The Emerging Role of Disabled People’s User Led Organisations in Commissioning:

An Evaluation Report
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Below are the links to both of these reports:

Kelly’s report:
Whose Community is it Anyway?

Mark’s report:
Disabled People’s Organisations in Yorkshire and Humberside – Experience of Tendering

Here is the link to the Department of Health Key ULO Design Criteria
Department of Health key ULO design criteria
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Executive Summary

This report summarises the outcomes of a project carried out in the Yorkshire and Humber region between June 2011 and June 2013, which looked at the development of Disabled People’s User Led Organisations (DPULOs) in the region. A number of areas were identified to research as part of this project, including the current process of commissioning, the barriers faced by DPULOs, how the process could be improved and ways of developing a network to link DPULOs in the region.

A number of key findings have resulted from this work, which are important to outline, along with recommendations that can be built on in the future:

Regional network

One thing that emerged from this research is that DPULOs feel they would benefit from some sort of network to share information. Their preferred method was an online site to engage in, and this was tried as part of the research project. However, this did not work due to a gap in capacity in terms of what DPULOs want to gain from a regional network, and the time and resources groups can realistically afford to put in. One option to combat this would be to provide training in how to most effectively use the online site. Alternatively, another method of groups engaging with one another that has not been explored in this project could be developed.

Commissioning

The process of commissioning has shifted in recent years to focus on the more formal process of procurement and contracting; meaning DPULOs feel that they are less able to access it. What is needed is for commissioners to become more flexible in the process and move towards ‘intelligent commissioning’ so that the process used fits the needs and services required. This would facilitate involvement of smaller groups and allow the option of different approaches to service delivery, such as sub-contracting and co-production.
Unique Selling Point of DPULOs

DPULOs have a unique selling point in being a voice for disabled people and representatives of the community accessing their services, which could bring benefit to the commissioning process. However, it could be argued that DPULOs fail to market this added social value effectively; developing the ability to do this would help groups become more involved in commissioning and service delivery. Not only do DPULOs need to market their potential to commissioners, but also to larger organisations that may secure contracts and be looking to sub-contract services to be delivered. Not only does the process and approach taken by commissioners need to change, but DPULOs themselves need to be willing to make changes to adapt to the process.

ULO design criteria

What has emerged from this research project is that the Department of Health ULO design criteria needs adapting. Service users and members of DPULOs did not understand the criteria, which could suggest that they are too complex as a set of rules to define user-led organisations. There is also the opinion that DPULOs should not have to seek a ‘badge’ of approval from statutory partners. What is suggested is that a new process should be designed; a process where the community being served by the DPULO decide the criteria for identifying DPULOs, rather than universal criteria designed by government.

Co-production

There are clear benefits to commissioners and service providers in involving DPULOs in commissioning and service delivery and, as such, it would be helpful to identify ways to include DPULOs more easily. Some DPULOs identified ethical barriers that could cause issues in terms of which groups are willing to work together and the contracts accessed, due to the strong values held by DPULOs and the fact that certain contracts could be detrimental to the community they serve. What needs to be recognised is that groups and organisations can co-produce without these strong values being compromised, and where possible attempts should be made to forge these links.
Introduction

Inclusion Now – the Disabled People’s User Led Organisation (DPULO) for Leeds, is a consortium made up of Voluntary Action Leeds, DIAL, Leeds Centre for Integrated Living and Connect in the North. They were funded as a consortium to produce this report as well as carrying out a regional research project between June 2011 and June 2013. This aimed to look at the development of DPULOs across the Yorkshire and Humber region, focusing on the following areas:

- Developing a Regional Network to bring together DPULOs
- The involvement of DPULOs in the commissioning and delivery of services in the future
- Issues around the development of DPULOs

The regional project was carried out by a number of organisations in the region coming together to look at a variety of issues surrounding the development of new, emerging and established DPULOs. The focus was on the commissioning process and strengthening the position of DPULOs, as well as looking at bringing together DPULOs in the area. This report aims to summarise the key findings from the various stages into recommendations that can be built on.

What is a DPULO?

Essentially, a DPULO is an organisation that is run by and for disabled people in the community - this includes anyone with rights under disability law. A DPULO aims to be representative of the views of members and service-users. It is also thought that these groups should be centred round the social model of disability, and so aim to challenge barriers for disabled people in society.

Additionally, it may be helpful to outline what is meant by ‘community’ in this report. When referring to a ‘community’, we are referring to a group of mental health service users, those with a physical or sensory impairment or any groups of people that may be accessing the services provided by the DPULOs. Essentially, it refers to the group of service users that are served by the DPULO.
Research Aims

The project as a whole had various stages and so brings together a range of aims, all relating to the strengthening of DPULOs in the region, assessing how they develop and their place in the commissioning process.

The main aim of the project was to bring together DPULOs in the area and look at their development in the commissioning process. However, there were also a number of underlying aspects and aims of the research that stemmed from the different stages and methods engaged in, which came together to form the general aim of the project.

Essentially there were four main aspects to the overall project:

- Developing a regional network of DPULOs to enable shared learning, problem solving and mutual support
- This linked with the commissioning project, which was aimed at ensuring the sharing of best practice and exploring the commissioning and tendering process, to identify any issues faced by DPULOs and develop good practice guidelines for accessible commissioning
- Case studies were funded to allow new, emerging and established DPULOs to look at any issues in developing against the Department of Health key ULO design criteria
- Case studies were also carried out to explore the issues around co-production in commissioning and other areas of interest such as partnership work, consortium formation and developing DPULOs

It was thought that these four points would link together and feed into the general aim of the project of the strengthening and developing of DPULOs. The original intention of this programme was to encourage new and existing DPULOs to develop and grow, move in to public service delivery. It also aimed to create more choice and control for people accessing support, as well as furthering the shared understanding of the (mutually beneficial) role DPULOs can play in commissioning.
Methodology

The purpose of this report is to summarise the findings that emerged from the regional project carried out to look at strengthening and developing DPULOs. The aim is to clearly outline a set of definite key recommendations that have been developed as a result of this research project.

The benefit of this is that, it is hoped, there will be a checklist available for DPULOs, other organisations and commissioners to access that identifies key ways and methods of ensuring that DPULOs are involved in the design, delivery and monitoring of the services received by their members.

Process

There were various stages to the overall project; various pots of funding and regional groups have come together over the two year period to feed into the wider regional project focussed on the development of DPULOs, bringing in the varying aims of the overall project.

An initial series of three workshops was run across North, West and South Yorkshire introducing the idea of a regional network and assessing the experience of DPULOs in commissioning. The workshops were held in York, Doncaster and Leeds and were aimed at both DPULOs and commissioners; the workshops were mixed in terms of response from both groups. The aim of the workshops was to determine what organisations wanted to gain from a regional DPULO network and how they would want to access information. They also looked at the current level of knowledge and experience of DPULOs in the commissioning process and the ways organisations would like to strengthen their position.

Based on the recommendations for further training that came out of the first workshops and the barriers identified, a second cycle of workshops was carried out. These were attended by both commissioners and DPULOs in the region, and were held to further the understanding of DPULO experience of commissioning and how this could be developed. The idea was to get DPULOs and commissioners engaging with one another, to give them a wider understanding of the commissioning cycle and the role played by
each party. However, the attendance of DPULOs was lower than anticipated, meaning the sessions weren’t as useful as it was hoped they would be. The feeling was that if more groups had been in attendance, there would have been more engagement and meaningful discussion to generate feedback and give a fuller understanding of the current situation.

As well as the workshops, five DPULOs bid for and won funding to carry out individual case studies. These case studies aimed to look into the Department of Health ULO design criteria and any hurdles organisations met developing against these, as well as the benefits of co-production for DPULOs and the various ways of developing partnership or consortium work. It was thought that these case studies would also give information on commissioning.

Five groups carried out their own projects and produced an evaluative report outlining their findings, as well as being interviewed following completion of their project to assess the benefits and findings. A regional event was held in July 2012 for groups to present their findings to the other groups involved and a wider audience. This approach to research had varying success in that, while some groups did focus on the aims of the project and produce related reports, others strayed and produced work less relevant to the project as a whole.

There was an underspend following the completion of the workshops and case studies, and it was decided this would be used to expand on some of the case studies: two DPULOs were chosen to do further research reports. The primary interest for use of the remaining funding was to further the shared understanding of the role DPULOs can play in commissioning and build on the original aims of the project. It was hoped these would give a more detailed analysis and so produce more complex findings and recommendations. These final reports have been extremely well carried out and provide useful information that forms part of this report; providing some recommendations to build on.
Regional Network

One of the main aims of this project was to look at developing a regional network of DPULOs for mutual support of all organisations in the region and a facility for shared learning. Before this project, there had never been any formal drawing together of all the DPULOs in the region, so it was seen as important to find some way to facilitate this.

The initial series of workshops that was carried out in June and July 2011 was aimed at finding out what DPULOs would want to gain from a regional DPULO network and what form it would take – a number of key points emerged from this series of workshops.

What people want from a network

The primary focus of a network, as emerged from the workshops, would be a place for sharing best practice, resources and knowledge of the commissioning process and other useful tips for DPULOs. It was seen as a way to allow communication and information sharing, as well as mutual support of new, emerging and established DPULOs.

Information, resources and even contacts could be shared via chat rooms and posting on an online site to keep the DPULOs in the network constantly updated. It would be a virtual hub of information that would be jargon free and accessible by all organisations.

It would be a way to provide representation and a central, collective voice for DPULOs in the area to get them noticed, as well as providing a platform to sell their unique services. A network could also be a way of facilitating partnership work or co-production and sharing of funding opportunities, to help DPULOs in the region access the commissioning process.

How it would work

As well as having clear ideas of what organisations thought would be the benefits of a network, those involved in the workshops had clear ideas of the best way for a network be developed:
The idea was to have a primarily electronic communication and a virtual network, as this would take up less time and resources for DPULOs. Sub-regional meetings would ideally be held quarterly and an annual regional meeting to keep all of the DPULOs involved up to date. Any meeting held would have a clear theme and structure to ensure they were worthwhile and beneficial. A mix of communication, including chat rooms, forums, emails, and bulletins could be used to allow more effective ways of sharing information.

It was agreed there would be shared hosting and facilitating as all groups would be able to post in the site, but they recognised one group would need to be in charge. The only worry was in terms of where it would go once the initial funding ran out; there was a suggestion of it then becoming solely an online resource, like an online site to share information and keep in contact.

**Next stage**

Following the feedback from the workshops it was clear that DPULOs would benefit from some sort of regional network. Based on what appeared to be the best solution for DPULOs, an online site was set up in October 2011. The idea behind the site was that DPULOs would populate the site and get involved by posting useful links, personal experiences and best practice in order to help other DPULOs or organisations aspiring to become DPULOs.

Around 47 organisations in total originally signed up to the site, however this was a mix of commissioners and other organisations and not just DPULOs. This shows that there was enthusiasm from DPULOs and others in the region to get involved in information sharing and the formation of a network. However, once it was agreed and set up, the groups involved in the network failed to get involved as was necessary and only one group successfully populated the site, meaning there was insufficient interaction and sharing of best practice and so the network did not have the desired effect. While the research suggested that DPULOs would benefit from a network of some sort or some way to bring DPULOs in the region together and share best practice, in reality this did not happen.

There appears to be a gap in capacity in terms of what DPULOs want to gain from a network and the time and resources DPULOs can devote to setting up and hosting an online site like the one suggested. This is one of the key findings that came from this project: DPULOs as organisations may...
lack the capacity to get involved in the things that could help them to develop and become more involved in the commissioning process.

In order to tackle this problem, it may be useful to look at other types of online resources that could be used and other methods for allowing this sharing of information that involves less work. Training in how to most effectively use and engage in the online site may also help DPULOs become more involved and feel more capable of making use of the network site.

Key recommendations

- Some sort of network to bring together DPULOs would be beneficial
- The aim would be to share best practice and provide peer support - online would be best
- Need to find a way to facilitate this network that does not involve excessive resources and time being used by DPULOs
- There is an apparent gap in the capacity of DPULOs to carry this out and what they wish to see happen
- Training in how to engage with an online site may be beneficial to DPULOs
Commissioning

Commissioning is the whole process of planning and buying services to be delivered, based on the needs of the community being served. There are various ways of commissioning and delivering services, and it is thought that DPULOs could play a valuable role in shaping service delivery.

One of the most important aspects of this research project was the exploration of DPULOs and the development of their position within the commissioning process – with the intention of bringing about best practice guidelines for DPULOs, other organisations and commissioners to access.

The initial workshops aimed to get an introduction into what experience DPULOs had already gained in the commissioning process and any issues and barriers they faced:

**Experience of commissioning**

What became obvious is that few DPULOs have submitted tenders before or accessed the commissioning process, and most prefer to access funding from other avenues. One of the reasons is that the commissioning process itself can sometimes seem too complicated for DPULOs to understand. Some DPULOs felt the process could be too time-consuming for them as small organisations, as they lacked the staff and resources necessary to draw up and submit tenders in procurement to compete with the larger national organisations.

Additionally, some DPULOs involved had experienced a lack of communication between commissioners and DPULOs; either because commissioners are unaware of the benefits of DPULO involvement in the process, or the DPULOs themselves fail to get in contact with commissioners in their area and are unsure of how to access support organisations to help. There is a general feeling that the added social value DPULOs could offer in the commissioning process and delivery of services is not being fully accessed.
Barriers for DPULOs in accessing the process

One of the major barriers for DPULOs in getting involved in the commissioning process is the overcomplicated nature of the system; the language and jargon used can be too complex for some DPULOs to understand and so they feel unable to compete. This links to the general problem of the process being too time consuming for smaller organisations that are unable to allocate specific time, staff and resources.

The size of contracts also works against small organisations as they feel they lack the capacity and experience to fill them compared to the larger, national organisations. It can feel like there are too many stages and ‘hoops’ to jump through, meaning there are unrealistic expectations on the tenderers. DPULOs often are unaware of the various support organisations available to help with the process. Additionally, it emerged that some groups felt commissioners saw DPULOs as less able and equipped to deliver the services; this links to the lack of understanding of the added social value DPULOs can bring to the commissioning process in terms of representing the service-users.

These initial workshops also outlined how DPULOs would like to move forward in terms of training and developing their position in commissioning:

Moving forward

Training would be required to familiarise DPULOs with the process, language and jargon used in commissioning. It would be helpful for this training to be run with commissioners as well as DPULOs, to give an opportunity to ‘swap shoes’ and see the other perspective. Sessions would need to be accessible and engage in different methods of learning in order to be inclusive. Making standard documentation for the process available for DPULOs would also be a beneficial way of helping DPULOs to feel more able to get involved.

DPULOs need to understand what skills are necessary to develop in order to improve in the procurement process and how to sell their unique qualities in commissioning; there is a general need to up-skill local organisations so they can compete. Good dialogue throughout the commissioning process would help here.
More workshops were scheduled in line with these recommendations to provide training and gather more information. These were less successful in terms of producing meaningful findings due to a lack of attendance from DPULOs. This may be because the area was too complex, or DPULOs felt they could not spare the staff and resources to attend a full cycle of workshops.

However, some findings did come from these workshops:

People generally felt that DPULOs could understand the issues and empathise with the service users. It is important to consult with service users in the delivery process so they are involved in shaping the services they receive. Also, it is important to utilise the skills and strengths of community groups and the added value they can offer.

The resources DPULOs have available to get involved in the commissioning process are limited, so allowances need to be made by commissioners to help DPULOs overcome these problems. DPULOs need time to research contracts and prepare if they are to compete. Partnership work can be important to benefit all parties in the commissioning process.

Following these workshops, case studies and reports were carried out by individual DPULOs that aimed to look in more detail at the position of DPULOs in the commissioning process and address any problems there. They came to much the same conclusion as the feedback from the initial workshops – only a small minority of DPULOs appear to have any experience in commissioning, and of that it is mostly negative. DPULOs face numerous barriers in accessing the commissioning process, meaning many often do not even attempt to compete. Another problem identified was the process itself, and the way statutory partners may not recognise which DPULOs could help.

However, this is something that needs to be addressed as DPULOs have a unique selling point in being a voice of their community that could bring extra benefits to the process of commissioning. The research project outlined a number of things that can change to improve the current position.
The Process

Some DPULOs felt the process was too complex, and outlined that they would benefit from training to become more familiar with the jargon and language used. This would make commissioning seem more accessible to DPULOs.

Commissioning is the whole process of deciding which services are needed and the best way to deliver those services. There seems to have been a shift recently in favour of the more rigid approach of procurement and contracts for tender. This formal process can lead to DPULOs not being as involved in the process as they should be. However, a more flexible approach can be used as there are many other ways to deliver services than formal contract. Commissioners could make grants available as a way of funding smaller areas of service delivery. Sub-contracting is also a worthwhile alternative that can allow DPULOs to deliver services in the communities they serve. In order to improve the situation here, DPULOs who have the capacity could develop their skills in procurement of contracts in order to compete. Statutory partners also need to be more willing to look at other methods of commissioning that are more flexible and allow the involvement of DPULOs.

The commissioning process has numerous stages to it, not just procurement, and it is important to get DPULOs involved in all aspects including the design of services and how they will be delivered. While DPULOS may feel they lack the experience to compete in bids for procurement, there are other aspects of commissioning that could benefit from DPULO involvement.

The most important point to make is that the process needs to develop to be one of intelligent commissioning – so the process adapts to fit the needs of the community accessing the services. One idea would be to put as much focus on the social value that can be brought to the community being served when deciding on service delivery as is placed on the financial value of contracts.

DPULOs

A central point of this project is that it is not just the commissioners and the process itself that need to change; DPULOs themselves need to be willing to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to compete in the process.
It is important that DPULOs learn to market their unique status as a voice for disabled people and service users, as this will be a huge benefit when delivering services. While DPULOs may feel they are unable to devote the time to submitting tenders, it is this development and improving their skills here that could help organisations to grow.

In addition, DPULOs are not always aware of the support organisations available to help with the tendering process. Accessing this support, as well as being more willing to actively engage in partnership work and co-production, will help DPULOs in the commissioning process. Groups need to move away from the idea that other DPULOs are ‘competition’ and be willing to work together in partnerships.

As well as developing partnerships with other DPULOs, there is a need for groups to work with commissioners in the process. The best way, as was suggested in the research, is to develop a ‘critical friend’ approach, so DPULOs can deliver the services required and work collaboratively but also remain independent and able to challenge in areas they feel passionate about. Sub-contracting is another possible way forward: while larger organisations may win contracts for procurement, they may sub-contract parts of the services to be delivered to DPULOs. This means it is important DPULOs develop ways to sell their unique selling points to commissioners and other organisations.

**Commissioners**

One point raised throughout the project is that commissioners need to be more aware of the issues and barriers faced by DPULOs in accessing the process and ensure that this is taken into account. For example, giving longer time scales for applications and an earlier warning to DPULOs of contracts that become available for tender. This would also help as it gives organisations more time to put together a full bid to submit.

Understanding the added social value DPULOs could bring to commissioning and service delivery is also important, as once this is taken on board commissioners may be more willing and able to get DPULOs involved. There needs to be an effort to work more closely with DPULOs in general and consider giving training to help these groups become fully functioning in service delivery as a whole. There should be the opportunity
for DPULOs to be involved in commissioning at every level and be able to shape service delivery.

**Key recommendations**

What DPULOs can do

- Develop skills in procurement if they have the capacity, in order to prepare themselves for commissioning
- Learn to sell their unique points in terms of being a voice for disabled people to commissioners and larger organisations for sub-contracting
- Overcome the idea that other groups are competition and embrace partnership work and co-production
- Find out who their local commissioners are and forge relationships, such as a ‘critical friend’ approach

What commissioners can do

- Create more dialogue to ensure DPULOs are involved in the process of commissioning throughout
- Understand the issues faced by DPULOs in accessing the commissioning process and recognise the added social value DPULOs can offer
- Inform DPULOs earlier of funding opportunities and contracts available

How the process can change

- Move to intelligent commissioning, whereby the process of commissioning services fits the needs of the service users and the community being served
- Have best service delivery and social value for the community of service users in mind for the end goal as well as best value
- Make smaller contracts available or use grants, so DPULOs feel they are able to deliver and be involved in the commissioning process
Co-production and Partnerships

Funding was also available to allow organisations to carry out case studies looking at co-production and the issues around this, as well as ways of developing partnership work. The idea was that this could link closely to the work on commissioning and the development of DPULOs. It is thought that DPULOs becoming more involved in partnerships and working collaboratively with other groups to deliver services will help them develop.

Co-production

Co-production is the process of mutual involvement in service delivery; commissioners and statutory partners should work with DPULOs as partners at a strategic level to design and deliver services. Essentially, it involves those at different levels in the commissioning process coming together to deliver services. The idea is that services will be delivered mutually between those who access the services and the professionals who typically decide on services delivery.

While none of the groups involved focussed solely on the issues around developing co-production, most groups identified that co-production is a way forward for smaller DPULOs to develop and access the commissioning process. What is significant is that most groups who did case studies had formed links of some sort with various types of organisations – showing the important role working together can play in the development of DPULOs. One group was able to form an agreement with the local health authority and visited the House of Commons to present some of their ideas, which shows the importance of change in this area is being recognised.

One group outlined the need for the relationship between those who decide on service delivery and the community being served to change – it needs to develop into one of trust and respect, to ensure they develop services together. This would allow co-production between statutory partners, local authorities, DPULOs and those accessing the services; so resources are invested in the community to deliver the best possible services.

It was recognised that it is important to develop close links with local commissioners in order to facilitate dialogue from early on in the
commissioning process – in a ‘critical friend’ approach as previously discussed. As well as commissioners, groups within this project had or had attempted to forge links with local authorities and statutory partners as a result of this work. Again, having contact with an organisation that is part of the tendering process will give DPULOs a better standing in the system. Once DPULOs have links such as these, they will find it easier to gain access to the tendering process and start the process of co-producing.

**Partnerships**

Additionally, DPULOs have recognised the benefits that can come from forming partnerships and relationships with other DPULOs in order to become involved in the commissioning process. Recent development in this project shows that most DPULOs recognise partnership work is a way to increase DPULO involvement in the commissioning process and the majority of those DPULOs involved in the project were part of a partnership of some form. Partnership work with groups on the same level of the process can mean being involved at every stage of the commissioning process; consortia can be formed to deliver and be collaborative providers of services.

One method of working together touched on by some of the research was developing a consortium or alliance of DPULOs in the area or region, which links to the idea of trying to form a regional network. The point here is that, if DPULOs form partnerships and work collaboratively with one another they can share knowledge, skills and information and help one another to grow and develop in the commissioning process and be better equipped to deliver services.

One issue that was highlighted in the project was the issue around what groups to form partnerships with. The issue of ethics and values can still be a barrier in partnership working in terms of which groups DPULOs feel they can work with and contracts they feel they can deliver on. DPULOs wouldn’t be comfortable working in partnership with organisations who do not share the same ethical views as themselves. Similarly, they are less likely to bid for contracts that would appear to be unfavourable for a particular community group that they serve.

One view expressed in the research was that DPULOs have sometimes felt that commissioners do not fully understand the complex moral issues and
competing values held by DPULOs that surround the idea of collaborating and working together. These issues can mean some DPULOs feel they cannot work together or cannot deliver certain services. This feeling that DPULOs should form partnerships regardless of these conflicting values is something that was highlighted in the initial workshops.

However, DPULOs involved in this project were keen to highlight that groups may need to overcome these barriers and the idea that they can form partnerships if they want to be more successful and grow within the commissioning process. There is a wide spectrum of groups that can work together in order to deliver services without ethical barriers being an issue.

**Key recommendations**

- Co-production is a way for smaller DPULOs to get involved in the commissioning of services
- It is important for those who use the services to be able to shape service delivery and be involved at every level
- Embrace the idea of working together in whatever form of partnership works best for the organisations involved
- This can also include DPULOs forging links with local authorities, statutory partners, commissioners and larger DPULOs through sub-contracting to ensure the best service delivery
As well as focusing on commissioning and the development of a regional network of DPULOs, funding was made available for organisations to carry out case studies to look at the Department of Health User-Led Organisation (ULO) key design criteria. The idea was to allow both established and emerging DPULOs to produce reports outlining any hurdles or issues faced in trying to develop to meet the design criteria.

This is a set of criteria developed by the Department of Health that aims to outline what a DPULO should look like and the values it should hold. The idea of the Department of Health criteria is that groups that meet all 21 of the criteria are seen as user-led organisations: it is a way of distinguishing which groups are DPULOs.

Please see the acknowledgements for a link to the official Department of Health ULO Design Criteria

While it is a good idea to have some way of identifying community groups and user-led organisations and the beneficial values they possess, the research project has uncovered some uncertainties with the criteria themselves and using them as the way to show which groups are recognised as a DPULO.

The Criteria

Some DPULOs involved outlined how their groups were successful in meeting the design criteria. They also looked at the positives and negatives of the groups possessing these criteria – showing that once a group does develop against the criteria then it is has a number of positive qualities that are beneficial to a user-led group.

What came out of the case studies is that some groups were successful in meeting the criteria in full. This could suggest that, once DPULOs become more developed they find it easier to meet the criteria. One group also outlined the positives of their group’s meeting the criteria, showing that the values outlined in the criteria are positive ones for DPULOs to have.
However, one case study carried out highlighted how service users didn’t understand the criteria and how it related to their DPULO. This could suggest that the Department of Health design criteria are too complex as a set of values for all DPULOs to adhere to. It could be argued there are too many points within the criteria to meet before an organisation can be recognised as a DPULO. Some of the points are also very specific, meaning some groups could be excluded simply because they focus on other areas.

The idea of DPULOs is that they are user-led, serve their members and are based in the community of service users, so having such a complex and detailed set of ‘rules’ to develop against could be excessive. It seems wrong that such organisations that are based in their local communities should have to develop against a set criteria designed by government, rather than simply being recognised by the members they serve.

One suggestion that came out of this project is that it is wrong for groups to have to develop against a certain set of criteria in order to get a ‘badge’ of approval from government to say they are a user-led organisation. The focal point of these groups is that they are run by their members and are based in the community; so the criteria for establishing such groups should come from the work they do in the community. As such, future development here should focus on forming a process where those in the community that are served by the DPULO and access the services decide the criteria to judge groups against.

**Moving Forward**

While some groups seemed able to meet the criteria, others were not as successful. Although no specific hurdles were outlined in this part of the project in terms of how groups can develop to meet this criteria, the main point to emerge is that the criteria are too complex and detailed for small organisations to be able to meet. The criteria outlined are valuable qualities for a DPULO, but it may be unrealistic to ask a group to meet all 21.

One way of getting over this ‘hurdle’ in the DPULO criteria is to change the approach so groups no longer need a ‘badge’ of approval from Department of Health. This would allow even emerging groups, who have not yet become established enough to meet the criteria to be identified as a DPULO too.
One group outlined how they were in the process of developing a regional alliance of DPULOs; so DPULOs can join together the community and provide a better framework for recognising the DPULOs in the region. Membership will be based on the work done by the groups and support given to the community who access their services, while still being based on the key values outlined in the department of health criteria. The idea would be to use membership of this alliance as a way to identify DPULOs in the community rather than the Design Criteria. While this appears to be a good alternative, it would again bring in the point mentioned earlier in the report of there being a problem in the capacity of groups to be involved in building alliances and sharing information in this way.

**Key recommendations**

- The current ULO Design Criteria are too complex a set of criteria for user-led groups to develop against, meaning some DPULOs could be excluded
- A new approach needs to be developed to define who is a DPULO that focusses on the community the DPULO serves
- Those in the community that are served by the DPULO should decide the criteria
- The idea of forming a regional alliance or some method of linking DPULOs in a region together as a way of identifying DPULOs in a region links to the problem of a lack of capacity of groups to get involved in any sort of network or online site
Conclusion

This report has been published to bring together the findings from this region-wide project researching the development of a regional DPULO network and improving the commissioning process for these organisations. It has been a worthwhile project as it is clear that the issue of DPULOs developing in the commissioning process is important, and this project has outlined the problems with this and how they can be resolved moving forward.

It was thought that a best practice guide could be developed from this report to help DPULOs develop, and as such it is important to recognise the key recommendations that have been identified and build on the work carried out:

Recommendations

• The gap in capacity of DPULOs to facilitate a network needs to be addressed so groups can interact and share information
• The commissioning process needs to change so the process engaged in fits the needs
• DPULOs need to be willing to develop skills in commissioning and procurement
• DPULOs need to develop ways to sell their unique selling points to commissioners and other large organisations
• More dialogue between commissioners and DPULOs is needed to ensure these organisations are involved in every stage of service delivery
• Commissioners need to understand the issues faced by DPULOs in accessing the process and make allowances to help
• Partnership work and co-production between DPULOs and organisations at all levels of the commissioning process is a way forward
• Ethical barriers to partnerships or co-production need to be overcome to facilitate different organisations working together
• ULO design criteria are too complex, and need to change so that the community served by the DPULO decides the criteria
Produced by VT Services

On behalf of Inclusion Now!

Including the work of Choices and Rights Disability Coalition

And the Personalisation Forum Group
This report is the result of a research project carried out in the Yorkshire and Humber region focusing on Disabled People’s User Led Organisations (DPULOs). The main focus of this research project was looking into developing a regional DPULO network to bring DPULOs in the area together, as well as looking into the involvement of DPULOs in the commissioning process and how this can be improved.

This report now aims to summarise the project, setting out the fundamental findings and some key recommendations to build on. It is hoped this report can act as a best practice guideline for both DPULOs and commissioners.

**What is a DPULO?**

Essentially, a DPULO is an organisation that is run by and for disabled people in the community – this includes anyone with rights under disability law. A DPULO aims to be representative of the views of members and service-users. It is also thought that these organisations should be centred round the social model of disability, and so aim to challenge barriers for disabled people in society.

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