

Self directed support – the development of direct payments and introducing Individual Budgets for mental health service users and carers

Facilitated by Sue Sumpner, Direct Payments team, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council.

This workshop will have a focus on choice and control: how much do you have when you are assessed as needing social care services? What can direct payments and individual budgets do to make sure people are at the centre of decisions when care planning?

Examples of innovative uses of direct payments will be included.

Most of the workshop focused on Direct Payments. In 1996 Direct Payments Act was passed and was the result of people with disabilities lobbying to be in control of deciding how care and support should be provided and by whom. Due to low take-up, in 2003 a further act was passed making it a **duty** for LA to offer the option of direct payments to people who meet their eligibility criteria. Despite this duty a number of local authorities such as Leeds, have very low numbers of people with MH needs accessing Direct Payments.

Sue spoke of her experiences in Rotherham, which is doing well at making Direct Payments accessible to people with mental health needs – 150 people have accessed them, with 94 currently receiving Direct Payments.

Sue screened a video (available from Volition), which gave great examples of people using Direct Payments, although not all of them would meet the Leeds eligibility criteria.

There followed a lively and at times passionate discussion about why Leeds has been unable or unwilling to make the cultural and financial changes necessary to implement direct payments. Despite much talk, working days and groups and an agreed strategy, there has been no discernable progress. As there is no new money for direct payments, money needs to be taken out of existing services was made available. A number of those present felt that lack of political will but also an individual with vision had been major barriers. The Adult Social Care Commissioner present agreed to take back the issues and questions raised from the discussion back to the department.

Two individuals expressed concerns, one about handing over control to vulnerable people, and another the need to ensure people are supported to identify what they can purchase, but Sue reassured them that people have ideas already and empowering them in this is part of their recovery.

The broad consensus was that Leeds must take urgent action on Direct Payments and that Volition should be working to support this, as this is in the interest of people using our services and of the future development of the services we offer. Sue felt the national experience is that people will choose to

buy good services and she was heartened that in Leeds providers were so open to the challenge.

Sue then gave is a brief whistle stop introduction to Individualised budgets.