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Gibat-Tfal, Familji, u l-Komunita'

SERVICE USER INVOLVEMENT: THE MALTESE CONTEXT

Introduction :

Fundamental principle underpinning “User Involvement” is “access to social rights”.

- In involving users in the policy-making, planning, delivery and evaluation stages of social services, service providers can get closer to identifying the real needs of users and potential users; and tailor services to meet these needs. Thus, ensuring, strengthening and implementing the right of access to social protection, health, housing, employment, education and other social services.



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The Malta context – development of SUI against this backdrop

Historical development of social services in Malta is still relatively young-
spanning period 20-30 years.

- Colonial heritage and strong church involvement in early development of social welfare services, led to a paternalistic, benevolent approach to service delivery- 'doing for' than 'with' client. Church's role important but user was passive recipient.
- Welfarism phase- characterized by state controlled welfare bureaucracies- "big daddy knows best". Positive in provision of social rights but little SUI(Evers).
- Service provision was fragmented with service providers working on their own.



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Development cont....

Recent developments (last 5-10years):

- Professionalism-traditional. Patronizing approach of old style welfare bureaucracies- 'professional knows best' / 'top-down' approach (Evers).
- Professionalism-modern. Professionals bound by code of ethics; trained in client-centered practice. 'Transparency', 'consultation' with and involving client/user more e.g. in social work contracts, care plans. But with high case loads, limited resources, these forms of 'involvement' can suffer.



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Recent developments cont....

- Managerialism-commercial concepts e.g. 'cost-efficiency/effectiveness', 'quality assurance' and electronic communication becoming part of social service practice. Users involved in research, satisfaction surveys to bring provider and user closer. Downsides: in difficult economic climate and restricted budgets, closer provider/user relationship suffers. Also, communicating through websites can substitute personal dialogue (Evers).





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Cont....

- Witnessing beginnings of an integrated approach-entities coming together and working with NGO’s and local stakeholders at the level of policy and provision. They are involved in agreements, joint projects and representation on Ministerial task forces, forums and committees, towards an integrated service provision. Integrated systems create environment for promotion of SUI.
- Implementation of “user involvement” is still in preliminary stages. User still in the main a “recipient” -involved in consultancy at evaluation stage of services.

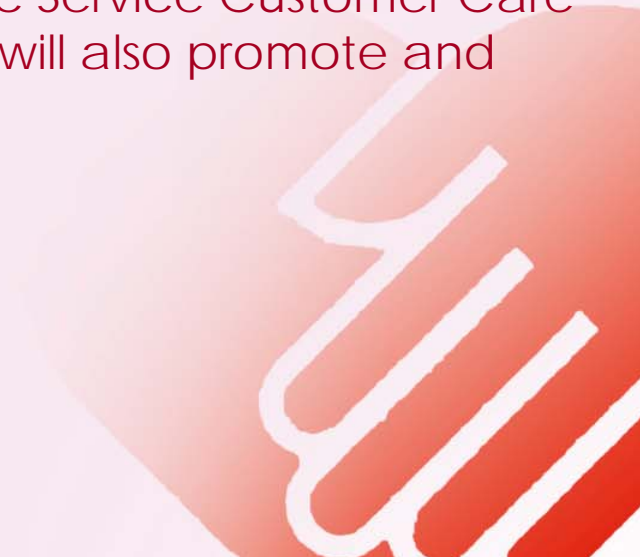


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But progress being made:

- seeing growing trend of users being outspoken about and more aware of asserting rights
- involvement of users in projects and empowering them at the community level-government vision and strategy
- Recent legislation- Ombudsman Act Data, '95, Data Protection Act, '03, Commissioner for Childrens Act, '03, protect and promote users rights in relation to their use of social services; as do Public Service Customer Care Charters. The new Domestic Violence legislation will also promote and provide the right to protection for victims.





SUI at agency/entity level

The National Social Welfare agency, Appogg:

- Service users still have in the main traditional role of being sources of data/providing information in the evaluation of services, as opposed to being actively involved in the planning/decision-making, policy-making and delivery of services.
- Agency committed to SUI-increasing involvement of users in community projects & using focus groups to consult; in care plans, case conferences/reviews; website information partly based on questions asked by users; implemented policies such as data protection policy and put in place a 'quality assurance and systems auditor'.



Examples of user involvement in agency Service Evaluation

'Client" Satisfaction Survey' – Appogg service users '99-'00

- Aim – measure user satisfaction re Appogg services.
- Questionnaire – re knowledge of agency, perceptions of service and administrative aspects-environment of office (location and appearance), and staff role/performance, and effect of service on them.

Provided feedback re:

Conditions of offices. **Highlighted** whether users needs were met in crises situations. Positive experiences re outcome of services.



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Child Development and Assessment Unit Evaluation

Background :

- By Appogg in collaboration with Health Division and National Commission for Persons with disability.
- Aim – to obtain “Audit” of CDAU as seen by clients/carers.
- CDAU set up to meet the medical, physical, emotional, behavioural and educational needs of children (birth-16yrs) with disabilities, outside acute ward setting.
- Methodology-questionnaire. Questions covered all aspects of CDAU : referral process, attendance, waiting times, follow-up, satisfaction with multi-disciplinary services; parental involvement, relationship with other services.



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Results: Satisfaction – high level re “approachability” of staff. Those unsatisfied listed “poor communication/lack of explanations” as reasons.

Individual programme – only over a third respondents felt involved in children’s rehabilitation and decision-making process. Over half didn’t feel “part of team” in caring for children. **Highlighted** need to involve users in the process – empower them to have a say/control in their situation.

Case conferences – 20% of cases, conclusions of conferences not discussed with users/carers. 80% wished direct involvement in conferences. **Highlighted** previous concern.

Information on benefits/other services – high % given information on social services allowances. But less than a quarter given booklet on support services. **Highlighted** more work needed here- break down one of barriers to SUI and access to social rights by ensuring access to information.



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Future improvements – setting up resource centre; participation in case conferences; provision of parking facilities and friendly attire for staff.

Recommendations: Design booklet on CDAU and related services, to give to all clients at first appointment-applying concept of access to information.

- Train CDAU staff to increase knowledge re available services outside health-ensure best service delivery.
- Provide Customer Care; liaise between CDAU and other services; organize ongoing audit.
- Awareness campaign aimed at potential referrers-to gain knowledge of CDAU services/ encourage early referrals.
- Address operational issues; parent involvement in child’s care plan/case conferences. Ensure follow-up after-communicate decisions/counselling. Among others



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Appogg agency/other entity examples cont... :

- Sexual Harassment Survey with Ministry for Social Policy
- SVPR (Residence for the Elderly) Survey re transport needs for carers
- Children In need Survey- 1st time in Malta primary rather than secondary interviewing used. Children directly shared their experiences of residential care, their treatment by the police and courts, among others. There's a wealth of feedback here to work on in tailoring services to better meet the needs of children.
- Involvement of users in the planning of Emergency Shelter for victims of domestic violence .





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Examples cont...

- Appogg Refugee Service Open accommodation Centre - empowered residents to elect house leaders to put forward residents' initiatives/complaints and act on them. Moving towards residents setting up own services-'tuck shop' etc., as well as co-operatives (craft/gardening).
- N.G.O. Refugee Open Centre - empowered residents to run laundry, tailor's shop, cafeterias, and be involved in the running of the office etc.
- National Commission for Persons with Disability-consult users in the process of drafting policies; users involved in service delivery-majority of staff are disabled persons & 2 of its 'flagship' services are run by disabled persons; information is accessible in alternate forms & services adjusted according to users' feedback.
- Richmond Foundation-involves users in preliminary interviews for staff recruitment.



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Some Cultural/National Barriers to SUI

- Political/legal- lack of national policies and legislation on SUI e.g. re user representation on decision-making bodies. Legislation that makes it a must for users to be consulted about decisions & services received.
- Professional- attitudes: negative/stereotyping users e.g. 'out to abuse system'. Protective towards users e.g. initial 'resistance' from staff re Data Protection consent forms-concern that frighten users from using service, rather than seeing the positive side-users having a right of consent about the information kept on them.
- Resources- limited financial and human resources-a reality! When staff are pressured, the time & energy consuming process of SUI is not a priority. Under tight budgets, entities may axe SUI projects



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Future challenges

- to keep focus on an inclusive and not exclusive approach (place ourselves more in users shoes-how we feel if not consulted, involved in decision-making)
- to constantly ask ourselves whether entities are operating only from their agenda's at the expense of the users-'top-down' approach instead of 'bottom-up' one
- to identify and breakdown barriers to user involvement and encourage empowerment, opportunities and access to choices and rights. To have the professional courage to advocate for user rights and involvement in face of political pressure.



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Challenges cont....

- To set up more mechanisms to really listen to users views e.g. adult victims in the Court systems-how system can be more sensitive to their right for protection as witnesses etc., and to childrens' voices-especially in the Court system (Family Court set up and video interviewing have helped)
- To 'Centralize" the concept of SUI as part of our entities operations (policy-makers, managers need to believe in this, convey to staff & set up structures to make it happen)
- To implement the Guidelines on SUI

Easier said than done you say!! True... but research and experience has shown that SUI has a positive impact on service process.



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The End

**GOOD LUCK IN YOUR QUEST IN
MAKING SERVICE USER
INVOLVEMENT A REALITY**

AND THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

