



bigger voices - better lives

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Consultation Report:
The Bridge Centre
for people with physical disabilities
Hythe - Kent

Introduction

Advocacy for All are commissioned by Kent County Council to provide Advocacy for people with a Learning Disability in Kent.

We were asked by the Efficiency Manager at Kent County Council to provide advocacy for the people who use the Bridge Centre on a Tuesday and Wednesday as part of the Physical Disabilities Group. There had been an initial consultation meeting to discuss the future of the service, and people had requested advocacy support during the consultation process.

Advocacy is when one person helps another person or group of people to make their needs and wishes known. Professional Advocates work with people to support them to speak up for themselves, make sure that others listen to what they are saying, and ensuring their rights are respected.

The consultation into The Bridge Centre for people with physical disabilities started on the 24th July 2012 and ran to the 16th October 2012.

Why was a consultation needed?

- the review of services for people with learning disabilities at The Bridge meant that this service delivery would now be across 5 days
- The Bridge Centre would need to close for building work, a temporary place for the group needed to be agreed

- people with physical disabilities wanting more tailored services to increase choice
- the need to achieve value for money and target resources to the most amount of people
- Kent County Council had found a range of opportunities as part of this process and shared these at their initial meeting in July
- The group, parents and carers' requested another meeting and asked for independent advocacy support

The Advocate, Emma Bates, liaised with the Efficiency Manager Samantha Sheppard, in order to understand what had already been presented to the group prior to the meeting attended on the 28th August 2012.



Emma Bates
Advocate

The first Advocacy Group meeting

The Efficiency Manager coordinated and organised a meeting on the 28th August to enable advocacy work to begin. The advocate, Emma, met with service users and parents and carers. Some staff were also present. The meeting was a general discussion about people's wishes and feelings. These were broken down into categories.

We formulated Questions and Comments that people felt needed addressing in the consultation process. All comments and concerns were noted and questions drawn up. These were put to the nominated Kent County Council staff who joined the meeting.

The overall feelings from this group advocacy session have been grouped into common themes.

New Service

- People felt that not all Case Managers are fully aware of what was happening; some people felt that their Case Managers did not know this consultation was happening
- People felt they were having to put their names down for services not yet up and running, being unsure who runs them, what will be on offer, when they will open and their capacity. This has worried some people into putting their names down quickly in case they don't get a place
- People would like more options than the few they have been given

- Concerns that individuals have to take up a direct payment. Some people did not want to. Reasons for this varied but commonly were due to the direct payment possibly being frozen even if service charges were to go up in the future

New venue

- Staff support - the group felt that they needed more than a facilitator who 'dropped in' as some people need physical support. Consistent staff are important to some, as this is important to them attending a service
- Equipment and staff - support for the maintenance exercises are needed
- Transport - some individuals currently get transport paid for
- Keeping the group together - friendships and common interests. People are feeling vulnerable.
- Worries that Summer Court residents have not been consulted

General Comments:

- A general feeling that the Physical Disability Group has been being 'wound down' during the past years. There have been no new members and no one shown around. Staff who used to be there to facilitate activities and outings have left and not been replaced.

- 'Why can't we stay as we are?' Sharing the Centre with people with a learning disability. Some people felt this was an idea to explore, one person expressed concern as to any aspects of behaviour that challenges and how, if this manifested physically, this could affect people in the Physical Disability Group.
- This consultation for the Physical Disability group seems to be happening late in the process and that they have taken second place after the decision for all the people who use the LD service.

The Kent County Council (KCC) representatives provided responses at the meeting for as many of the questions as they were able. A full copy of the Comments, Questions and Concerns along with the responses were forwarded to the Efficiency Manager.

At the end of this meeting the service users were offered a further meeting with KCC. The Service users were asked if they would like the opportunity for some group work sessions at The Bridge with the Advocate, Emma, which they accepted.

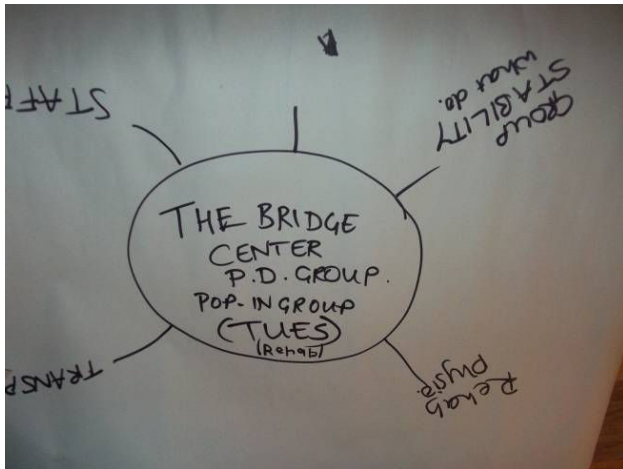
Workshops

The advocate was asked to provide two one-off workshops of one hour each, for each group, and One to One sessions if required.

We arranged for the sessions to be before the next group meeting at the end of September. The time of the sessions was set to ensure that the focus remained on the consultation - What people who use the service wanted to do, whilst the building work was taking place.

Emma, the advocate, attended The Bridge Centre and worked with the service users present on the day.

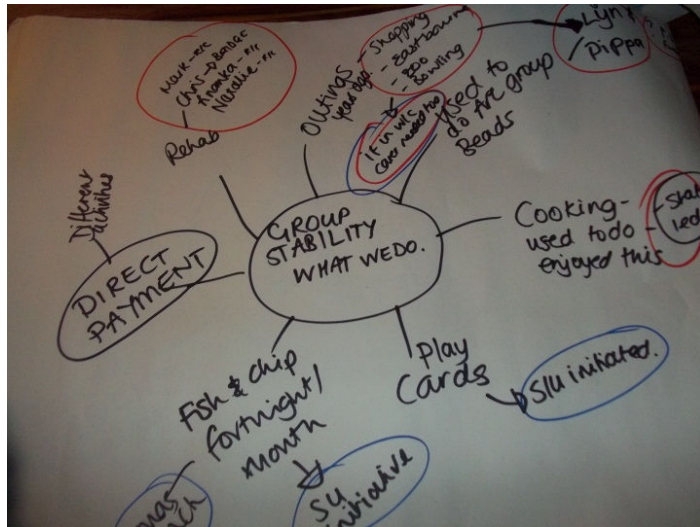
Tuesday Group



Emma, visited The Bridge Centre on the day agreed. 7 people who use the service were present. We started the meeting by revisiting the purpose of why this was happening and how much time we had. Emma explained she would be available to meet with service users on an individual basis, 1 person asked to do this. Emma also gave everyone her contact details should they wish to speak to her away from this meeting. Emma asked the group if they were happy to work on big sheets of paper and if they would like write, but they asked her to. There sessions began by asking the group what they felt were the important issues about the consultation:

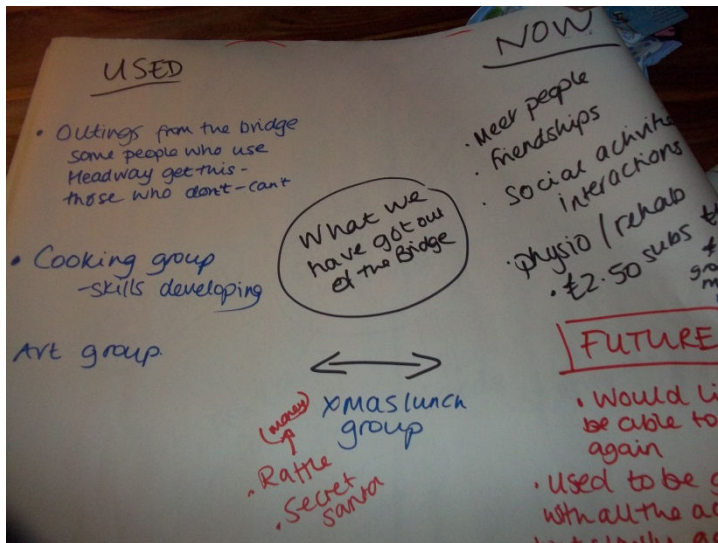
The Tuesday Group highlighted that group stability, staff, rehab/physio and transport were all the issues they felt most concerned about.

Emma went through a series of discussions about each issue that was concerning them.

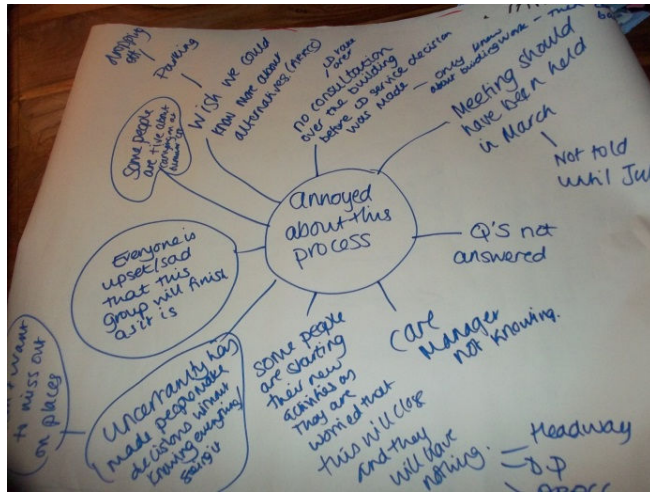


The group expressed concerns that they felt it was being ‘wound down’, and had been over the years. They explained how they all had been together a long time and felt that change was being forced upon them. They explained all the things they do now that make The Bridge Group good. They also talked about what level of support they get from staff, depending on ‘which side’ they access.

This discussion led on to what people who attend The Bridge wanted from the service and what they felt they missed from what the service used to offer them and what they would like to have in the future.



The group were all really keen on having outings and day trips again and felt like they really missed out on this opportunity. The group also discussed the activities they used to do such as cooking and jewellery making. These seemed to be popular amongst the Group and they really enjoyed the sessions. The Tuesday Group said they pay £2.50 on a Tuesday for refreshments and for the Group to run. They also organise their own Christmas function and this is really important to them.



The group wanted to discuss how the consultation had made them feel.

There was a degree of uncertainty over new proposed venues and what this may mean, as well as what will happen to the Group if some people leave and go to alternative sessions run by others or take a direct payment

‘What will happen to those who are left?’

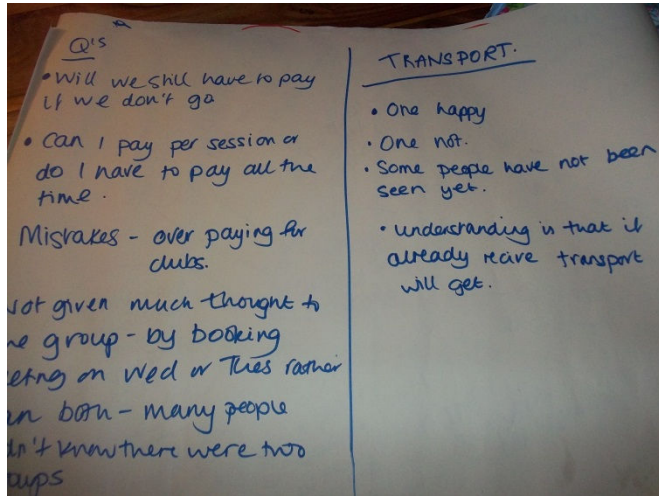
It was also mentioned that the Physical Disability Group felt that they were not fully consulted with over the building’s usage when the learning disability service decision was made.

All those present expressed:

- this consultation was running too late in the process
- the next meeting day and time not being as convenient
- they had not been given enough information about some services to make an informed decision.

The group asked questions around location, accessibility and sessions. Emma had taken pictures of the location and the front access of the building that will be used by A.R.R.C when it opens, local parking facilities that she shared with the group.



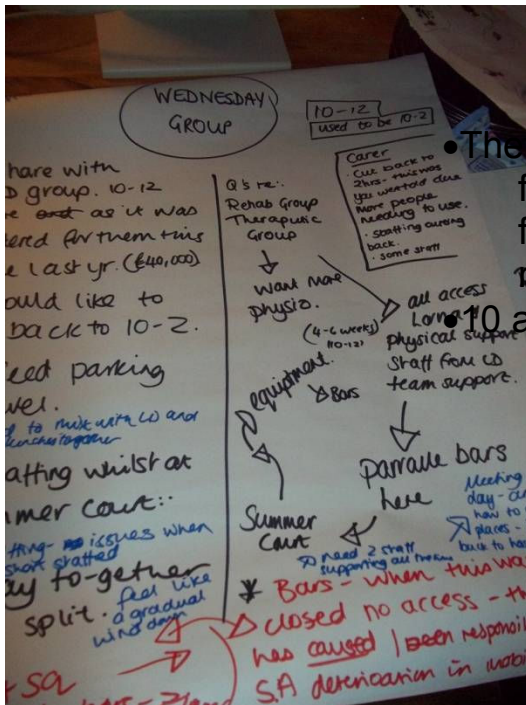


Finally we wrote a list of questions that people felt needed addressing to feel reassured. Most people still had overriding concerns about transport not continuing and paying for services they were not using, if they were accessing Direct Payments. The individual, who had wanted to meet on a one to one, decided that they had been able to voice their opinion adequately in the session.

Emma explained that this information would be sent to the Efficiency Manager before the next meeting. The hope was that the issues could be addressed then.

Wednesday Group

In this group we recorded things in a slightly different way due to the different focus this group has. Initially there were 4 people who use the service present and 2 carers. The meeting began by explaining the purpose of getting together to present their questions, comments and concerns. Emma gave everyone her contact details, should anyone wish to speak to her individually or at another time. Emma ensured that each person's primary concern was noted.



The feelings of this group were:

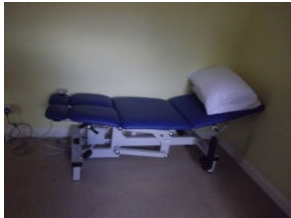
- They felt the centre was being wound down to save costs. The service had been cut from 10 am – 2 pm to 10 am -12 noon on the understanding they needed space for more people to attend. The group are disappointed that these extra people never came. They would like the service to go back to 10 am -2 pm

Feel let down: it is not long since The Bridge had building work and a lot of money was spent on making the space usable for them. When this happened the Group used the Resource Centre in Folkestone.

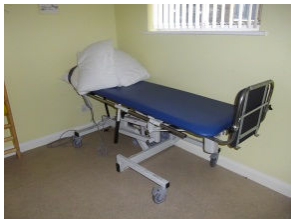
They have enjoyed times when they have integrated with the Learning Disability group. The Physical Disability group have, in the past, been invited to lunch when the Learning Disability group have been cooking. This group misses that interaction.



The concerns this group raised focused on: accessible parking, staffing whilst at Summer Court and the rehab equipment that they use. There were issues from previous closures that they felt had never been addressed and are concerned this was happening again.



This group wished to stay together, go to Summer Court whilst the work was continuing. They would like the equipment to be taken with them, that is, the tilt table, the treatment table, the hoist, wall bars, and if possible the parallel bars.



Not everyone felt they would be able to make the next meeting at 2pm at Summer Court as people's transport picks up at 12.

Emma explained that this information would be sent to the Efficiency Manager before the next meeting. The hope was that the issues could be addressed then.

Meeting 26th September

The advocate attended the meeting on the 26th September. The staff present from KCC and Housing 21 reassured those present with answers and comments to the questions that had been raised from the workshops.

People said that they had been listened to.

People present expressed reassurance that issues raised such as transport had been addressed.

The equipment storage along with discussions with the physiotherapist was comforting to those present. Housing 21 staff were able to show the people present where equipment would be stored and open to discussion over further adaptations that could facilitate people's wishes.

When expressed at the meeting that this was not a cost cutting exercise people within the meeting felt reassured that if they were eligible for a service they would still receive one.

Everyone present was happy that this would be the final meeting.

Everyone present was made aware that the consultation would run until the 16th October and that all the comments questions and concerns would be included in the report and that Emma would be completing this report for inclusion. The advocate reiterated that if anyone should wish to contact her they could do so and she provided her contact details.

In Conclusion

The Advocacy support commissioned for this consultation has been able to support all the individuals who were able to make the meetings and workshops, ensuring they had their comments questions and concerns included for consideration during the consultation period and in the final report.

Advocacy support, provided by Advocacy for All, facilitated the Physical Disability Group to feel united as a group in their comments, concerns and questions they had about the consultation, and to gain the answers they needed to feel reassured by the process.

One person contacted Advocacy since the meeting and the comments have been integrated into the report.

Comments received by the people who attend the service and the parents and carers were positive that their voice had been heard.