

Jeremy Swain – Chief Executive

Employing Service users – the Giving
Real Opportunities for Work (GROW)
experience



- 300 staff
- **68 staff ex-service users**
- 25 service teams
- 200 volunteers
- £14.5 million turnover
- 7130 service users

- Street outreach
- Hostels
- Tenancy support
- Education, training and employment
- Health services
- Advice services
- Specialist alcohol, drug and mental health projects

GROW was inspired by:

- Our service users wanting to work for Thames Reach
- The experience of visiting the Fortune Society in Harlem, NYC
- The exposure of our hypocrisy when approaching employers for jobs
- The need to provide better services



The change programme

- Separately funded initiative to change to the culture of the organisation
- Target of 15% of work force ex-service users
- Top down approach driven by local champions
- Heavily evaluated
- Later focus on embedding the employment of service users to become mainstream (the norm)



The cultural change process

- Focused on engagement of most of the work force (after 18 months, 85% were involved)
- Addressing fears of staff – confidentiality, boundaries, vulnerability
- Additional support – life coaches
- Reformulation of recruitment process – history of service use flipped to a positive
- Changes to procedures and policies such as the Code of Conduct

Mainstreaming GROW

- Embedding GROW into our trainee programme (with pathway in through volunteer programmes)
- Giving credibility to GROW through evaluations including financial
- Influencing commissioners to drive change amongst other organisations
- Supporting roll out nationally – Customer Employment Partnership

Reflections

- Broad support for GROW but some areas of prejudice exposed
- The concept of being a service user and employee in same organisation particularly challenging
- Important to maintain the willingness to disclose
- No two tier approach – standards retained across the staff group
- Enormous impact on policy-makers, politicians and employers
- Thames Reach is more diverse in outlook and healthier for it

More information

- <http://www.thamesreach.org.uk/what-we-do/user-employment>
- <http://www.cepjobs.org>
- <https://twitter.com/drugfree2012>