



"Look Around- See Me!" project: Community champions involvement by DB

The following case study looks at how community champions in training felt about their role and involvement in the project. A small focus group and observation (non-participatory, unstructured and overt) were conducted in order to investigate ways in which people were empowered to participate, set the agenda, make decisions and generate a sense of responsibility in the project. The focus group was conducted in Polish as talking in English could impact on the group dynamic. All quotations were translated by the author. Details about the Change Networks are available the About the Change Network page.

Empowering people to participate

The following ways of supporting and empowering people were useful in this project:

- Recognising people as assets:
"Work on the brochure is based on people's experience and knowledge. They are the ones who shape this brochure and as a result they feel important and needed".
"They feel needed because they knowledge and experience are necessary for creating this brochure".
- Being a part of group of people with similar experiences:
"The group itself. They feel that they are together. Especially people who have a history of mental health issues. They know that they have this history but now they can do something different together with other similar people."
"We are all Polish people in a foreign country and we can be discriminated based on our nationality and mental health. The opportunity to create something in our community, because our community is very big in here, is very motivating to them (...) and that they have a chance to get to know each other and learn something new."
- Atmosphere during the meetings:
"I think that the atmosphere that is created is the most important and also how people are treated, that we call each other by our first names which is not common in Poland especially in a group of people of various ages."
"I think that the secret (of empowering people) is that everyone is welcome there (in the group). We are trying to let them know, and maybe this is working, that we are waiting for them, that they are important and that we are working together."
- Building social networks:

"Networking is very important. I think that it attracts people that they can meet someone new and build their social network but also enrich their life with new ideas."

- The term of "community champion"

"Empowerment is already implied in the term "community champions".

"During the first meeting I was not sure... because the name "community champions" sounds like a very serious role and they might feel overwhelmed with this name. I was not sure how they would feel with it, whether it would not overwhelm them. The second meeting showed that they identify strongly with it.

Decision making



The project developed a brochure. No final decisions regarding the form and content of the brochure were made at the time of writing but the communication officer emphasised that community champions would be involved in it:

"They (community champions) will be deciding what will be included in this brochure. We are gathering information (from community champions), and during

the next workshop we will make a matrix to show what we already have so they can decide what will be included. This is also their brochure and we are giving them tools for making this brochure, but in fact they are the ones who decide what will be included in it".

Currently there are two groups of community champions and there are plans to organise a social event during which they will meet each other. This might support them in working together on the brochure and in communicating and sharing information on a blog which will be established shortly.

There is a tendency towards giving community champions greater decision making power in the project. For example, initially the Communication Officer planned to edit the brochure and then to ask people for comments and approval. Currently, the idea of involving community champions (by creating a small group of people with needed skills) in editing is being considered.

Also, there is a plan to involve the project partner organisations in commenting and adding information to the brochure and Health All Around will be involved in co-organising a wellbeing Event.

Setting the agenda

People influenced the agenda setting for the training sessions during the organisational meeting. This is how the Communication Officer described it:

"The agenda for the training sessions was created during the meeting on the 5th of March, because it was a very important meeting. I had See Me resources (for training community champions). I knew what their (See Me) focus was and I was after a meeting with Rebecca. But I did not tell them (community champions) specifically how these training sessions should be like because I wanted to hear from them what are the problems and what is needed".

Responsibility

- The shared sense of responsibility was observed during the training sessions. The sessions were very lively and people were freely sharing their ideas, e.g., recently they suggested organising a social event. Also, the way they were talking while participating indicated their ownership of the project and shared sense of responsibility, e.g., they were referring to the project and the group as "our" and using expressions such as "we need to do...". Similar observations were made by one of the training facilitators.
- The role of "community champion" increased people's sense of identification and responsibility for the project.
- There is no significant difference in the sense of responsibility for the project between paid and unpaid facilitators:
- "As a volunteer I feel the only difference is in that I am not paid, but as a volunteer apart from money everything else is as if I were an employee including a level of engagement and exchanging ideas between Basia, me and community champions."