

Progressing Consumer Leadership

Kites Trust

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Paper # 1

Consumer Leadership Principles

Starting the discussion and sharing some ideas from a few Australian colleagues.

When discussing consumer leadership it is important to be clear if we are speaking about individual or collective consumer leadership.

Generally at Kites, we are focused on the latter but we acknowledge that there are aspects common to both, such

as *‘knowing when to step forward or step up.’*

For both collective and individual leadership there are some **common values** that could be considered:

- Self-determination
- Accountability
- Transparency of process
- Social Justice
- Context
- Recognition of and valuing diversity
- Grounded
- Self-reflective
- Openness to learning

Potential Barriers

It can be helpful to consider what some of the barriers are to implement or enact consumer leadership and work around them. **Representation** - not falling into the trap of being undermined by being expected to represent all consumers. **Resources** - in particular the lack of resources which can disadvantage consumer leadership in any setting.

Paternalism - not allowing any one or group to play the parent. **Elitism** - Not always allowing just a select few to lead. **Expertise** - Knowing what you know and not letting ‘professionals’ overwhelm.

Background

In May this year a member of the Kites team attended a conference in Victoria, Australia titled “**Reframing Mental Health**” organised by Psychiatric Disability Services of Victoria or VICSERVE as it is known www.vicserve.org.au. The conference was mainly for community based services and had several themes, including consumer leadership which is a key reason why Kites was interested in attending.

It was a worthwhile conference and there were lots of great presentations including several by consumers that provided opportunities to hear and learn more about what is happening in consumer leadership in Australia.

The presentations were:

Thinking Deeply about Consumer Leadership. Merrinda Epstein and Flick Grey from **Our Consumer Place** www.ourconsumerplace.com.au

And I have a dream: defining and enabling consumer leadership in the community managed mental health sector. Indio Daya. indigo@prahranmission.com.au

This paper is informed by these Australian consumer presentations and the work that Kites has been doing to progress consumer leadership.

Leadership can be developed as an extension of consumer participation which has been promoted successfully in some services and settings for many years. Some examples where participation may be extended to leadership are:

- strategy and service development
- monitoring
- evaluation
- research
- consumer directed policy development
- consumer- led approaches
- consumer run services (within other organisations)

“Leadership is not just individual, it’s a community characteristic.” Indigo Daya.

Promoting consumer leadership within existing services requires them to be prepared to make changes and do things differently.

Suggestions from the presentations by Australian consumers were that organisations need to:

- Acknowledge the need for change
- Relinquish power and be transparent

- Accept it will be uncomfortable at times
- Respect the wisdom of lived experience
- Commit to consumer engagement and leadership

Organisations that facilitate consumer leadership will have, or develop supportive human resources policies and practices, including:

- Take affirmative action employment targeting all levels
- Provide support for disclosure /non-disclosure
- Set people up to succeed e.g. affirmative action training
- Provide peer supervision for peer workers
- Offer mentoring opportunities
- Acknowledge that consumer experience = expertise
- Promote an emerging peer profession
- Provide wellness planning and support for all employees and all aspects of wellbeing
- Have flexible employment arrangements
- Ensure there is pay parity.

The Australian consumer presenters at the conference provided some sound advice for consumers to consider in supporting leadership.

“We need joint democratic leadership and non-hierarchical models.” Flick Grey and Merrinda Epstein.

1. Know when to pass on the areas we are not so good at to others. (*Something we are not so good at presently.*)
2. Find effective ways to gather information. (*Large consultations have had their day.*)
3. Be prepared to address the issue of consumers criticising others. (The Australians called it ‘horizontal violence’.)
4. Be aware how there can be hierarchies in diagnoses which also impact.

Some final words of wisdom from our Australian colleagues -

“Being the change we want to see.”

“We need partnership not power dynamic!”

Kites would like to progress consumer leadership and continue sharing ideas and thoughts towards developing Consumer Leadership Principles for New Zealand. Therefore, we welcome your comments and feedback to this paper.

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