**BRIDGING THE GAP MENTORING**

**Also known as Bridging the Gap Islington**

**User Involvement**

**1. Introduction**

Bridging the Gap Mentoring considers involving mentors, mentees and people with lived experience of the issues that we are supporting, as vital to providing an informed and effective service. We believe that the involvement of our service users and mentors will help to improve our services by making them more relevant to the people who use them and improve our ability to reach people who might benefit through our publicity. Appendix 1 has more detail about the opportunities and challenges of user involvement which we have considered.

1. **Background**

Our constitution was drawn up with the purpose of giving opportunities for the involvement of a wider public. We are set up as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation by Association (CIO 1162671) by association. This means we are required to have a membership and to invite members to our Annual General Meeting.

We have already taken the first steps towards user involvement in September 2017 when we agreed that mentors and service users who have completed a mentoring partnership and are not currently being mentored should be invited to become members of Bridging the Gap Mentoring. As members they are entitled to attend the Annual General Meeting and to vote on any business, including the appointment of trustees.

**3. Policy**

Bridging the Gap Mentoring will:

* Consider all opportunities for service user involvement activity, and try to encourage and facilitate it where possible.
* Aim to ensure that service user involvement activity is meaningful, well planned and impactful. (Appendix 1)
* We will aim to ensure that any work related to involving users and mentors will respect their
  + Experience
  + Dignity
  + Expectations
  + As well as the need for confidentiality, emotional and practical support and safety

(see Appendix 2)

**4.** **Responsibility**

The Coordinator, staff and volunteers of Bridging the Gap Mentoring will aim to ensure that:

* + service user involvement activities are planned and delivered safely and effectively.
  + The impact of involvement activities is evaluated.

**5. Action:**

We want to do more to make this forward-thinking policy effective. Some mentors have attended our AGM but no service users have attended. We believe that following a more pro-active policy may be more successful.In order to achieve a greater involvement of mentors and service users, we plan to

* Invite mentors to attend focus group(s) aimed at gaining their feedback
* Arrange individual interviews with selected service users to get a better understanding of how we have helped and how we could help them better
* Invite those service users who are interviewed to join a focus group which may meet repeatedly to comment on how our service and publicity can be improved.
* Encourage members of the mentor and service user focus groups to attend and participate in our AGM.

We hope that these initial steps will create a framework for user and mentor involvement to develop. If this works well, we hope that some mentors and service users may wish to stand for election as trustees running the charity in the future.

A more detailed plan is set out in Appendix 3

Approved: 5/7/2021

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Version 1

Appendix 1

**BRIDGING THE GAP MENTORING**

**The opportunities and challenges of User Involvement**

**What are we doing?**

Service users, volunteers and people who have lived experience of the issues we support, join staff and volunteers as equal partners in shaping our services and activities through participatory approaches, at all levels of the charity.

We aim for genuine participation and involvement of service users and mentors in running our service. But we recognise that we may need to progress through limited consultation and feedback in order to achieve the longer term goal of User Involvement.

For example:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Limited consultation and feedback:**  •Seeking views  •One direction flow of information  •Limited / unknown  influence  •Rarely fedback  •A ‘one-off’ engagement  **Types of participation:**   * Service user survey * Limited focus group | **Genuine participation and involvement:**  •Power-sharing  •Influencing decision-making  •A more ‘active’ participation  •A process  •Not just sharing experiences, but shaping solutions/ services  **Types of participation:**   * Decision making group * Project delivery group |

**Why we are encouraging service user involvement**

* New insights will help us deliver better and more relevant services
* It encourages new ideas, creativity and innovation
* It can help a better allocation and focus of resources
* It encourages increased trust, transparency and credibility of the charity
* It can provide more sustainable services, as they are adapting to meet changing needs of service users
* It empowers people to be experts on their own lives
* It increases confidence, development of skills and learning as well as wellbeing
* It can encourage self-efficacy, that an individual action can have an impact
* It can builds someone’s social support networks
* It’s a required element of some contracts, bids and tenders and will make us more likely to be successful

**We recognise that there will be some difficulties in developing user involvement**

* It can take time– it can take longer to work in this way and this needs to be considered in our planning and timelines
* Its not ‘free’ – we need to consider staff time costs, travel expenses, subsistence expenses etc
* Participation is not always ‘easy’ – it can challenge our model of working and goes against normal patterns of working
* Staff time – in order to deliver service user involvement activities
* Learning and development is required for staff, volunteers and people with lived experience in order for activity to be successful
* Ethics – working with people who have a variety of needs can lead to ethical challenges and considerations which can lead to additional time and resource requirements
* Equality, diversity and inclusion – to ensure we are accessible and giving equal opportunities we need to be flexible and responsive in our approach

Appendix 2

**BRIDGING THE GAP MENTORING**

**Principles**

When involving people with lived experience, it is important to consider the below principles of working to keep everyone safe and to work impactfully**.** We ask that everyone consider the following:

**Experience**

* We recognise that the people participating in user involvement work might have **experience as a mentee or mentor** of Bridging the Gap Islington. Those involved might have wider experience or a **lived experience** of the issues that Bridging the Gap Islington supports – for example addictions, homelessness and experience of the criminal justice system. Those involved might also access our service in the future.
* Whatever peoples experience, we acknowledge the **insight and value** that their involvement brings.
* We will ensure that our service user involvement work **does no harm**, by managing the risks of people participating.

**Respect and dignity**

* We recognise that sometimes we need to use certain **language** to make identification easier, for example, service user. However, we will strive to work in a way that is respectful and doesn’t unhelpfully label people.
* We will reduce the use of **jargon** to ensure that everyone can be actively involved.
* We will work in ways that are **inclusive and accessible** to ensure that people can participate and we are involving a wide range of experiences.
* We will ensure that **everyone gets something** out of being a participant in user involvement work, whether that is skills, learning, experience etc.
* We will ensure people are **recognised and acknowledged** for their involvement.

**Ways of working**

* We will be clear on the **scope of influence** people will have in a piece of work to ensure we do not set unrealistic expectations.
* We will strive to ensure there is a **balance of power** so that everyone involved is equal, accountable and responsible.
* We will ensure that the **feedback loop** is closed so that people understand the importance and impact of their participation.
* We will **plan** our user involvement work purposefully and creatively.
* We will work with an open mindset as a **critical friend to evaluate** our services so we can improve what we do.

**Safety and accessibility**

When planning and delivering user involvement activity – we will consider the following:

* **Confidentiality**
  + When involved in service user involvement activity, everyone will follow the confidentiality policies of Bridging the Gap Islington.
* **Out of pocket expenses**
  + Everyone involved in service user involvement activity will have out of pocket expenses (travel and refreshments) paid for so they are able to comfortably attend.
  + At present, Bridging the Gap Islington does not provide money or a voucher (payment) to those who participate.
* **Accessibility**
  + We will ensure that all activities planned are widely accessible for participants. For example, we will consider digital and online access, location, reading and writing required, speaking in front of a group, length of activity etc.
  + We will plan service user involvement activity with enough resource and capacity so it can run effectively.
* **Safeguarding and working safely**
  + When involved in service user involvement activity, everyone will follow the policies and guidelines of Bridging the Gap Islington.
  + All participants of activities will be properly briefed and de-briefed to ensure they are fully prepared, have clear expectations and can be involved safely

Appendix 3.

Action plan

We will take the following steps as soon as possible, starting immediately.

**Service users**:

1. At the end of mentoring ask: “May we contact you in two months to see how you are?”
2. About 2 months after mentoring: Contact again to ask:
   1. How are you?
   2. What is going well?
   3. What is difficult?
   4. Do you need help?
   5. Would you be ready to meet with others (online) to help improve our service?
3. Where appropriate :
4. Invite to focus group – includes inviting group members to become members of Bridging the Gap.
5. Possible additional focus groups
6. Invite to AGM

**Mentors:**

Invite to focus group includes inviting group members to become members of Bridging the Gap

Invite to AGM.