

drugworld DIARIES



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It's a busy week for me in February. Kensington and Chelsea's service user group has been commissioned to design and run a borough-wide peer mentoring service, and today we began our in-house training. We have interviewed and selected nine peer mentors from the volunteers who work in our peer-run weekend service. I spend a busy day running through role play scenarios looking at different ways of supporting service users. The mentors were enthusiastic and wonderfully inventive.

I move on to the town hall for a 'service redesign' meeting between the DAAT and services. One project, Blenheim/CDP, is preparing to move to new premises and there are some interesting discussions taking place on satellite services. The new building is intended to be the main service for drug users in the borough, with care managers, BBV nurses and so on popping in to run surgeries, giving a focal point for pathways across a variety of services in Kensington and Chelsea.

After another challenging day of training, it's back off to the town hall for the user group's monthly management committee meeting with the commissioner. It's always good to sit down with the user group's team leaders and look at the challenges of running a weekend service that has 85 volunteers and between 5,000-6,000 contacts a year. We are about to publish an impact and evaluation report on the user group's weekend peer run service, and to be honest, I think we are all a

little stunned by the results. To be able to demonstrate that we have a non-therapeutic model of engagement that is significantly impacting on individual's drug use is great. We have always had faith in what we do, but to see it evidenced like this is a proud and powerful moment. For a service that started with a small badminton club five years ago, we have come a very long way.

It's the NTA's London Service User Coordinator's Forum and time for a discussion on the new drug strategy and the recovery agenda. Everyone is worried about funding cuts and reductions in local services, and although the new agenda really opens up doors for service user involvement, the challenges involved are huge. Service user involvement is moving faster by the month in London, especially with regard to peer-run services, but we can all feel the uncertainty of walking these new and sometimes unexpected paths into the future. There is a lot of fear around cuts to housing benefits, changes to incapacity benefit and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), and the potential for reduction in services across the treatment system. The NTA may be reasonably up-beat, but some of us are not so sure. Right now there are far too many questions that cannot be effectively answered, and as service user coordinators, we are going to be at the sharp end of things.

The relationship between the

user group and Blenheim/CDP has always been an excellent example of partnership working and this morning is our bi-monthly team meeting, when both organisations look at logistics, practical issues and any difficulties we may encounter with service users. This can require careful handling, if a service user (as is currently the case) is barred from accessing one service but not the other. We are both running drop-ins; but our ground rules and manner of operation are entirely different, as are the services we offer. I have always found it immensely encouraging that a service user group is able to negotiate and work with a service provider without falling into the trap of Us versus Them. Such relationships can only improve the treatment system.

I popped into the Social Club to facilitate a discussion among the volunteer team about 'boundaries' before the drop-in opened for the day. As service user volunteers working in a service designed to operate as much like a family as possible, the line between personal and professional relationships is one that needs to be revisited every so often, and we have found the best way to do this is with honesty, humour and openness. We have always accepted the reality of relationships occurring between volunteers, after all there are more than 80 of us. Nevertheless, it is something that needs to be carefully managed, and like any family there are times when we need to clear the air.