

ELECTRONIC GUIDE 3

Positive meetings and get-togethers



We know that approaches to user involvement that entail people coming together or going to meetings, are likely to leave out some people. It is important, therefore, to offer different ways of getting involved to give everyone a chance. At the same times, we know that service user-only meetings organised by service users, are particularly valued by a very wide range of service users. Equally important, is to ensure that all meetings are run in an accessible and interesting way, to encourage the widest possible involvement.

Participants in this project particularly the four service user organisations who helped carry it out, identified some key features as central to holding a successful and inclusive involvement event. They found that these could attract a diverse range of service users and not just 'the usual suspects'. They placed an emphasis on enabling participants to:

- Have a good time and enjoy themselves
- Have good, free, food and refreshments which are culturally appropriate
- Be in a warm, safe and supportive environment
- Gain knowledge, awareness and understanding from attending the events or meetings.

From their own experience and organising events, they had learned the value of a range of components in encouraging the involvement of a diverse range of service users. Many of the activities they identify can also be used to highlight important issues and experiences and to stimulate discussion:

- **Entertainment produced by service users for participants to listen to, for example:**
 - Drumming
 - Karaoke
 - Music groups/singer song-writer
 - Drama/theatre

- **Activities which participants can be involved in themselves, for example:**
 - Karaoke
 - Music workshops
 - Art workshops
 - Drama/role playing
 - Poetry workshops
 - Comedy and sketches
 - Games
 - Writing workshops
- **Activities to encourage networking and making links with other participants, for example:**
 - The use of accessible 'ice breakers', to help get things going
 - Cabaret style layout of room, around tables
 - Opportunities for small group discussions/activities
 - A long and relaxed lunch break
 - Other opportunities for informal chatting and network
- **Activities to help people relax and aid communication, for example:**
 - Aroma therapy workshops
 - Yoga/pilates
 - Massage
 - Reflexology
 - Hypnotherapy
 - Relaxation exercises
- **Appropriate and accessible venues, which can add an air of informality and promote a relaxed atmosphere, for example:**
 - Cafes
 - Restaurants
 - Parks
 - Pubs

Key Points

- Service users should have a choice over all these activities.
- Ensure that there is a 'quiet' room for those who want 'time out'.
- Access issues must be given first priority and facilitators/organisers must make sure that they work in fully accessible ways.