web or the Recovery star; within Mentoring, service users will be encouraged and supported in defining their own targets for which they seek mentoring help.

Within **Carers' Services**, 1 to 1 sessions will broadly follow an active listening model.

All group work within the organisation will encourage individual participants to set their own goals for recovery, and will support them in this. Group workers are tasked with ensuring that the needs of individuals in the group are not lost within the group process.

### **2.3 Involvement in commenting on services**

The organisation will strive to attract feedback from those who use its service, through a variety of means. These are defined in more detail in the Quality Assurance Policy. In particular, structures to attract verbal feedback shall be:

Tenants' involvement in the Housing Sub Group

Monthly Forums for Community Services in each of the three towns

A service-user panel for Community Services, formed from elected representatives from beneficiaries.

It is policy that the outcome from all exercises in gaining service-user and beneficiary feedback shall be submitted to the Quality sub-group. Where budgets allow, the organisation will plan periodic service-user conferences to get a comprehensive view of service user and beneficiary perspectives on the organisation.

### **2.4 Involvement in Planning Services**

At Board Level, the organisation welcomes as Trustees service-users and beneficiaries who have been elected by the membership, and have the appropriate skills or knowledge to contribute to effective Board processes. DGS Mind is committed to appropriately supporting these Trustees, either through the assisted volunteering scheme, or by other means to be individually defined after election.

Non-trustee service users and beneficiaries shall be recruited to all of the following sub-groups of the Board of Trustees:

Quality Sub Group

Fundraising Sub Group

Housing Sub Group

Within **Community Services**, the Monthly Forums and the Service User Panel shall have key roles in planning future service developments. At the Planning Events group, beneficiaries shall take the lead in planning and organising both the regular social Out and Abouts, as well as the larger events (eg Christmas Party).

Within **Carers Services**, the social group will be encouraged and empowered to plan social activities for carers as a whole.

Where significant changes in services or policy and practice are being considered, this will be signalled to the appropriate service users and beneficiaries within sufficient time to allow them to comment as a consultative process.

## **2.5 Involvement in Delivering Services**

DGS Mind regards the personal experience of mental health issues as a positive when recruiting staff, and will note this in the list of essential/desirable qualities against which candidates are scored.

In the recruitment process for staff, beneficiaries will be invited to form a beneficiary interview group in which they shall meet shortlisted candidates, question them and comment on their suitability as they see it. Each beneficiary interview group panel shall be facilitated by a DGS Mind worker, who shall have the task of:

- Preparing the beneficiaries for their role.
- Ensuring the meeting with each candidate is productive and does not breach Equalities guidelines.
- Reporting back to the interviewing panel on the beneficiaries' perspectives.

The interviewing panel is charged with considering the beneficiaries' perspective alongside the other information they have gathered on the candidates, before making their final decision to appoint. This process shall only be overridden where, due to the nature of the post being recruited, (eg Office Cleaner) it is impractical to expect relevant beneficiaries to give their time to the process.

DGS Mind is committed to taking on service users as volunteers within the running of the organisation, via the assisted volunteering system, as long as they otherwise pass the screening and selection processes, filling identified volunteering vacancies.

DGS Mind is keen to promote systems in which service users run services themselves. Service-users and beneficiaries will be encouraged, supported and where appropriate given training to run peer-led services in the form of self-help groups, activities, social events and other forms of peer-led work which will develop in the future.

DGS Mind values greatly the contribution that can be given to the delivery of its training programmes by people who have or are experiencing mental health issues, and shall structure its internal and external training programmes to include sessions delivered by service users.

## **3. Training and Selection of Volunteers and Staff**

To underpin this policy, we recognise that the attitude of paid and un-paid workers to service users and beneficiaries is of the utmost importance to ensuring that the ethos of involvement and empowerment permeates the whole organisation. We therefore expressly check out staff and volunteer candidates' attitudes to beneficiary involvement as part of the selection process, include this as an item in Job Descriptions and Volunteer Role Descriptions, and provide training on these issues.

The organisation has adopted the Codes of Practice for Social Care Workers, as published by the General Social Care Council, as an expression of its own values. Copies of this, which underline the rights of service user to control their own lives and make informed choices about the services they receive, are distributed to all members of staff, and serve as an anchor for supervisory processes.

A statement on the organisation's approach to empowerment, which has strong links with the issues of involvement, and which is used for internal training purposes, is given as an annex to this policy.

## **Annex One**

### **DGS Mind: Statement on Service-User Empowerment**

Empowerment means helping the people who use our services to become as independent as they are able to. It means encouraging people to take control over those aspects of their own life for which they have become reliant on others, or where others - professionals or family and friends - have taken control away from them. Empowering service-users is not just a matter of merely expecting people to take more control, for there are skills to be learnt and fears to be overcome if this is to be a success. Support, training and mentoring may be needed along the way, not least where there are setbacks, or where things do not work out as planned.

We believe in empowerment because in achieving it, a person is not only rightfully back in control of their own life, but they also will experience the improved self-esteem, confidence and well-being that comes with it: and this in turn improves their mental health.

As an organisation which seeks to help people, DGS Mind must be aware at all times of the danger that people using our services may become over-reliant on them, or on the staff or volunteers who deliver them, and that this itself would be a disempowering experience. We must try therefore to be skilful enough to provide help in a way which enhances, rather than overrides, existing coping skills. Where, during periods of great vulnerability, the level of dependency on the organisation or its staff is increased, care must be taken to plan for a return to optimum levels of empowerment at the end of this period.

Any organisation that believes in the empowerment of the people who use its services will also place great value on the participation of its service-users throughout the organisation. DGS Mind therefore supports, and commits resources to, ensuring the genuine participation of service users in the delivery, evaluation and planning of its activities. It does this through a wide range of current strategies; through self-help groups, feedback forms, forums for day services, questionnaires and tenant meetings, and is keen to explore new ways of facilitating meaningful participation.

June 08