

**Easy read version**

**Connect Works**  
Connect in the North

**October 2010**

# About this easy read version



This booklet is part of the report Changing our worlds: User-controlled research in action written by Alison Faulkner for INVOLVE.

The report has information about seven different research projects. For all of these projects, people who use health and social care services decided what research to do and how to do the research – we call this user-controlled research.

This easy read version has been prepared by Connect in the North. It aims to make the information about their project available to a wide audience. Other information about this project is in Example 3 in the full report.

The full report is available from INVOLVE. Information about how to contact us is on the back cover of this booklet.

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# Connect Works – Connect in the North

## What Connect Works did



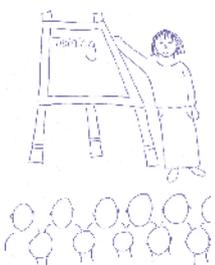
Connect Works was a project run by Connect in the North. They are an organisation led by people with learning difficulties.



The work was done by people with learning difficulties.



They wanted to find out what people with learning difficulties wanted from personal assistants.



The group wrote a training course for personal assistants using what they found out.

People with learning difficulties would be able to choose staff trained by people with learning difficulties.



We talked to Claire Massa and Philip Hawley who did the work and Sarah Wheatley who supported it.

## How it started



The idea for the project came from a members meeting. Members thought it would help people with learning difficulties have more control over their lives.



I want to be able to choose who I want to look after me, rather than have others controlling me.

**Claire**



Leeds City Council Special Grants gave the money to find out what people wanted from a personal assistant.



Skills for Care – New Types of Worker money paid for the training.

There was a planning group who found out what people wanted. They were: Claire Massa, Joycelyn Richards, Susan Hanley, Philip Hawley and Bhupesh Limbachia.



There was a Training Group who were Alan Hicks, Joycelyn Richards, David Boyes, Manjinder Singh, Claire Massa, and Susan Hanley.

Sarah Wheatley supported both groups.

## Finding out what people want



The Planning Group talked about their own lives. They wrote up what they thought was good and bad support. They used this to write questions to ask people.



The Planning Group spoke to 89 people with learning difficulties.

Most of the finding out was done by talking to groups of people. A few people filled in questionnaires.



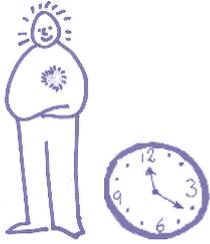
Questionnaires were sent to family carers but not many people replied.

The Planning Group would get people talking by having a fun icebreaker. The questions they wanted to ask were on posters. The people voted for what was important by using coloured stickers.



The Planning Group talked about what everyone had said. Claire wrote it up on the computer.

# The Training



The Training Group used what was found out to choose people to go on the training and to write the course.

They found out that staff having good values was more important than them having experience. People also wanted staff to be on time and keep good records.



The training was run twice. 3 people ran the training and everyone decided who passed.

9 people passed the training. They went on a list so people with learning difficulties could employ them.



After the training the people on the course and the Training Group met up to talk about what worked and what didn't.

It was agreed that the course should be longer and it should lead to a qualification.

## People with learning difficulties being in control



It was important that people with learning difficulties were in control.

“

I feel people who are not disabled who organise these groups don't want to know what disabled people need. We would know what people want. Having disabled people doing this is a big thing. It's people who know asking people who know.

Philip

”

Susan and Claire ran the sessions and Sarah's role was to support them to plan them. She wrote up what was said, sometimes in different ways so the group could decide what worked best. When Susan and Claire came up with ideas it was her job to fit them together.

“

The project was equal but in different ways.

Claire

”

## What Helped



There were lots of good things about the project:

“

'It made a big difference.  
I enjoyed doing every bit of it.

Claire

”

Friendship – This helped people talk to each other well

- Working together
- Using easy words
- Slowing down so people could keep up
- Having breaks
- Being organised – so what was found out could be written up

## What made it difficult



- When the group thought different things, but they did agree in the end. '[We] would put our opinions together to get your say into one'
- Getting upset sometimes 'I would give a bit of my past to show what I meant by something, explaining something' (Claire) It helped there was a lot of support in the group
- Some of the people on the training course didn't come

## Making a difference



It's about asking the right questions. I also think it was powerful – people were seeing other people with learning difficulties in valued roles.

**Sarah**



- One of the team is now a paid trainer
- People have got their own staff
- There is a list of personal assistants
- People have changed their jobs and are happy
- The course has gone from being 4 half days to 10 half days. It has been run twice
- Everyone felt able to share what they thought
- People from different ethnic communities were trained as part of the project

## Future Plans



Connect in the North would like the course to lead to a qualification. This is difficult because it is expensive. It usually means that trainers need to have a teaching qualification. It is hard for people with learning difficulties to get a teaching qualification because the courses aren't accessible.

Connect in the North are looking at different ways to pay for the course:

- People with learning difficulties paying from their individual budget
- Working with a local college
- The local authority

## To find out more



Connect in the North

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**Disclaimer:** The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of INVOLVE or the National Institute for Health Research.

## The Connect Works Team



INVOLVE is a national advisory group funded by the National Institute for Health Research to promote and support public involvement in NHS, public health and social care research and development.

If you would like to know more about what we do, please contact us:

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