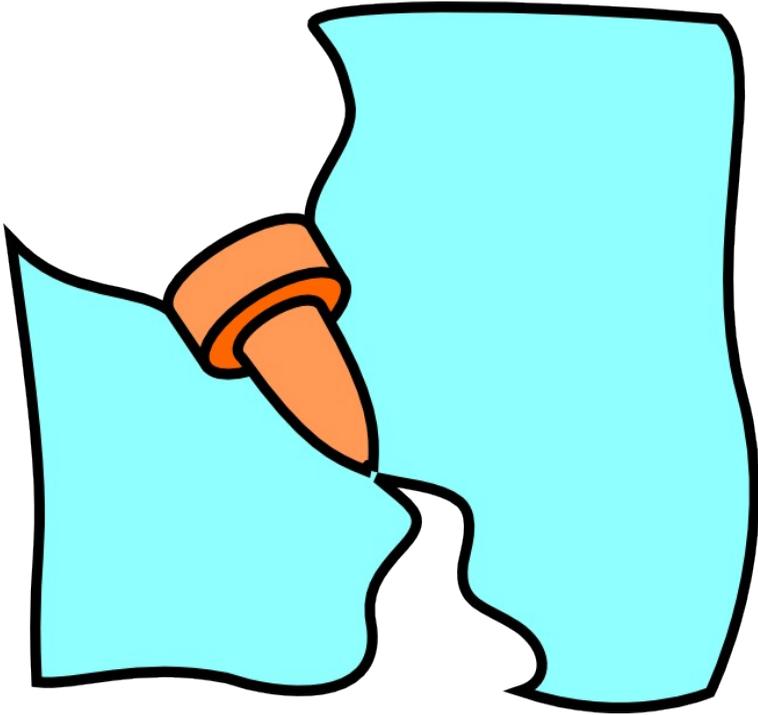


Peer Broker Course 2011



**Review of our first course for people with lived
experience of health and social care services who
want to work as 'Support Brokers'**

REVIEW OF FIRST PEER BROKER COURSE

SUMMARY

The Community Glue Peer Broker Course ran between September and December 2011, training four people as Support Brokers. All trainees had experience of long-term illness or disability and/or cared for a relative, and several were involved in charities or user-led services. Feedback about the course overall and the way people were encouraged to participate was overwhelmingly positive (97.5%). We learned that sessions needed to be slightly longer than 2 hours, and learning activities timed better. Interactive learning activities, such as simulations, were highly valued by participants. Some elements of theory, such as the way individual budgets are calculated and administered, were confusing. Teaching aids were adequate. Facilities were adequate, although the room was sometimes too warm.

There was widespread support for the idea of a 'peer broker forum'. Changes to the way that brokerage is working locally frustrated participants' ambitions to gain paid employment at the end of the course, though many found that learning from the course was useful to them personally, or to the people they cared for. Despite the evident problems with self-directed support locally, the group felt that the course was worthwhile and that Community Glue should continue working on supporting self-directed support.

BACKGROUND

The first run of the Community Glue course for Peer Brokers ran between September and December 2011. The median attendance was four learners, the lowest was three and the largest five: four people completed the course. Sessions were held at The Old Music Hall on Cowley Road – a charity centre with wheelchair access and good facilities. Two people facilitated each two-hour session (duration and timing had resulted from consultation with local service user and carer groups).

Course content was based on the criteria developed by Skills for Care¹, and tailored to build on people's personal experience of using health and social care services. We tried to make sure the teaching and learning activities were consistent with the subject, seeking to draw parallels between an empowering, supportive approach to teaching and the application of a similar approach to brokerage. We used a 'peer learning' approach, where everyone's personal experiences were valued equally instead of having 'experts'. We did use a few 'declarative' teaching and learning activities to communicate the basic information, but in the main used 'functioning' activities such as simulations and role-plays.

We sought feedback on an ongoing basis, and make it very clear we were happy to modify both course content. People found it hard to give us a clear steer, at least to start with: the support broker role itself is very new, and we gave our view that we were effectively inventing 'peer

1 [Skills for Care \(2010\) the independent broker role and training requirements: a summary report](#)

brokerage', because no-one else was providing training similar to ours. We sought both informal feedback – before and after session, in the tea break and also as we went along – and formal feedback, mainly by using forms. At the end of the course, we also invited people to say what they felt about the course on video. There were three types of formal feedback:

- After each session.
- Half way through the course.
- At the end of the course.

A. AFTER EACH SESSION

We asked people to complete feedback forms after each session. We forgot to design the feedback form for the 10th session, and the last two 'top-up' sessions were slightly ad-hoc, so it wasn't possible to design a form. The design of the forms changed from session to session, but some elements were the same in each case.

We asked people to rate each session overall. 97.5% of feedback was that sessions had gone well, 2.5% that the session was OK, and there was no feedback that sessions had gone badly. We also asked people about whether we had supported people to participate well, OK or badly. The scores were the same (i.e. 97.5% 'well' and 2.5 'OK').

There was always a box for people to give other feedback not on the form. From this we learned that the flip-chart was difficult for some people to read, so we started using a 'virtual flip-chart' (using a laptop and

projector). We also learned that some people found the room too hot and stuffy, and our directions for the first session needed improvement (to explain how to get in through the side entrance). A couple of times we were able to pick up issues from people's feedback and clarify them during the following session, but despite this people remained confused about the financial side of self-directed support. Which, frankly, is probably not unrelated to the fact that it is confusing!

We consistently overrun the sessions, and occasionally had problems with the timing of activities within the sessions. While some of this is fairly inevitable when running a new-course, particularly one which aims to use a lot of peer-learning techniques, we drew two conclusions. Firstly, we would need to sharpen up our timings, and secondly the sessions needed to be longer (with one or two split in half).

B. AT THE HALF WAY POINT

We asked people to complete short forms to help us plan for after the course finished.

When the course finished, $\frac{3}{4}$ respondents wanted to get paid work as brokers, and 1 wanted to work in some sort of volunteer broker support role and get more training. One was fed up with volunteer opportunities, and very clearly only interested in paid work. People were interested in support with confidence and any other free training that might be available. One respondent worked for another local user-led organisation, and was keen to

foster informal links.

We asked people what we could do to make it easier for them to reach their ambitions. Everybody asked us to try and set up meetings between them and employer organisations. We invited Christine Witcher (Manager of the Age UK Broker service, who'd helped us set up the course). By the time she came it was already obvious that zero hours contracts weren't working out well, and she estimated that 15-16 hours per week would be the minimum time people would need to commit in order to get a proper handle on and keep up-to-date with the complex admin. systems. One asked for support with application forms and help practising interview skills.

We asked about the idea of peer broker forum to support people in practice. They said about an hour a month would be reasonable.

C. AFTER THE COURSE FINISHED

At the end of the course, we asked people to fill in a form that contained quiz elements (what have you learned), and prompted people to make suggestions about what could be improved.

The first question focussed on 'peer-learning'. The group was fairly unanimous on the major defining feature: that no person's experience counted for more than anyone else's. Everyone felt that the 'simulations' (role plays) were valuable, and individuals highlighted a variety of other activities they'd personally found useful. People

wanted more opportunities to present their own' cases' to the group; we decided to take this idea forward in to the forum, and keep an open mind about making space in future training sessions. However, both facilitators are concerned about the risks of asking people to present 'confidential' information, or to over-expose themselves emotionally.

Policies, regulations and guidance relating to self-directed support are changing all the time. The two main ways people thought we could help them stay up-to-date were via the Community Glue web site and the forum. We've endeavoured to do both.

We tried to be realistic about the limitations of self-directed support, particularly in the wider context of changes to the welfare system. We asked our group if they thought self-directed support had been discredited, and whether we should walk away from it. People unanimously thought it was important for us to stay involved. One person suggested that we should set up some sort of support of activists/self-advocates who want to challenge their individual budgets.

Throughout the course, we stressed the immense value of supports that could be provided by 'user-led' groups and organisations. We asked how we could best support the development of local initiatives. The group came up with a range of useful suggestions, including:

- Providing basic skills training and support to local groups.
- Use a wide range of supports as examples for

exercises on support planning.

- Sharing information on our web site
- Developing a similar course for people who want to develop user-led supports.

We asked people for some more information about how a monthly peer broker forum might run. Again, people came up with a range of useful suggestions:

- Updating people about changes to the way individual budgets are administered locally, and on policy developments.
- Possibly doing some more simulations.
- Hearing from people with experience of setting up/using support plans.
- Exchanging information about local supports.
- Letting people know if there are any developments with mental health budgets
- Having an opportunity to talk about things people are finding difficult.
- Taking it in turns to research and present on particular topics, including
 - A session focussed on dementia.
 - A session on communicating with people with dysphasia.
 - A session on personal care equipment, including oxygen and breathing apparatus, and personal hygiene.

Community Glue CIC 07300592
The Old Music Hall, 106-108 Cowley Road
www.communityglue.org.uk