

CLINKS NEWS

Issue 06 Winter 2010/11

for voluntary organisations that work
with offenders and their families

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SERVICE USER INVOLVEMENT

What does it mean, who is it for and how do you do it?

What does Clinks do for the Voluntary & Community sector?

Clinks supports the Voluntary and Community Sector working with offenders in England and Wales.

Our aim is to ensure the sector and all those with whom it works, are informed and engaged in order to transform the lives of offenders. We do this through:

- Providing representation and voice
- Promoting the sector
- Influencing policy and campaigning
- Providing information and publications
- Running training and events
- Providing services and support
- Undertaking research and development.

Clinks is a membership charity with a network of over 5,000 people working to support the rehabilitation of offenders.

To find out more about Clinks membership visit:
www.clinks.org/membership

CLINKS

supporting voluntary organisations that work with offenders and their families

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Service user engagement

It is now over two years since Clinks published its report, *Unlocking Potential*, which highlighted the importance of involving the voices of offenders and ex-offenders in the Criminal Justice System. It was widely welcomed by those working within the CJS, both in the voluntary and the statutory sectors.

The concept of involving the user in the design and delivery of services has been popular over recent years; under the Labour Government it was key in their approach to health and social care services, and was also used in education and local government.

Within the CJS, the previous government made much of the importance of the victim's voice which is relatively uncontroversial with the general public.

In contrast, while many professionals advocate giving offenders a stronger voice in criminal justice, it is a difficult concept to sell to the media and wider public. This is acknowledged, on pages 7 and 11, by Mark Johnson of User

Voice. The controversy over the recent decision to grant prisoners their human right to vote provides insight into how service user involvement in the CJS would be received.

Yet it is clear offenders who have successfully changed their lives can offer valuable insight to those who make decisions about our system and rehabilitation services at all levels and across sectors. In addition, being listened to and contributing to a more effective system can be valuable to the rehabilitation process for the offender.

In this edition of *Clinks News* we present the views of those at the forefront of service user involvement, and find out about a number of initiatives that have enabled service users to develop and articulate their voice within the Criminal Justice System.

There is still work to be done before we reach the top of Arnstein's ladder (see page 20). Mark Johnson of User Voice and Ex-Cell Solutions' Dave Nicholson argue that the balance of power still sits with the professionals, and that there is a danger of

tokenism. In recognition of the difficulties of real and effective user involvement, Clinks and Revolving Doors Agency have produced guidance and training for the VCS, written by service users (see page 4).

The Big Question (page 7) reveals a lack of clarity on how the Coalition views service user involvement. Clinks will continue to argue for the offender voice to be heard at all levels, and in all sectors. Real service user involvement is not easy, but the rewards can be great for all involved. ✦

CLIVE MARTIN
Director, Clinks



“It is clear that offenders who have successfully changed their lives can offer valuable insight to those who make decisions about our system and rehabilitation services at all levels.”

Clinks' people

Goodbye and good luck

Clinks are sorry to bid farewell to Lynne Laidlaw and Karen Desai.

Lynne left Clinks earlier this year. Lynne was our London VCS Development Manager and successfully promoted the profile of the VCS in London. She also delivered our CJS training courses, and was an excellent and extremely popular trainer. She is now an independent consultant.

Karen joined Clinks in 2006, and has been our Membership and Events Administrator since 2007. She has provided a strong voice for service user involvement, speaking with other offenders, policy makers and ministers about issues affecting those in prison and the community. Karen also supported Peter Moffat in his research for the 2009 BBC drama, *Criminal Justice*.

I'm sure you'll join us in wishing Lynne and Karen all the very best for the future.

Welcome

Clinks welcomes four new members of staff to the team. In the South West, Laura Lavery and Louise Clark have joined Lesley Frazer to further develop the role of the VCS working with offenders and ex-offenders in the region. Laura has a background in the police and local infrastructure, whereas Louise's background is women in prison, specifically sex workers.

Clare Hayes joins us as a Policy Researcher until March 2011. She is keeping a keen eye on developments coming out of the new Government and helping Clinks plan its strategy and response to policies that might impact on the VCS.

Hazel Alcraft joins as our new Membership and Events Administrator.

info Meet Laura, Louise, Clare and Hazel at: www.clinks.org/about/whos-who/staff



New Clinks website...

Clinks has launched its new website, where you'll find everything you need to know about Clinks and its role supporting the VCS working with offenders. The new site is easy to navigate, includes all our publications, and you can join and subscribe to services online. Make sure you add us to your favourites, and please send any feed back to joe.gardham@clinks.org.

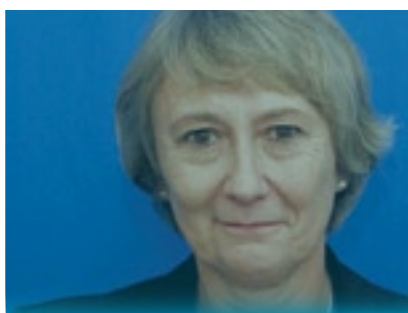
INFO www.clinks.org

...and follow us on Twitter



Clinks are on Twitter! You can follow us @Clinks_Tweets, a new way in which we can keep you informed and up to speed with the VCS in the Criminal Justice System. You can view our Tweets even if you don't use Twitter.

INFO www.twitter.com/Clinks_Tweets
or @Clinks_Tweets

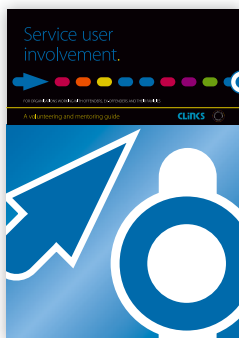


New Chair

Clinks is delighted to announce the appointment of Dame Anne Owers OBE as our new Chair. She will take up the post in January 2011. Anne is prominent across the Criminal Justice System of England & Wales for her role as HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2001-2010) and as a committed human rights campaigner.

INFO Read more at www.clinks.org/publications/press_releases

Service user involvement guide



Service User Involvement is the latest publication from Clinks' Volunteering and Mentoring Network, produced

in partnership with Revolving Doors Agency (RDA).

Those that work with offenders, ex-offenders and their families are constantly looking to improve the services they offer service users.

Service user involvement – where an organisation involves service users in planning, managing or delivering the services that it provides – is recognised as an effective tool to achieve this.

Written by members of RDA's National Service User Forum, this guide provides a structured and accessible introduction to involving offenders and ex-offenders, including examples of good practice, checklists and signposting to further information and support.

INFO www.clinks.org/publications/reports/vol_guides

Arts Alliance



Following the closure of the Anne Peaker Centre earlier this year, Clinks has taken over the management of the Arts Alliance.

This is a network of arts organisations working in the Criminal Justice System to support people both in prison and in the community.

If you are interested in arts organisations' resettlement and rehabilitation work, see the Arts Alliance website.

INFO www.artsalliance.org.uk

Clinks AGM and conference

Clinks AGM will be 20 January in central London. Nick Herbert MP will be speaking.

INFO www.clinks.org

Light Lunch

Clinks' popular ebulletin, *Light Lunch*, has reached 200 editions and has over 5,000 subscribers.

80 per cent of *Light Lunch* readers say it's their primary source of CJS information. You can subscribe on the Clinks website.

INFO www.clinks.org/publications/ebulletins/light-lunch

Why we need women-only services



Publications round up

- Localising justice: how can we increase local VCS involvement in service design and delivery
- The Big Society: constraints and potential
- Clinks response to Rehabilitation Revolution
- Clinks response to Sentencing Review
- London prisons & VCS
- How can Clinks support the coalition
- Payment by results: What does it mean for voluntary organisations working with offenders?
- Innovative services for a rehab revolution – what could go to market?
- A new focus on measuring outcomes: where do we start?
- Response to the role of Probation
- The value of the arts in the CJS.

INFO For these and other topical publications visit www.clinks.org/publications

Women-only services are marginalised and suffer from inadequate funding, despite evidence that women want them, and that they bring wide ranging benefits. Three years since Baroness Corston's, and the Women's Resource Centre's *Why Women Only?* report this is still the case.

Designed for men

The 2007 Corston report said our Criminal Justice System, designed for men, failed to meet the needs of women offenders. It called for a “radical new approach, treating women both holistically and individually – a woman centred approach”. The report received cross party support, and led to two year funding for one stop shops. The funding was welcomed by a resource starved sector, but it was neither sustainable, nor enough to provide services for all.

Why Women Only? highlighted the value that women-only services bring: “Women feel supported and comfortable. They become empowered and develop confidence, greater independence and higher self-esteem. They are less marginalised and isolated and feel more able to express themselves.”

Distinct needs

Evidence indicates that women have a far more negative experience of custody than men, and there are too many women going to prison on short sentences, with an over-use of remand.

According to the Corston report, 80% of female prisoners suffer from diagnosable mental health problems. 81% of the women that Women in Prison work with have experienced domestic violence or sexual abuse.

Approximately 50% of all self-harm incidents in prison are committed by women, though they comprise only 5% of the total prison population. Many projects are designed for men, and

programmes are often transferred with little adaptation to address the many and varied needs that are exclusive to women.

By women, for women

Designed by and for women who have been involved in the Criminal Justice System, women-only schemes afford a level of insight and empathy missing from generic programmes.

Because of the really difficult experiences that many of them have had in relation to men, Women in Prison think their service needs to be a really safe space for them. And for them that means it being women-only.

Women's Resource Centre also found that 97% of women polled thought women victims of sexual assault should have the option of accessing women-only support. Some women would not access mixed services.

Dwindling funds

Women-only services are acutely affected by funding problems; the Fawcett Society report that in 2002/03, only 1.2% of central Government funding went to women's organisations, despite making up 7% of registered charities. Equality is often misunderstood as a requirement to treat men and women in identical ways. This has led to the redirection of funds from women-only services and the application of services and treatment designed for men to women.

In spite of changes in gender roles, evidence indicates that when services are designed by and for women, the positive effects are felt not just by the female service users but their children, families, dependents and beyond. As *Why Women Only?* says, “if you educate a woman you educate a whole nation”.

INFO Women's Resource Centre www.wrc.org.uk



In the last decade, the women's prison population has increased by 60%.

Over half of women in prison have experienced domestic violence and one in three, sexual violence.

An estimated 17,700 children are separated from their mothers by imprisonment each year.

Only 5% of children of women in prison remain in their homes.

One in five women in prison are foreign nationals, some of whom are known to have been coerced or trafficked into offending.

Bromley Briefings 2010



“I didn't expect to end the day singing a calypso sitting next to Lord Ramsbotham!”



Arts Alliance conference raised the roof!

On 28 and 29 September Clinks held the third annual Arts Alliance conference. This was held at the Royal Festival Hall in partnership with the Southbank Centre and organised alongside the opening of the Koestler Trust's exhibition of 'art by offenders and secure patients and detainees'.

The aim of the conference was to explore forthcoming government policy and highlight new evidence into the effectiveness of the arts in criminal justice.

It opened with the inaugural Anne Peaker debate on arts in criminal justice. Anne Peaker was an inspirational researcher and advocate of arts in criminal justice. The debate – chaired by Jude Kelly OBE, the Artistic Director of Southbank Centre – was a great success and sparked discussion and debate for the following day.

On 29 September we updated people on new government thinking with policy snapshots from National Offender Management Service (NOMS), Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the

Arts Council alongside a keynote address from Michael Spurr, Chief Executive of NOMS. All of which was chaired by Baroness Lola Young. Alongside this we held 12 diverse workshops looking at evidence, research, best practice and more debate. Our three artists in residence brought the conference to a storming close with poetry, illustrations and a finale involving calypso call and response singing. ✚

INFO For more information on the Arts Alliance please visit www.artsalliance.org.uk

The general election heralded a new type of politics. Here we explore what Big Society might mean for service user involvement in criminal justice.

The Big Question

→ Dave Nicholson

Director, Ex-Cell Solutions

Taking the Government at its word, the idea of the Big Society has implications they wouldn't necessarily endorse, certainly in the field of reducing re-offending. I would also question how much The Big Society is just ideological rhetoric to cover up the need for expenditure cuts. Will anything really come of it?

There is a big difference between what the Conservatives are talking about and what I'd like to see. It's essentially the difference between a co-operative approach and my preferred move toward mutuals.

"Mutual structures are much broader in their scope than just ceding control to public service workers; it involves the wider public and – as Tessa Jowell said – service users, "where sensible." I think the use of 'where sensible' is the key contested area. Who defines what's sensible and in what context? That very phrase will become the big political battleground.

→ Peta Halls

Development Officer,
National Youth Agency

Everything is going to be dominated by this drive to cut costs. If we can demonstrate the cost cutting, money saving benefits of service user involvement, it becomes a persuasive argument. An argument the new Government can buy into.

My concern is that the idea of involving service users, certainly when you're talking about prisoners and ex-offenders, doesn't sit comfortably with previous Conservative thinking.

→ Cos Michael

Prisoners' Education Trust

It's too early to say. Some of their messages have been contradictory, but they've clearly done a great deal of work looking at the Criminal Justice System, and for that reason alone one should be cautiously optimistic.

They've spent a lot of time thinking about it, John Hayes spent a lot of time on the Apprenticeship Bill; Iain Duncan Smith has done a lot of work in his Centre for Social Justice; Nick Herbert too. So one has to acknowledge there are people in place who have done a lot of work in the area. That's not a party political point, but it is a point for some degree of optimism.

→ Mark Johnson

Founder, User Voice

The top line, The Big Society, is a perfect fit with the idea of service user involvement. It's about relinquishing power and control to the society, to the people who actually live it. That's a good thing. But when you're stepping into criminal justice you've got real problems.

You're up against the public who are being informed by the media, and there is talk of relinquishing judicial power to the public. If you allow this

to happen you're going to end up with only the angriest people taking the power. Justice should be clinical and based on science. There's no room for emotion, and relinquishing power back to the public can be very dangerous. We'll end up with lynch mobs. Media-fuelled public opinion isn't shaped by what's right, it's shaped by what's popular.

→ Sue Ryland

Chair, Service
User Involvement
Committee, DISC

We're battenning down the hatches. We're expecting the most awful cuts over the next two or three years.

I work across nine different local authorities and we're getting different messages from each. One authority has written to say they're putting a stop on all commissioning until budget announcements have been made.

If contracts are cut it's going to be very hard to provide the same baseline quality service. But getting service users involved doesn't cost extra money. Asking a service user what works and what doesn't won't cost extra money. The question, therefore, isn't how a new government will affect our ability to continue with service user involvement. The question is around how we maintain that basic service. ❖

“Everything is going to be dominated by this drive to cut costs. If we can demonstrate the money saving benefits, service user involvement becomes a persuasive argument.”

WON'T SOMEBODY
THINK OF THE

Service user involvement for young offenders is patchy and variable, fuelling resentment and frustration among young people.

CHILDREN?

is anybody listening?



“Young people involved in crime are done to rather than involved with,” argues Peta Halls, development officer at the National Youth Agency. Peta recently completed a wide-ranging report examining service user involvement within youth justice. And the results are damning.

The evidence screams of a patchy network of variable practice, where the majority of youth offending teams view user involvement as a low priority; police and probation remain focused on punishment not rehabilitation; and young people are driven by their frustration with the system to reoffend and slip deeper into a life of crime.

“Young people’s voice and influence is not encouraged across the system. The whole climate is about being done to rather than being involved; everything is about reducing risk. This is one of the larger ironies: all the evidence points to the fact that the way things currently work actually exacerbates risk,” Peta says.

No understanding

The report points to the fact there is no coherent, strategic approach to service user involvement among Youth Offending Teams (YOTs). The net result for the young people is they “do not feel valued or listened to within the youth justice system, they feel a lack of involvement and empowerment.”

“We saw clear evidence of this at an attendance centre where the young people were genuinely angry about what they were being asked to do,” Peta says. “They fully accepted they were there as punishment and actively wanted to make amends. But what they were being asked to do was meaningless and bore no relation to anything that could be applied to their lives.”

The young people were being asked to bake cakes. “They couldn’t afford the ingredients, they weren’t learning to cook anything nutritious that could help them develop skills for the real world. If they’re being taught how to cook, why not a shepherd’s pie or spaghetti Bolognese?”

Peta says there was palpable resentment among the young people. “The young people weren’t involved. They weren’t being consulted as to how the whole thing could be made relevant and beneficial. There was huge frustration and anger. So much so that a number of the young people went on to reoffend.”

The teenagers, according to Peta, had built up such resentment to the authorities that reoffending was viewed as legitimate protest. “The courses are a complete waste of money, the agencies are not addressing the reasons for the offending behaviour and are not listening to what the young people are telling them would be of benefit. If the young person understands they are being ‘punished’ and is willing to embark on some form of reparation, Youth Offending Teams are missing a trick.”

Doubly deviant

The findings of the NYA are backed up by a further piece of research carried out by the National Children’s Bureau, which asserts that “negative public perceptions of young offenders have resulted in political ambivalence as to whether young offenders ‘deserve’ a say, while staff culture and a lack of training on participative approaches can further hinder meaningful contributions by young people”.

“This backs up what we found,” says Peta. “Young people are seen in such negative terms generally that it’s not hard to imagine young offenders are seen as doubly deviant. The fear of negative headlines really affects what YOTs do around participation. We came across people in police and probation who strongly believe young people do not deserve a voice. These are young people – they aren’t career criminals. There’s a good chance of rehabilitation, so if we can help develop a voice and a set of skills for these young people we stand them in good stead.” ❖

iNFO Peta Halls, National Youth Agency
petah@nya.org.uk

The NCB report, *Young People’s Participation in the Youth Justice System*, by Diane Hart and Chris Thompson, can be downloaded at www.ncb.org.uk

Just as the Criminal Justice System in the UK catches up with the idea of service user involvement, the rest of the world has moved on: to co-ownership and mutualism.

Dave Nicholson, of Ex-Cell Solutions, provides the low down.

Mutualism, co-ownership and co-control are now the buzzwords right across public services, but there seems little consideration of the implications for the Criminal Justice System (CJS) or the VCS's involvement.

The talk is of John Lewis-style public services – not just service user involvement, but the ownership and control of each public service by those who work in and manage it and also, when sensible, by those who use its services.

It's a nice soundbite, but when is it 'sensible' for offenders to control services through co-ownership with staff and management? And, who exactly are the service users of the CJS?

In the case of NOMS we can identify two groups – the public for whom it provides protection, and offenders with whom it

works to tackle the causes of their offending behaviour.

Is it sensible, then, for offenders to co-own and control services that tackle the causes of their offending behaviour?

This is not a new question. Thirty years ago, Bottoms & McWilliams argued that instead of offenders being passive recipients of expert assistance, they should act as active agents in their own rehabilitation. In other words: they should co-own their rehabilitation.

Radical

But co-control of rehabilitation has radical implications. User Voice (see pages 10-11) is a national organisation set up and run by ex-offenders and claims that, "...getting offenders to devise their own rehabilitation programmes is the best way to reduce crime." They are piloting elected Prisoner Councils in three prisons as a means of moving towards this goal.

Social Co-operatives of ex-prisoners and offenders provide another example of co-ownership and co-control. Originating in Italy – and now to be found in most countries of the European Union – offenders create their own employment and deliver their own resettlement services to one another through membership of the Social Co-operative. The role of the professional is to facilitate the promotion, development and

success of each scheme, rather than provide 'expert' assistance and offender management.

Finally, a new initiative in Manchester is in the early stages of developing a Credit Union, co-owned and co-controlled by prisoners and ex-prisoners. As well as providing financial services to its members, the Union will also provide them with a full range of resettlement services, help and advice.

Is all this 'sensible' though? These examples and a wide range of other voices say it is – on both normative and empirical grounds. The Good Lives Rehabilitation Model (Ward & Maruna 2007) carries on where Bottoms & McWilliams left off and actively promotes the involvement and control of the rehabilitation process by an equal partnership of offender and criminal justice professional.

Insofar as this approach can be shown empirically to reduce reoffending, surely it should be regarded as 'sensible'.

In the same way, it can be argued, from a normative standpoint, that it is right for offenders to be involved in the ownership of their own rehabilitation. If society wants offenders to act responsibly then they should be given the opportunity to be responsible for their own rehabilitation. ✦

mutually beneficial





CUTTING OUT THE MIDDLE MAN



Is the VCS guilty of killing service user involvement? **Mark Johnson**, founder of **User Voice**, puts forward the prosecution.

There is a problem at the heart of service user involvement in the Criminal Justice System, and that problem is one of power. Specifically, the power relationship between service user and provider.

While increasing numbers of organisations subscribe to the top line principle of user involvement, not enough has been done to define what it means in practice.

Service users sitting on committees where they are heavily outnumbered, often intimidated and don't get an agenda which enables them to discuss what matters? That's not power sharing.

Carefully chosen service users being pulled in at the end of meetings to answer specially selected questions? Let's not pretend that's user representation.

Time to listen

User Voice is led and largely delivered by ex-offenders. But we recognise that our voices are not the ones that should be heard. Our job is to make a crack in the wall so all the unheard voices can shout through. Our job is to urge policy-makers to put their ear to the wall and listen.

In the past year we have made it our mission to introduce senior civil servants and ministers to people they don't

usually meet. Enabling policymakers to understand, perhaps for the first time, how little impact current policies have on the lives of excluded teenagers.

Recently released young offenders gave evidence to the Home Affairs Committee. This body had been discussing young offenders without actually talking to a single one.

Inside prisons, we are pioneering our own brand of democratically elected prison council so the views on the wings can be taken on board when the governor decides what's best.

Boa constrictors

If offenders are not equipped to lead successful lives we will never reduce re-offending. It's not hard to find out what's needed: you just have to ask.

Sometimes User Voice has to bypass the massive middle tier of service providers to get offenders' voices straight to the policy-makers. The VCS is a growing industry and it serves itself before it delivers. Yet policy-makers and end-users share an aim: to bring about successful change to reduce re-offending.

Large, complacent organisations that don't want to change are like boa constrictors. They take the concept of the user voice, embrace it so hard that they suffocate it, and then swallow it whole. Thankfully, no one can do that to User Voice. We're run by ex-offenders and recognise that for user's voices to be empowered they need to be independent and fully funded. In criminal justice this is a long way off, but it's our aim.

“People who claim to be involved in user engagement realise that the end game, logically, is their own unemployment, and they don't like it. Not that they would ever admit that.”



Clinks News challenges Mark Johnson's criticisms of the VCS's service user involvement.

You say many subscribe to 'top line principles' of service user involvement but go no further – why is that a problem?

People think user involvement is about consultation. You're only in the shallows there. And that's where a lot of organisations stop.

Most organisations want user engagement to benefit their services. They don't consider how it is going to benefit the service users; there is little consideration as to what their motivation is, what they're hoping for.

The power balance is unequal from the start. It always will be because people who claim to be involved in user engagement realise that the end game, logically, is their own unemployment, and they don't like it. Not that they would ever admit that.

Other contributors to Clinks News admit service user involvement can be rudimentary, but – they say – that's better than nothing. Isn't there a danger that you're demanding too much too soon? And that by making such demands you discourage organisations that have good intentions?

If you're not going to engage in a relationship where everyone benefits, better not to do it at all.

User engagement is messy and chaotic. Big organisations with

inflexible management structures don't want to know. Service users who could be the most value to an organisation are deemed too difficult to manage, so you end up with the most docile service users sat in meetings.

You are highly critical of the VCS, calling it an 'interception industry' in a recent Guardian article. What's your problem?

The big service providers need to be culled. The bigger the management structure, the less able they are to effect change. Short duration, box-ticking programmes are of no relevance to service users. It's not how services users' lives look.

I've worked in massive organisations that shape shift to get different pots of money, but continue to work in the same way. They might have been set up to work with 18-25 year olds. Times are tight and they see there's a pot of money for working with 15 year-olds, so they'll suddenly set up a team to focus on 15 year-olds. It's a racket.

If your approach is right, where's the evidence? You won't get anywhere until you've convinced the hardliners and the sceptics. It's not that the work isn't good, it is that there is no easy way of measuring it, and there hasn't been enough done to gather the evidence.

The Prison Councils User Voice set up produced amazing results. Within six months there was a 37% decrease in prisoner complaints in

one prison (Albany) and in Parkhurst there was a drop from 160 to 47 people going into segregation.

By engaging with the service user you are addressing issues closer to the cause. This model of engagement allows you to do this rather than entering into a punitive approach.

Imagine if O2 decided to not consult the end-user, and instead charged a select number of board members to design its products and services. How long would O2 stay in business? The shareholders would revolt.

That sounds like common sense but it's also naïve – for much of the public and the media there is no equivalence between a PLC and a prison. Prisons are places of punishment.

Yes, public perception of crime and punishment is an issue. It's a bar against all understanding. The problem is the public is educated via the media. I've never met a prisoner who has disputed the fact that they should be punished for their actions.

There is this bizarre relationship between the media, the public, and the politics. Policies are shaped by the media and politicians disregard professional insights.

To ever really get this sorted we're going to need politicians who are willing to take decisions that are not only difficult, but could prove – to them, personally – politically devastating. ❖



DON'T TAKE HIS WORD FOR IT!



Frustrated with tokenism, Unlock strives to move service user involvement from a box-ticking exercise toward something of real benefit to both service providers and users. **Christopher Stacey**, sets out its manifesto.

Long before service-user involvement became fashionable in the Criminal Justice System, it was at the very heart of Unlock. In 2000, a group of former prisoners, disenchanted with traditional approaches to penal reform, decided to form an organisation that would tackle the issues faced by reformed offenders.

Rather than 'representing' its members, Unlock's purpose is to get those who rarely hear from reformed offenders to listen. Unlock members have:

- Given oral evidence to the House of Commons Justice Select Committee on the Role of a Prison Officer
- Contributed to a consultation on the Rehabilitation of Offenders (Amendment) Bill
- Made a submission to the Parole Board's stakeholder engagement exercise on improving their communication with prisoners.

The goal is not to improve Unlock's services but to ensure the voices of service users are taken into account in areas of policy that

directly affect them. There is a continuous stream of policy-making that is missing this engagement.

In May 2009, Unlock placed an article in Inside Time magazine seeking prisoners' views on proposed reforms to prison law funding. The Legal Services Commission was undertaking a consultation but bizarrely prisoners were not considered a stakeholder. A recent DWP/MoJ review of employment services does not include the voice of service users, suggesting that nobody thought to ask them what is needed.

A question of need

The requirement for user involvement arises because it is often unclear whether the services being funded are needed. Understanding this need has always been the VCS's strength. However, a competitive – even combative – relationship has developed within the VCS due to the growing dominance of the commissioner/ service-provider model.

There is an increasing pressure to filter the feedback of service users when communicating with commissioners. The danger is that user involvement becomes nothing more than a way of looking better, rather than actually making things better. It can easily become something that has to be done, without a real understanding of why.

A recent Guardian article

by former prisoner Eric Allison demonstrates the damage of service user involvement implemented for the wrong reasons – damage not to the organisation, but to the individual.

Eric cites the example of reformed offenders involved with government-funded rehabilitation agencies. They felt they were "trundled out as tame ex-cons". Others felt like the "token ex-offenders", allowed to work as volunteers but ceaselessly leap-frogged for a promised place on the payroll.

Positive futures

However, increased user involvement has its dangers. For many reformed offenders, faced with discrimination in society, it can be seen as the only way to turn a negative history into a positive future identity.

For some, working in the Criminal Justice System is a genuine choice but the danger is that it is seen as the only way people with convictions can gain recognition, respect and success.

Service user involvement has come a long way but must be prevented from becoming no more than another tick in the box. There is a gulf between genuinely involving customers and the tokenism that can pass for it. ✚

Christopher Stacey is Information & Advice Manager at Unlock, the National Association of Reformed Offenders.

CRB CHECKS

The enemy of effective user involvement?



Ushered in on a wave of good intent, the ubiquity of the CRB check threatens to undermine the benefits of service user involvement. Professionals working with ex-offenders report that service users are needlessly blocked from playing a positive part in the rehabilitation of other criminals, because bureaucracy sees risk where it should see benefit.

Clinks News asked a range of professionals what factors were most instrumental in the effective rehabilitation of offenders. Time and again the responses suggested that if service users felt they were understood, if they could see that the workers could identify with them and empathise with what they were going through, rehabilitation was far more successful.

“Empathy is of paramount importance,” says Peta Halls development officer, National Youth Agency. “Young offenders want to feel their key worker has a knowledge and understanding of what they’ve been through.”

Seriously alienated

It’s not just young offenders. Dave Nicholson, director of Ex-Cell Solutions, says the same is true of the prisoners his organisation works with. “The best people to work with seriously alienated offenders are those who have been in similar situations themselves.”

“We make a point wherever possible to employ and work with people who actually know what they’re talking about.

More important than necessarily having the right qualifications, is the ability to empathise.”

Despite the opinion and experience of professionals, those with criminal records are often barred from working with those who could benefit most.

“It’s a huge problem,” argues Mark Johnson, director of User Voice. “The government is the largest employer in the country and yet it has a bar against employing those with positive CRBs. I recently gave a presentation to the Ministry of Justice. I said that one in three men in the UK has a criminal conviction and joked that the other two either haven’t been caught or aren’t telling the truth! The serious point is: in your office, do you know who’s been binge drinking, involved in domestic violence, taking drugs? We don’t know what a lot of people get up to and yet we’re in the crazy situation where we’re penalising those whose risks we can identify.”

Millstone

The CRB check, a tool intended to help identify risk and manage it, has become the millstone around the neck of many ex-offenders.

“Despite equal opportunities policies coming out of our ears, this is one group that is well and truly discriminated against,” says Dave. “Ex-offenders are screened out of public and private sector jobs and quite often ones where their particular offence would pose no threat at all. In fact, it could be of absolute benefit.”

Not only are service users prevented from helping their peers, the suffocating effect of a positive CRB stops many ex-offenders from applying their skills and learning more broadly.

Help myself

Sharon is an 18-year-old care leaver from Wrexham. She has a criminal record for attempted arson, and has found the CRB check to be the biggest barrier to meaningful employment.

“There are loads of schemes to help me. Having a criminal record is actually really useful if you want some free courses or you want to get some kind of help. But I’m fed up with being helped, I want to help myself.”

Sharon argues that while she benefited from her time as a service user, she fears being trapped in an endless cycle of schemes and programmes.

“I want to get out of this industry for criminals and be normal. Thing is, no matter what jobs I’ve gone for, employers see a positive CRB. They see ‘arson’ and think ‘nutter’. When there are ten other people going for the same job, who are they going to pick? It’s not the headcase who will burn down their building. What I don’t get is why the fact I tried to burn down a care home when I was younger makes any difference to whether I’d be a good PA, or receptionist, or nursery nurse? What benefit is anyone getting from the CRB check?” ❖

“ Having a criminal record is actually really useful if you want some free courses or you want to get some kind of help. But I’m fed up with being helped, I want to help myself.”

THE PROBLEM WITH SERVICE USER INVOLVEMENT IS...

WHAT'S THE BIGGEST PROBLEM?
THE- **CRIMINAL JUSTICE**
AGENCIES/ THE STAFF/ THE
OFFENDERS/ OR THE FACT THAT
NO ONE HAS PROVED USER
INVOLVEMENT IS WORTH IT?

User involvement brings benefits to both the organisation and the service user, but the path to effective engagement is littered with obstacles. Some are organisational, some relate to working with prisons and some with establishing a relationship with the offender.

As with any 'difficult' group, offenders suffer from a negative and often unsympathetic public perception. While those working directly with these individuals may have the best of intentions, attempts at true engagement – with an equal power balance that offers most benefit to the offender – can be stymied by concerns about negative media reaction. There may also be resistance from those, within and without the system, who feel offenders should be punished and have forfeited their right to a voice.

Public enemy

The National Children's Bureau conducted a report into levels of participation within the youth justice system in 2009. While the conclusions are specific to the young person's estate, the report's authors – Diane Hart and Chris Thompson – made findings that are equally applicable across the CJS.

"Negative public perceptions of young offenders have resulted in political ambivalence as to whether young offenders 'deserve' a say," they write, "while staff culture and commitment can further hinder meaningful contributions."

Peta Halls, of the National Youth Agency, echoes these findings and says that police and probation fall way behind other agencies in their willingness to engage with service users (see page 8).

"The desire to embrace service user involvement depends on the background of the individuals, and the disciplines they're coming from. Some agencies were very aware and much more participative in their approach. Police and probation less so. We came across police who strongly believed these young people were not deserving of a voice."

This attitude is not isolated to young offenders. It exists for all offenders and can have a pernicious effect. For user involvement to work, it has to operate on a foundation of trust, but where there is an ingrained belief in the offender being deviant the barriers can be huge.

Bad attitude

HMP Leeds has drawn plaudits for its programme to engage prisoners in the delivery and design of its health services (see page 18). Despite the project's award-winning credentials, getting it off the ground was beset with challenges. Challenges that stemmed, at least in part, from the attitudes of prison staff.

In evaluating the work, Anne Cowman, project lead for NHS Leeds Community Healthcare, which ran the scheme, offers a frank assessment. She says that while the project "empowers offenders... and encourages them to be involved in decision making processes [that lead] to improvements in self esteem and ... a positive impact on behaviour", there were "numerous concerns raised by staff and security". Primarily regarding prisoner involvement in the recruitment of healthcare managers.

As Anne explains, "One of the biggest challenges was to promote the viability of the project. It was difficult for the prison service to comprehend and/or accept the benefits that would arise from utilising prisoners in this capacity."

Yet even when prison staff embrace user involvement, the reality of prison life can get in the way. Second only to the rigours of getting staff



on board, were Anne's experiences of working with a transient and demotivated population.

"The nature of the prison population made the project challenging and at times difficult," Anne says. "Prisoners who began the induction process were moved to a training prison before they were able to undertake their role."

To resolve this problem, Anne negotiated with the Offender Management team and secured a proportion of service user posts where prisoners would stay for a minimum of six months, enabling the completion of their training. "This gave sustainability and continuity to the team," she says.

The trick in this instance was to get buy in from the top level. But even when that is achieved, staff further down the pecking order may not be as understanding. Moreover, the reality of daily life on the wing can inhibit service user involvement and create its own difficulties.

Everyone on board?

In 2009, Koestler Trust enlisted female offenders to work as curators on its Art By Offenders exhibition. Downview Prison, in Sussex, was selected because Koestler had a pre-existing relationship with the prison and knew the staff to be accommodating and receptive to the idea of user involvement.

Despite this, problems soon presented themselves. As Sarah Mathéve, Outreach and Education Worker at Koestler Trust explains. "The women didn't just come from the resettlement wing, they came from all over the prison. There were problems getting all the women out on time, having them shower beforehand. Obviously it's not nice to spend the day in a gallery if you've not been allowed to shower, or you haven't had access to the right clothes." (See page 16).

Sarah echoes the points raised by Peta Halls and Diane Hart: some staff struggle with the notion that offenders are getting perks and privileges. "It's difficult

for prison staff. They're keeping everything running properly on the wing, and are probably thinking 'why should everyone else be locked up longer just because one person is getting special treatment?' It's not always easy, and I do appreciate the position."

Prove it

What all of these problems point to is the need for greater levels of education and persuasion. Criminal justice staff, commissioners and practitioners alike need to understand the unequivocal benefits of service user involvement. Currently, there is a divide between those who 'know' it's the right thing because it reduces recidivism, it raises aspiration and self-esteem and ultimately saves money for the public sector and those who remain unconvinced, who believe that engaging prisoners in this way is liberal nonsense and a waste of resources.

Until there is hard evidence, neither side will convince the other. Both will remain entrenched in their own beliefs and service user involvement will never be without difficulty. What is most peculiar is that little research exists. It is difficult to find hard evidence which creates persuasive, irrefutable arguments for full user involvement.

"There's a lack of research, a gap in the research and evaluation, no one has bothered to look for it. There's a universal assumption that it's a good thing, but I know of very little research that actually looks at what service user involvement means and what effect it can have," says Dave Nicholson, director, Ex-Cell Solutions.

The bad news is that without the evidence, it's hard to see how these underlying problems will go. The good news is there is an opportunity to address it. ❖

“We came across police who strongly believed young offenders did not deserve a voice.”

In 2009, **Koestler Trust** invited prisoners at HMP Downview to curate its annual exhibition of art by offenders. What happened next surprised the charity as much as the prisoners.

Sophie

“When I started work for Koestler it was not how I expected it to be at all. I was quite worried as I was quite ignorant about the world of art. I never thought I’d be involved in so many different aspects of putting together an art exhibition. Choosing the artwork to go to exhibition was tough as there was a deadline on it and there were many discussions amongst the group as to which pieces we thought should go through and which shouldn’t. Not many decisions were unanimous so there was a lot of debate around most pieces.”

Lucy

“I had never been to an art gallery before. I had never even heard the word curating before. I can now talk boastfully about paintings; I know what some are made of and even suggest how to showcase some of the art works. I put so much effort into learning about curating that it is a pleasure to represent offenders. As a serving prisoner myself, I can now actually pass on a message that offenders are not as bad as some people portray them to be. I have learnt so much. I am very proud of myself. I have learnt a lot about working as a team, the whole process taught me to actually believe in myself.”



Photo One by Robbie James, courtesy of Art Saves Lives

Koestler Trust has been exhibiting art by offenders for years, but has only recently handed control over to the prisoners. In 2008, as the charity teetered its first steps toward service user involvement, a group of young offenders serving community sentences was invited to whittle down thousands of submissions to the final 150 exhibited pieces. Their involvement was limited to selecting the artwork, but the experience gave the charity a glimpse of what might be possible.

“Working with the young offenders was great, but we felt we could have taken things further,” explains Sarah Mathéve, Outreach and Education Co-ordinator at Koestler Trust. “The young people had other commitments – school, college, community payback – which limited their involvement. They came along and saw the exhibition, but I don’t think they got the same sense of achievement as the women in 2009.”

No experience necessary

Building on an existing relationship with HMP Downview, Sarah met with the prisoners and invited six to take part in the 2009 show.

“I was clear that I don’t come from an arts background and we didn’t need, or even want, people to be into art. We wanted people who were willing to put in hard work, show enthusiasm and embark on a journey.”

Inclusivity was key. Koestler and the staff at Downview worked hard to draw together a disparate group of women – avoiding the trap of involving only the keen, the motivated and the well-behaved.

“We did all we could to open the opportunity to all prisoners and not just those engaged with education or art classes. In the end, the prisoners who posed the greatest challenge – some were on strict observation, on final warnings – were the ones who proved to be the biggest success.”

Comfort zone

Far from simply selecting art, the group hung the work (“even drilling holes in walls!”), decided upon explanatory text, wrote copy for brochures and flyers, participated in a launch night Q&A, and even ran exhibition tours.

“By the end of the project we had achieved far more than I ever

thought possible,” Sarah says. “They exceeded my expectations, not just as prisoners but as people with no experience of the art world. Asking them to curate, give tours and speak in public is huge; way outside most people’s comfort zone.”

Lessons learned

Sarah says quite apart from what the prisoners gained, the project provided Koestler Trust with plenty of salutary lessons.

“I worried the women would expect total control and anything less would make them feel their involvement was tokenistic. But the biggest lesson was that you can’t project your own insecurities onto the prisoners. When the idea of the women doing tours was floated, I couldn’t imagine any of them stepping forward. I did it the year before – it was terrifying. But throughout the two-month project they became so proud of the journey they’d been on they wanted to discuss the art, the exhibition, their reasons for choosing certain works, but also what the experience had meant to them.”

Results

Koestler Trust was so pleased with the results it is using the project as a template for future exhibitions. In 2010, its regional shows in Scotland and Manchester were prisoner-curated. Sarah says that there is no element of the work that will be off limits to the prisoners.

“If the 2009 show taught us anything it’s that you can’t second guess what the prisoners will want to get involved in, or what they will excel at. Everything will be on the table and we will shape their involvement according to their wishes. I’ve learnt that limiting this kind of work to your own idea of what’s possible is a huge mistake. The more choice you provide, the more control you offer up, the greater the reward will be.” ✚

Steve Woodford, CEO at Foundation, chats to Clinks about customers, troublesome trustees and why power doesn’t always corrupt.

What do you mean by service user involvement?

It affects everything from the bottom up. There’s no point in having service users on your board if you’re not allowing them to choose the colour of the walls in their supported housing.

At the bottom level it’s about choice; giving people a sense of respect and ownership of their lives and surroundings. At the top level, we build upon that by saying, “You can contribute to others, as well as to the organisation.”

Whose interests come first: the organisation’s or its service users?

The interests of both parties are one and the same: it’s about improving things for services users. There is no either or.

We go as far as having service users on our board – we have done for six years. Even though trustees from the private sector initially struggled with that concept.

Why was there a resistance to having service users on the board at Foundation and how was it overcome?

My chair has been a director within the brewing industry. He knew nothing of the VCS. His concept of boards was that directors have considerable expertise and business management experience.

It’s fair to say he wouldn’t have had alcoholics on the board of his brewery. That transition was tricky, but he’s now one of the biggest advocates of having customers on the board. He acknowledges that it keeps the customer central to what you’re doing and fundamentally changes the way the board operates.

If you set an example at the top of an organisation, you struggle to justify why users aren’t at every level of the work you do.

Is there a reason for you using the term ‘customer’ instead of ‘service user’?

The word customer addresses the power imbalance. When we first introduced this idea I got blasted for it: “people aren’t really customers, they don’t have a lot of choice in life”.

That argument misses the point. Our concept isn’t that customers shop around for our services; it’s about treating people with respect.

Organisations put service users in positions of power and influence, but it’s all heavily stage-managed.

Does this kind of involvement create unrealistic expectations in the mind of the service user?

No. It boosts self-esteem; countering years of being knocked back and belittled. As long as things are managed responsibly I’ve never seen anything other than benefits to the individual.

People are more sensible than we give them credit for. They know the Prime Minister won’t change the world on the basis of meeting them. People don’t get carried away. ✚

“This kind of involvement boosts someone’s self esteem; countering years of being knocked back and belittled and being a nobody.”

User involvement in



↓
The Patient Advice and Liaison Service within the prison saw an increase of 380% in enquiries following the co-ordinators taking their posts.

What happens when prisoners redesign healthcare provision? A **380% increase** in services accessed, a **50% upturn** in engagement from prisoners who previously abstained, a decrease in waiting times and a **10% reduction** in unattended appointments.

HMP Leeds has scooped a hat-trick of awards for its pioneering scheme to involve prisoners in the improvement of healthcare.

A partnership between HMP Leeds and NHS Leeds Community Healthcare, it demonstrates how sectors outside the VCS are tackling service user involvement.

Since the scheme's launch, the prison reports a 50% increase in the number of prisoners accessing healthcare services, improvements in prisoner self-esteem and behaviour, better integration between prisoners and staff and a number of offenders gaining employment on release.

This success has seen the scheme – the first of its kind in the UK - rolled out at HMP Wealstun, with plans for further implementation across the country.

Lack of voice

The scheme was launched following complaints from prisoners that they were not receiving healthcare equal to that of outside communities and that their voices were not being heard.

“Core to our plan was the creation of Healthcare Representatives from the offender population,” explains Anne Cowman, project leader. “We informed prisoners of our work and of the opportunities to get involved.”

From this initial approach, 40 prisoners came forward. Job descriptions were drawn up and application forms distributed. A total of 20 applicants were recruited, alongside a co-ordinator.

“The co-ordinator's role was essential to the theme of peer mentorship and guidance,” says Anne. “It has been proven that having a prisoner in this role enables information to be obtained more successfully and it gives evidence of healthcare and prisoners working effectively together in a non-judgemental way.”

Paid positions

Initially the co-ordinator role was voluntary, but the tail-end of 2009 saw three new co-ordinator roles established as paid prison posts. These co-ordinators are positioned in the Outpatient Clinic, Medical Reception and Triage Clinic.

The co-ordinators designed their own uniform, as well as information leaflets outlining their role and accessibility. Their role is crucial. Co-ordinators are the main conduit of information between healthcare providers and prisoners on the wings.

“This group has taken part in service improvement forums where their experiences and comments have changed prison health care working practices, relating to medical reception processes, medicine management, improving patient access to appointment systems and the service implementation of a new minor illness provision,” Anne says.

Innovations and concerns

The most innovative part of the project, according to Anne, was around prisoner involvement in the recruitment of senior healthcare managers.

“Service user involvement in recruitment is nothing new,” she admits, “but this is the first project that involves prisoners in such a crucial role.”

Health

It was also a move that caused some concern for prison staff. Due to the sensitivity of the interviews, service users were required to be non-judgemental and maintain high levels of confidentiality.

“There were numerous concerns raised by interviewees, staff and security. A compromise was reached whereby prisoners would be involved in a selected part of the process as a pilot to determine how successful prisoner involvement would be.”

Presentation

Candidates for the senior healthcare management positions were required to give a ten-minute presentation to co-ordinators based on the question: “Patients’ health is patients’ business. How will you ensure you and your team keep patients at the heart of healthcare provision within the prison?”

“I was impressed with the level of discussion between us and the service users when assessing the candidate’s performance and awarding marks,” says D Holland, prison governor. “Observations, comments and assessments were remarkably consistent between the facilitators and prisoners. It demonstrated that prisoners who had no formal training or experience of interviewing were able to make a valid contribution to the process.”

Results

Eighteen months into the scheme, co-ordinators were asked to complete questionnaires to evaluate their thoughts on the role and their involvement in shaping services.

Eighty per cent stated they felt listened to, valued and that the experience had improved their self-esteem. Ninety five per cent said they felt part of a team, while all respondents reported that they had helped make changes and had helped others within the prison.

Moreover, the Patient Advice and Liaison Service within the prison saw an increase of 380% in enquiries following the co-ordinators taking their posts. There was a 23 per cent increase in attendance at doctor and clinic appointments and a 10 per cent reduction in ‘did not attend’ rates, following the introduction, at the co-ordinator’s request, of a revised appointment card system.

Waiting times have been reduced from ten to three days, and there has been a 50 per cent increase in attendance by prisoners who previously abstained from all healthcare involvement.

Numbers up

This upturn in prisoner numbers attending healthcare appointments and engaging with services is directly attributable to the changes implemented at the suggestion of the service users.

“All new service improvement and development policies are redesigned with a co-ordinator being an integral part of the discussion process,” Anne says. “This enables us to maintain that the patient is at the heart of all that we do. This scheme has enabled prisoners to have better access to healthcare through a peer-led and support approach. This ensures healthcare can have a greater impact on the whole prison population, rather than just the more confident prisoners.” ✦

“I was impressed with the level of discussion between us and the service users. It demonstrated that using prisoners who had no formal training or experience of interviewing were able to make a valid contribution to the process.”

D Holland, prison governor, HMP Leeds

From theory to practice

Lesley Frazer of Clinks indicates how the past 40 years of academic study has shaped thinking around service user involvement.

While researchers have paid increasing attention to user involvement since the 1990s, this groundswell of academic interest has its roots in the 1960s.

In 1969, Sherry Arnstein published what is widely regarded as the seminal work on citizen participation. Within this study, she puts forward the argument for a 'Ladder of Participation' – a hierarchy of eight levels of engagement.

Following Arnstein, theories have become more nuanced. Participation has come to be viewed as a more complex and dynamic process, requiring active strategies to empower communities and individuals.

Gradual shift

This shift in understanding has developed to a point where service users, particularly in health and social care, are seen as crucial to the development of effective services.

Throughout the 1970s, the notion of the citizen as consumer gained prominence, and choice was viewed as a means of having access to power. Within public services this was reflected in the creation of community development approaches, which aimed to involve people in influencing change in their local neighbourhoods.

The following decade, self-help groups began to appear when consumers of public services recognised and asserted their influence over the type and quality of services offered.

As these voices coalesced, increasingly powerful user movements came into being; particularly in areas such as disability, mental health and older people's health and social care.

Parallel developments

These developments since the early 1990s, have been paralleled by political and economic approaches to provision of public and social services. Health and social care agencies have recognised service users as experts in identifying their own needs and have engaged with them to help plan and develop more effective, customer-focused services.

George Taylor, in his paper, *Empowerment, Identity and Participatory Research*, says this demonstrates service users are seen as "central to the solution of social problems and not simply victims of social ills."

Yet there is still some distance to go toward the goal of effective participation and user involvement.

Researchers have identified a number of barriers that refuse to give way, mainly in relation to the operation of power.

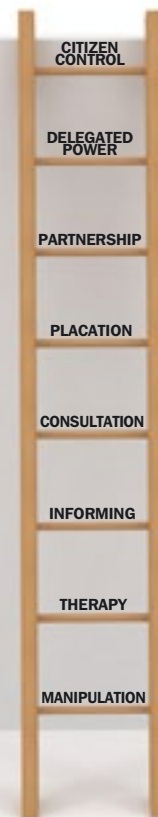
Amanda Gregory, of Hull University, argues that power still resides with the professionals. As she says in her study, *Problematising Participation: A Critical Review of Approaches to Participation in Evaluation Theory*, "effective user participation remains problematic".

Users who sit alongside professionals on planning groups often find their voices disregarded because they are not representative of the wider group. There is also the tendency for public services to rely on formal partnership processes, outputs and quick results. This runs counter to the needs of service users and can lead to the feeling of disengagement from the decision making process.

Slow going

Criminal Justice agencies have been slow to embrace user involvement. Despite the fact that many voluntary and community organisations have long argued for the importance of involving offenders and ex-offenders in service planning, most commissioning still takes place without reference to the users' perspective.

This edition of *Clinks News* presents a number of initiatives that have enabled service users to develop and articulate their voice. However, work still needs to be done before we reach the top of Arnstein's ladder. Mark Johnson of User Voice, and Dave Nicholson of Ex-Cell Solutions – among others – argue the balance of power still sits with the professionals. And while David Cameron's Big Society might hint at greater levels of service user involvement, it appears an impulse driven more by budgets than empowerment. ✚



Ladder of participation

Adapted from Sheila Arnstein's Ladder of Participation

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