



As a small alcohol agency with a good reputation (we're always in the local press) we find it quite easy to attract inexperienced staff for interview. Our huge problem is holding onto them once they have some training under their belt. We're in a constant state of turmoil, because as soon as we've trained someone up to a decent level, they're off looking for a job with a bigger agency with more benefits – good pension, flexi-time and twice the salary. A very demanding question – but has anyone hit on ways to inspire loyalty?

Jenny, Sheffield

Cash talks

Dear Jenny

In answer to 'a very demanding question', although it may not be possible to buy loyalty, it is possible, if as indicated, you are operating successfully, to pay a competitive salary. One alternative you may want to consider is that instead of employing trainees at a low salary, you seek to appoint professionals at a rate worthy of their experience and qualifications.

**Peter O'Loughlin,
The Eden Lodge Practice.**

Structural adjustment

Jenny,

Firstly I must congratulate you for providing an employment entry point into the sector that is paid and provides a training programme

that clearly makes new workers extremely employable. This type of initiative is something that is not often on offer in the sector.

Secondly, do you carry out exit interviews and therefore have evidence to support that they leave the organisation for better pay, pension scheme, flexible working, etc: the latter of which all agencies are required by law to provide? Things aren't always what they seem and you may find there are other reasons for them leaving or their reasons for leaving are mainly about just one of the areas, reducing what you need to do to address the situation.

I have worked with organisations in the past who have come across similar situations. My first suggestion is: you have no problem recruiting staff to the 'trainee' roles and therefore salary would appear to be perfectly attractive at this level. Would it be possible to decrease starting salary and increase the salary upon completion of the training as a means of anchoring your developed workers? Connexions have a good career pathway and pay system to reward experience and qualification attainment, usually explained in adverts. My second suggestion would be to implement a training retainer clause eg 'if you leave our employment within one year of receiving your training you will be expected to reimburse the organisation by 50 per cent of the course costs' or similar. I know of quite a few organisations who use this anchor, you may find some will not work for the organisation but this usually points out those whose commitment stems purely around receiving training before moving onto something 'better'.

I wish you luck in finding the happy solution.

Elizabeth, Sussex DAATs

Older workers

Dear Jenny

Be more fussy on who you employ. People who are older and who do not require material things in life. People who are conscientious and have worked in other jobs for a long time.

Chris Hannaby, Vale House

Reader's question

I have a client who's now doing really well in treatment. He's reached the stage when he really needs to reconnect with and have support from his family. The problem is, his family are less than keen to come in, saying they have 'heard it all before'. Has anyone got ideas on how I can persuade them to give him another chance?

Colin, Manchester

Email your suggested answers to the editor by Tuesday 6 December for inclusion in the 12 December issue of DDN. New questions are welcome from readers.

Fact file

Service User Groups

This issue: Glenda Daniels from OUT – Oxfordshire User Team

When and why did you start your group?

The group was started off by me and Rowan Williams, the Oxfordshire DAAT User Involvement worker. I met Rowan while living in a local hostel and began working with her full time as part of a placement I was doing at college. I met her just after I stopped using, which was perfect timing as I was too chaotic while still using to have had any input.

The group started gaining momentum from an Overdose Prevention project that Rowan started while still working for the Arrest Referral service in Oxford, SMART. Once I joined the project, she began teaching me about U/I and all that surrounded it. The first meeting I attended was the first South East User Group Forum in 2002.

I then set up the OUTLive Hepatitis C workshops as my main project for my college course, and it all went from there.

How many members do you have?

We started off by asking users who accessed our Peer Education workshops if they wanted to become members of OUT. This meant if they wanted to become as involved as Rowan and I were, they could. If not, they would receive invitations to education workshops, be called upon to consult on services in Oxfordshire to aid the DAAT in the development, planning and delivery of local services. At one point we had over 150 members. This has now changed into core group members, who are volunteers, and a staff team of three, plus our advisor, Rowan, who is sadly leaving us in December to continue other work with Oxfordshire DAAT. She has been my biggest inspiration throughout my user involvement career.

How did you obtain funding?

When we first started, we received funding from Oxon DAAT, as I work for the NTA for 2.5 days per week setting up U.I. in the SE DAAT regions.

Our other two staff are our harm reduction worker, Gavin Rogers, who is funded by the DAAT, and a volunteer coordinator who is funded by a charitable trust.

Our core running costs are generated by short term projects we take on: consultation, booklet producing, training and other small projects that our volunteers work on to gain experience to take on paid work in the field.

We became a registered charity in 2003-4 so can now approach funding bodies. It opens so many more doors for your group. We have just finished

helping Reading User Forum to gain their charitable status and continued funding; it can be done, even by those of us who have no experience whatsoever.

Where, and how regularly, do you hold meetings?

When we first started we held a meeting once a week at a local church hall. Now we meet with our volunteers once a week to give out activities and petty cash for the week and anyone can access the office when they wish, provided there is someone there to open up!

We usually grab users off the street or advertise in local drug services, asking them to come along to our workshops or consultation meetings, and pay for their attendance.

How do you keep it going?

When I first started, we kept it going by energy and enthusiasm alone really, plus a driving ambition to ensure that services in our area improved to help those trying to access treatment to get it quicker and better than we did!

What have been your highlights so far?

Having the chance to speak at conferences to tell others how user involvement in Oxfordshire has helped to improve services and waiting times and how they can do the same in their areas. Having the chance to build a life for myself and my family so soon after becoming clean from street drugs. The people I have met along the way and the things I have learned about the drug treatment system that I never knew before. Helping users to get better, quicker and more humane forms of treatment and educating them on their rights while they are in treatment, and what they should expect as aftercare.

How do you communicate with your members?

We consider all drug users in Oxfordshire to be our members and we are representing them and consulting with them on a weekly, if not daily, basis. We have a newsletter, we put up posters, we go and talk to users we know on the street, in hostels, services – everywhere. We talk to them, ask them their concerns and try to address them if we can.

Have you any tips for others starting a service user group?

Yes, work with your DAAT and the NTA, not against them. Most of them do want you involved, they just don't know how to go about it. Some have never had any experiences with users, and the ones they have had sometimes are not good. Get yourself some training – we can provide it if you wish – and start to link up with other groups who can give you advice. Visit other groups – most user groups are different from the next one, so all have something in the way of help and advice they can give you to help you on your way to becoming an integral part of the treatment system in your area and making positive changes.