

# **Case study seven**

## **Connect Works – Connect in the North**

### **Aims of the project**

This project was carried out by Connect in the North, an organisation led by people with learning difficulties. Connect in the North works to improve services and opportunities for people with learning difficulties. The project used research as the basis for developing a training course to train people to become personal assistants for people with learning difficulties. The aim was to enable people with learning difficulties to be able to choose a personal assistant from a list of people who have already been chosen and trained by people with learning difficulties (the Connect Works team).

### **How you found people to involve**

The original idea for the project came from a Connect in the North ([www.citn.org.uk](http://www.citn.org.uk)) members meeting. Connect in the North believes that people with learning difficulties should have control over their lives. Training people to be personal assistants is one way of doing this. The personalisation agenda, which has become prominent in recent times, meant that the idea could be realised, as it helped them get the funding to carry it out. Personalisation means starting with the person as an individual with strengths, preferences and aspirations and putting them at the centre of the process of identifying their needs and making choices about how and when they are supported to live their lives (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2010). Funding for the research part of the project came from Leeds City Council. Funding for the training came from Skills for Care: New types of worker money. The

people involved were: Claire Massa, Jocelyn Richards, Philip Hawley, David Boyes, Bhupesh Limbachia, Alan Hicks, Manjinder Singh and Susan Hanley (who used to work at Connect in the North) with Sarah Wheatley supporting them.

## **How you involved people**

The team formed two groups: one to work on the research and one to work on the training. The group looked at their own lives as a starting point: they came up with a list of what they would want from a personal assistant and put it up on the wall for people to identify what is good and what is bad. In this way they designed the questions to ask of other people. In the research, they spoke to 89 people, often in groups face to face, some through questionnaires. They would start a group with an icebreaker and then ask people the questions. They would put up the answers on the wall and ask people to put stickers or ticks against the things that were important to them. The team would gather up the information at the end. Claire put the information on computer. They also sent out questionnaires to involve other members of the family, but this was not very successful.

## **What training and support did you offer?**

The research helped the team to design the training for personal assistants: what training do personal assistants need to make them understand what they have to do? It helped to decide what types of people should come on the training and what was in the training. One thing they found was that values (for example treating people with respect) were more important than experience. People also thought that being on time and record keeping were important features. The team ran the Connect Works training twice. They selected people for the course, ran the training and evaluated the trainers on the basis of their coursework. They then evaluated the course and decided that it needed to be longer. Nine people from the

training were chosen to be on a list of personal assistants. This is available to anyone with a learning difficulty who uses direct payments or has an individual budget. The plan for the future is to get the course accredited.

Sarah's role was to facilitate the sessions, to give them a focus. She helped Susan and Claire to decide how to run the sessions. She also wrote up the ideas, writing it up in different ways for the group to decide which was best. They described the control of the project as 'equal but in different ways'. Claire or Susan would come up with the ideas and Sarah would fit it together. It was important to them that people with learning difficulties were in control of the project. People with learning disabilities selected people for the training course, trained people and evaluated both the trainees and the course itself, with Sarah's support.

## **What difference did public involvement make?**

- One of the team, David, now works as an associate trainer, after volunteering for Connect Works. It is his first ever paid employment.
- People have employed personal assistants from the course.
- They have a list of trained personal assistants working in the community.
- People have really changed what they were doing and are happy.
- The four-week course changed to a ten-week one: it is half a day a week for ten weeks. It has been run twice.
- It was a diverse group of people, which was good. Everyone felt able to share their views.

## **What would you advise other researchers**

# about involvement?

## Things that helped the research

The team listed many things that helped:

- Friendship was the main big thing – it had to be there to communicate with each other: ‘I miss you all.’
- Working together; being patient, tolerant, understanding, thoughtful; having fun!
- No jargon
- Could slow down so people could keep up; we had breaks
- Being organised – the information was counted up and put on computer (Claire did this)

## Things that made the research difficult

- There were differences of opinion amongst the group, but they reached agreement: ‘[we] would put opinions together to get your say into one.’
- Claire said she would get upset sometimes: ‘I would give a bit of my past to show what I meant by something, explaining something.’ They all agreed that there was a lot of support within the group which helped if someone got upset.
- Some participants did not turn up for the training course.

## Future plans

Some barriers for the development of the project were identified in the project’s final report. Connect in the North found that there are barriers to trainers with learning difficulties running accredited training. This is because many organisations funding courses leading to qualifications require the trainers to have a qualification. It is difficult for people with learning difficulties to obtain a qualification in training, although Connect in the North is continuing to explore this. The Open College Network will

accredit training led by people with learning difficulties but it is expensive for a small organisation.

Connect in the North are also exploring different ways of funding the training course for the future. These include:

- Contributions from people who have an individual budget
- Core funding from the local authority
- Learning and Skills Council in partnership with a local college.

## **Links to any relevant reports or articles**

The project is reported on the Skills for Care New Types of Worker website and a copy of the report may be found there: [www.newtypesofworker.co.uk/pages/projects/connect-works/usefuldocuments](http://www.newtypesofworker.co.uk/pages/projects/connect-works/usefuldocuments)

## **Contact details**

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## **Acknowledgement**

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