

Short report of CoolTan Arts Voices Personalisation Conference – 'First among many'

One of the first conferences this autumn concerning the current priority action of government for mental health and social care services - **Personalisation** - was held Friday, 25th September, at CoolTan Arts. Whilst a number of conferences or seminars are planned by other organisations, CoolTan's could be said to be an event closer to the people who would be directly affected by the changes, offering a more personal experience; and it was free.

The conference was planned and presented by **Gin Atkins**, Community involvement and advocacy Coordinator, and Phil Ruthen, Advocacy training Coordinator, with the CoolTan Voices participants and staff team. CoolTan Voices is the 'umbrella' group name for the many volunteering, training, community involvement opportunities and projects that are not primarily creative arts.

A large audience enthusiastically received the four guest speakers; the subject itself was debated in depth.

- **Personalisation** is founded on several key values which tells it apart from the way services have been traditionally provided, for example:
- **Self assessment** – social workers will be supporting people to identify their own needs and what they want to maintain or enhance their quality of life.
- **Self directed care** – service users will be supported to decide for themselves how they want their aims to be achieved, and what support they will need to do this.
- **Individual budgets** – financial resources will be allocated to the service user, depending on their level of need, drawing from a range of relevant funding sources. This budget can then be spent on the service user's behalf by the Local Authority, or given to the Individual through a **Direct Payment** to manage independently (and supported to do so if required). At the moment, services provided exclusively by the NHS are not able to be included in a direct payment, but government wants this changed as soon as possible – probably by April 2010.

Robin Murray-Neill, from the Department of Health's Putting People First team, is leading on mental health and Personalisation. He introduced the national perspective, why the changes have come in, what responses were happening. These changes – although decided over a decade ago, and often more associated with people with learning, sensory or physical disabilities, for instance, are equally relevant for people with personal experience of disabling mental distress. But the pace of change has been slow – despite repeated calls to act from central government, the mental health Tsar in 2006, service users and user-led organisations. These proposed shifts in power, responsibility, funding and social care

support systems have been arguably poorly resourced and not always well understood within mental health services themselves.

A neighbouring Borough perspective from the LB Lambeth pilot scheme was addressed by **Pauline Etim-Ubah**, Community Development Work Team, Fanon Southside Partnership. People in LB Lambeth are already being enabled to access personalised support services and direct payments, albeit on a small scale. The conference audience was keen to hear about how, or not, the service user perspective was being taken into account in Lambeth. What are some of the hurdles?

Sena Shah, Head of Provider Services Commissioning and Lead for Engaging Service Users and Carers for Adult Social Care, gave a commissioning perspective from Southwark Council – the Council is in the process of designing the routes for people to access personalised services and eventually individual budgets. Questions included: is there new money to the council to fund these changes, and how much choice would actually come about?

Jean Cozens, CoolTan Arts Trustee, drew the previous speakers' themes together in her personal response to the issues raised. She highlighted the need for people's rights and independence to be at the front of all changes, following on her personal experience of being a self-advocate with regards to her relationship with mental health services.

Due to extending time for people to comment on personalisation, a shortened but loud introduction to self-advocacy as a tool for exerting your rights in a personalised world was given by **Phil Ruthen**, Advocacy Training Coordinator, ending the successful afternoon.

CoolTan Voices will make widely available info from this free event - including presentation slides and questions generously answered by the panel speakers in writing since the event.

If you would like a copy of the personalisation info pack in a different format, please contact Gin or Phil.

Keep an eye out for more information on CoolTan Arts website, and for further information, to comment or get involved, contact either Gin on gin@cooltanarts.org.uk, or Phil on phil@cooltanarts.org.uk, drop in to CoolTan Arts, or call the office on 0207 701 2696 / 0795 248 1566 info@cooltanarts.org.uk

Community Advocacy Meetings

Most recent meeting was: Wednesday 18th November 2pm-3.30pm at CoolTan Arts.

CoolTan Arts Voices Community Advocacy Group held a meeting on the 20th October from 2-3.30pm at CoolTan, to follow up on the personalisation conference. We looked at the information brought together from since the conference, and

discussed how CoolTan Arts Voices could be involved as personalisation begins to roll out in LB Southwark.

A big THANK YOU to everyone who came to the Conference, and the Community Advocacy Meetings.