

## Newcastle Carers Udecide Project

### Award winning approach to letting communities decide how to spend funding.

Udecide gives people in Newcastle the power to decide how to spend a pot of money so it can make the biggest difference to their lives. The programme has matured and developed since it began in 2006 and has been nationally and internationally recognised and rewarded for its achievements, for example by a Eurocities Award in 2009.

Udecide is a way of engaging communities of geography or communities of shared interest or identity in identifying their needs, discussing and agreeing priorities and deciding about granting funding to address those needs. It has benefits in community development and cohesion. It leads to new relationships between beneficiaries and more responsive and focused service provision with stronger relationships between service providers and users.

Udecide has 6 basic phases, each phase has options and the Steering Group decides about the detailed plan in each phase:

**Phase 1:** Recruiting a Steering group, planning and preparing later phases

**Phase 2:** Engaging beneficiaries to define issues and explore solutions

**Phase 3:** Converting the information and ideas from the engagement phase into costed project proposals

**Phase 4:** Grand Voting event – planning and delivery

**Phase 5:** Process evaluation and project initiation

**Phase 6:** Project monitoring and evaluation

A suggestion from the Carers Conference 2009 was using the Udecide approach to spend the Carers Grant. This would create new opportunities to engage carers in exploring ideas about the support they value for their caring role.

Adult and Culture Services identified a spending pot of £50,000 and invited the Udecide Team to work with them to design a Udecide project to support the aims of their transformation programme. The project began in October 2009 when a Steering Group of carers and workers from several organisations and groups who have a role and interest in the welfare of the city's Carers. The Group agreed a communication and engagement plan, which included:

- A poster campaign.
- An information pack sent to all the organisations and groups who work with carers to explain the purpose and seek their co-operation to promote the project.
- Promotion among internal community facing workers and external professionals.
- Articles and notices in relevant newsletters and information bulletins such as the Elders Council newsletter, Carers Centre Newsletter, Newcastle Props Newsletter, the Evening Chronicle, staff information bulletins.
- A mailing to the client lists of the Dementia Care Partnership and Props.

A second stage of engagement focused on face-to-face engagement with carers at their meetings and gatherings. These included Carers Rights Day, Carers Centre Coffee Mornings and groups, DCP carers group, Props Carers Forum, North-West Carers and others. Steering Group partners engaged the carers and encouraged clients to complete postcards, send e-mails and call our free phone number. We received 174 responses.

The findings helped develop the project brief, which was circulated widely to service providers and community organisations. Needs identified by the carers included public transport; social opportunities; practical support, skills and training; information, advice and advocacy; volunteering and mutual support; contact with professionals; recognition, appreciation and respect for carers;

leisure and health; and carers rights at work. 34 groups and organisations sent expressions of interest, which became 25 applications for funding with a value of £96,000.

Projects going through to a decision were grouped with ones with similar outcomes to minimise the information that carers would have to evaluate. A voting brochure presented the project 'clusters' and described the benefits and outcomes of each cluster rather than showcasing the organisation bidding for the resources.

To maximise the opportunities for carers to vote, we offered postal voting to those unable to attend the Grand Vote. For two weeks leading up to the vote, carers could ask for a voting brochure and voting slip to record their ranked preferences for the seven clusters of projects on offer. 74 carers sent Postal votes, which were added to the votes cast at the Grand Voting Event.

Representatives from the seven clusters presented their project ideas to 67 carers and the people they care for at the Grand Voting Event. After the presentations, there was 'speed dating' and project sponsors had a short question and answer session at each of the tables. After the 'Speed dates', participants voted using electronic keypads. The successful clusters were 'Getting together, time for you', 'Finding your musical talents', 'Getting things done' and 'All skilled up'.

Each includes separate projects delivered by different organisations, designed to benefit carers of different ages, ethnicities and gender. The Steering Group now oversee the start of successful projects and are designing systems to monitor and evaluate the impact of the funding.

#### Successes:

- 218 people from a hard to reach group took part in a decision-making process – they were living city wide, of different ages, cultures and experiences. The majority had no connection to any group or organisation.
- Creating a framework of services and projects in response to the needs expressed by the service user.
- Forming an enthusiastic and committed Steering Group that is representative of a wide variety of carers across the city.
- Raising the profile of carers' issues with organisations and groups who had not considered delivering services for carers in the past.
- Creating new opportunities for carers in their communities.

#### Challenges:

- Some information from the consultation was not acted on by any organisations and groups
- Explaining the purpose and process of the project to the beneficiaries – ensuring they had the right information to make an informed decision based on the idea not the organisation
- Encouraging organisations to reconfigure their work to take (often new) client group's needs into consideration.
- Evaluation – evaluating the process has been done previously but we have agreed to evaluate the benefit to carers and evaluation of the organisations.

The Carers Udecide project has been an innovative and rewarding project for all those involved. Bringing together the needs and hopes of groups with service providers is at the heart of local and national government agendas. It leads to benefits that improve the design and delivery of services but also build relationships and trust and confidence. The project helped us learn many lessons and showed that learning could be applied to future projects if the resources become available.