



Conversations for Change Advocacy, artists and lived experience by Gordon Johnston

"Conversations for Change" has been designed by an artist and a group of people with lived experience of mental health issues who are involved in the arts and mental health advocacy with CAPS. It is a public art project in Edinburgh that will generate open discussion on mental health and promote wider understanding. See the About the Change Network section of the toolkit for more information.

Introduction

There are three key components to the Conversations For Change Project.

- The host organisation is CAPS, an independent mental health advocacy organisation based in Musselburgh and working throughout Lothian. CAPS is the grant holder, provides administrative and management backing, marketing and promotional support and will incorporate the outputs and lessons learned into its many other projects;
- The Creative Team is made up of volunteers who have lived experience of mental health issues and have themselves produced artworks. They collaborate with the artist to deliver the project, carrying out conversations on mental health issues in a variety of public places and recording these in a range of ways. In the final phase of the project they will design and make a piece of public art, which will be displayed in September; and
- The artist, Pam Van de Brug, a specialist in collaborative public art works, is employed as a consultant to co-ordinate the project. She facilitates the work of the Creative Team, bringing knowledge and experience of artistic techniques and will work with the Team to create a unique piece of public art.

Consideration of the subject of Power within this project therefore involves understanding the respective roles of these three components and the interactions between them in relation to the agreed research questions.

Key Questions on Power

How do we support people to participate/ exert influence?

The project was conceived by CAPS to build on past public arts projects developed through work for the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival. The initiative therefore came from people with lived experience who have previously worked under the CAPS banner. The Creative Team now provides the main vehicle for participation and involves people who have been active in past CAPS projects as well as newer recruits. The Creative Team

designs and carries out public conversations, with the whole process being facilitated by the artist. The Team members are therefore supported to plan and implement the project delivery mechanisms themselves.

What resources are allocated to do this?

Almost half of the project budget goes to the artist as consultancy fees. A major part of her role is the facilitation of the Creative Team's work and coordination of project delivery. Involvement is therefore well resourced. The use of publicity is also key in maximising involvement in the project.

How do we use resources/ tools /assets /technology in this?

The project is using technology very well. A dedicated website (www.conversationsforchange.scot) and a Facebook page (www.facebook.com/pages/Conversations-For-Change/663628883754860) have been established. These both provide information about the project and its future events and allow feedback and ideas to be submitted. Resources are also allocated from the budget for the production of a piece of artwork. What form that will take will emerge during the conversations.

How are decisions made? How empowering is that process?

The Creative Team, in meetings facilitated by the artist, makes decisions on the interventions to be carried out and designs each session. A mailing list of people interested in the project (The Conversations Team) also inputs ideas via e-mails. Team members feel empowered by their involvement in the project and in control of its activities.

How do people with lived experience participate in/ dictate the process?

The Creative Team makes the practical decisions involved in delivering the project, guided by the artist. They therefore have control of the process. CAPS Advocacy itself is managed by a Management Committee made up of people with lived experience.



What is on the agenda and who sets it?

Creative Team meetings are based around evaluating the results of past interventions and planning new ones. They tend to operate as facilitated discussion sessions rather than as formal meetings. The artist is responsible for leading the sessions but the content and direction is decided by the Team. It would therefore be fair to say that people with lived

experience set the agenda for the project.

Who is accountable/ responsible within your change network?

CAPS Advocacy is the grant holder and therefore has the ultimate responsibility to See Me as funder for the delivery of the project. The artist is contracted by CAPS through a consultancy contract and has a responsibility to provide regular progress reports.

How have you addressed the power dynamics in your project?

The key relationship is the one between the Creative Team and the artist. It would appear that this is working well and that a spirit of trust and co-operation has been established.

Members of the Team feel that they are in control, and can develop their own skills and expertise under the artist's guidance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it seems that the use of advocacy principles underpinning CAPS' design of the protect enables power to lie mainly with those having lived experience of mental health issues. The Creative Team, guided by the artist, drives the project and both designs and delivers its interventions. This supported involvement model is working well.