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Report for Tomorrow's People

1. Introduction

- This research is part of a wider project that Opinion Leader Research is conducting for the NCC and the Home Office
- The purpose of the study is to understand what distinctive value 3rd sector organisations bring to public services
- Research was conducted with users of Tomorrow's People services on 16 May 2006
- The sample was as follows:
 - 1 x 1.5 hour group discussion with users of Tomorrow's People Sefton office
 1. age 18-43
 2. all male ex-offenders
 3. all current service users
 - 1 x 1.5 hour group discussion with users of Tomorrow's People Liverpool City office
 1. age 18-40
 2. all male ex-offenders
 3. current and previous service users
- The discussion guide is appended to this document

2. Overview

- The vast majority of participants interviewed said that Tomorrow's People provides an excellent service and one that they could not access anywhere else
- There were no criticisms at all of Tomorrow's People's services

"They're different from anywhere else. They actually genuinely remember conversations you have. They're listening to what you say and not just sound like they're just doing it for the job and that"

"I'd say it was very good, they help you a lot. They do a lot for you"

"You'd think we were being paid to do this to big them up but it's genuine!"

3. What your customers want from an employment service

The key priorities for your service users are:

- **Getting the basics right:** helping people get jobs, giving information, advice and guidance
 - CV/application form writing
 - Preparing for interviews
 - Business plans
- **Good communication and information:** keeping users up to date with progress on job applications and other queries
 - Continued contact
 - Information in a suitable format
- **Keeping promises:** doing what you say you will do
 - Giving people the assistance you promised them
 - Meeting them when you say you will
- **Flexibility and choice:** providing a service that is tailored to the individual and taking the time to understand each person's needs:
 - Giving them a choice of which jobs they apply for
 - Catering for diverse needs

- Flexibility in when and where to meet
- **Being listened to and views being taken into account:** asking for feedback on the services once users have got jobs or are on training courses and using this to improve services
- **Trust and transparency:** being able to trust staff
 - Keeping all information confidential
 - Dealing with issues in front of users
- **Good relationship with staff:** sympathetic and interested staff that people feel comfortable opening up to
 - Consistent relationship with one member of staff
 - Not being judgemental
 - Being positive and encouraging
- **Connection to the community:** Having strong ties with the local community
 - Offices and staff are local
 - Staff having good local contacts
 - Knowledge of the local employers/training courses
- **Going the extra mile:** staff taking a personal interest in cases, an extra level of support
 - Spend significant time with client
 - Dealing with lots of government and other orgs to sort out issues
- **Added services:** help fill gaps needed to gain employment/training

4. How well your customers think you deliver what they want:

Getting the basics right

- Tomorrow's People are thought to be very good at getting the basics right
 - People say that staff provide all they need, for example help them to get a job / training / qualifications / advice on loans / business plans etc
 - If participants did not have any of the basics required to get a job, a CV for example, Tomorrow's People were praised for assisting them with this

- Tomorrow's People staff are thought to be well trained, with good contacts and highly knowledgeable

"They talk about what it takes to get you a job and they show up any defects that you've got. If you haven't got a CV they'll do it for you. Tell you what you need to get a job and that"

"You go to the jobcentres to sign on and the first thing they say to you is 'what are you doing about looking for a job'? They just want you off the dole but they're not prepared to help you get off the dole. These people are here"

Good communication and information

- Staff at Tomorrow's People are thought to be very good communicators
 - They always telephone participants to keep them up to date with progress but are not seen to be pestering people unnecessarily. Because of past experiences with other organisations their expectations around communication were very low before they started using the service, but have been far exceeded

"I was expecting a hard time, loads of grief and loads of phone calls and aggro and just on your case all the time"

- Staff always meet people one on one rather than just talking on the phone

"You just speak to them on the phone, you don't speak like one on one (face-to-face), they're just on a phone call (dole office)"

- Staff will also use their communication skills to help service users

Keeping promises

- Tomorrow's People are thought to be good at keeping promises
 - Staff say that they will help people find a job or training and they do this. Many other organisations have registered them, have taken down all their details and then just not got back to them

"They just put you on the backburner don't they and leave you there, these (Tomorrow's People) don't"

- They say they will be in regular contact to check up on how things are going and they do this

"Well they're always getting in contact now aren't they, on a regular basis. Don't just die after two weeks"

Flexibility and choice

- Tomorrow's People provide good flexibility and choice
 - Staff will look for a job that fits what the service user wants/asks for. The job centre was often criticised for trying to force people to do things that don't fit with their experience

"They (Tomorrow's People) don't say here you are, you're an electrician so you're going to go and work in a warehouse. They won't do that type of thing. They look for that job that you want"

"That they don't just try and shove any old job at you. They try and fit what you've asked for"

- Staff will meet people when and where it suits the service user, for example at a local café. The meetings are very informal and casual, which is greatly appreciated
- Jobs are only looked for in local areas, whereas other providers had put jobs forward that were in another city

"You go in there and you press them buttons for local jobs and it comes up Blackpool and I was saying to the woman, whereabouts in Blackpool, we're Liverpool. It's just a joke isn't it? [job centre]"

Being listened to and views being taken into account

- Participants mentioned that they had been asked for feedback on Tomorrow's People services when they had got a job. Most did not respond though as they 'did not have any complaints'

Trust and transparency

- Tomorrow's People have a good level of transparency and trust
 - Staff will often make calls in front of people so that they can hear what they are saying. They see this very positively
 - People highly valued the level of confidentiality at Tomorrow's People. They were confident that they could say anything to a member of staff and that it would not go any further and would not affect their employment prospects

"She (Tomorrow's People) said, whatever you say won't go any further, and that's what I wanted. The dole don't do that. It's like I don't trust them. You feel if you tell them anything they'll just jump on it and make a big deal of it straight away so you don't tell them nothing at all"

Good relationship with staff

- Everyone in the groups praised the staff highly
 - Tomorrow's People staff are thought to be very friendly, non-judgemental, patient and make people feel relaxed. They give the service user confidence and do not 'knock them down'

"They don't just phone you up and say oh, blah, blah, blah, they phone you up and have a conversation with you on the phone, speak to you, as a human being. Some places you phone up and they're just yeah, all right, tarrar, and put the phone down on you"

- Participants are very pleased that they have a continuous relationship with one member of staff rather than many. It means that staff get to know them and their issues and they do not have to repeat themselves each time they meet

"You don't get passed around from pillar to post to different people. So one person will know what you're talking about and the next, you've got to explain everything else to someone else. They don't do it that way. You just stick with that person"

- The staff encourage people but ultimately they have to help themselves which is seen positively

Connection to the community

- Although Tomorrow's People is a national organisation it was seen as very important that the offices are small local offices and that the staff are from the local area – they know the area, know what it is like.
 - Staff were seen to have good local contacts with employers and knowledge about local training courses etc.

"(Want staff to be from local community) because they know what the area's like. You couldn't have someone coming travelling from Blackpool every day just to spend a day in Liverpool and get back home. It's people that live in the area. They know the area"

- But people were a bit worried about the organisation getting any bigger and whether this would affect the local feel of the offices

"Just have loads of little ones instead of a couple of big ones (offices)"

Going the extra mile

- Staff are always thought to go the extra mile
 - The appointment times at Tomorrow's People are thought to be much longer than at the jobcentre. It is not unusual that staff will spend an hour talking to someone

whereas at the jobcentre they say that staff may only talk for 10 minutes. They are seen to take the time for people, unlike public organisations that are seen not to care as much and private organisations that are more profit focussed

- The staff at Tomorrow's People are thought to be committed to everyone they work with. They will do the best job they can for service users, always giving 110%
- Some of the staff are even thought to go out of their way to help by doing things in their own time. Staff can be seen as more like friends
- If the member of staff does not know the answer to something they will find out e.g. ring up the relevant organisations

"They try their best. They can't do no more than try their best for you can they?"

"They're always phoning you all the time, even when I come in then, she give me more jobs to go for"

"If they are really busy they don't really care, they just sit down and take their time with you no matter what"

Added services

- Tomorrow's People do provide some added services that are not related to employment but that fill gaps that might stop people getting a job. One thing they don't provide is Internet access but this was not really valued by participants
- People mentioned that staff have helped them to get a driving licence, qualifications, CSCS card and helped them with benefits or legal advice

5. Conclusions

- Tomorrow's People performs very well at providing what people want from an employment service
- Many people mention that Tomorrow's People was the only organisation that was willing to help them because of their ex-offender status
- The key strengths of Tomorrow's People are:
 - A flexible service to suit everyone's needs
 - Confidentiality
 - Friendly, non-judgemental staff that give people confidence in themselves
 - Staff that will go the extra mile for every client
 - Regular contact
- There were no criticisms of the service so no improvements were recommended. Keep doing what you are currently doing!

6. Appendix

NATIONAL CONSUMER COUNCIL DISCUSSION GUIDE – SERVICE USERS

Introduction (5 mins)

- Introduce self and explain the purpose of the discussion
 - Seek permission to tape record, explain confidentiality
 - No right or wrong answers
 - Please don't all speak at once
 - Housekeeping - mobiles off, location of toilets etc
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- Ask people to introduce themselves and give a brief description of their contact with the service (length and type of contact with the service)

Awareness (5 mins)

- Did you know the name of the organisation from which you get your service before being asked here today?
- What type of organisation is it? (note awareness that it is in the voluntary/3rd sector)
- How would you describe the organisation to a friend who going to receive a service from this same organisation? Why?

Experience (30 mins)

Timeline task

- I am going to ask you the best and worst things about the service you receive
- Before I do that I'd like you to fill out a timeline of your contact with the service over the past ten years
 - Starting in the past I'd like you to draw a line that represents the highs and lows of your relationship with this service on the graph
 - Would you please then write in the reasons behind any highs and lows in your experience?

GIVE A FEW MINS FOR PARTICIPANTS TO FILL IN TIMELINE

- Let's now talk as a group about the highs and lows and reasons for these – you can use your timeline to explain your points
- So overall, what are the best and worst things about the service? Why?

MODERATOR TO WRITE UP ON A FLIPCHART THE BEST AND WORST THINGS ABOUT THE SERVICE

- For each: how distinctive is this to this particular service?
- For best things: do they make this organisation special in any way?

Change

- Has there been any change over time in the organisation supplying the service here?
- How did you feel about that change? Why?
- How did it change the service you received?
- Have you ever had services from any other organisation in the past?
- Did you have a choice about which housing organisation you got services from?

Mapping exercise

We will allow people to self-define their measures of success for this organisation

GET PEOPLE TO BRAINSTORM THE KEY THINGS THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO THEM/THEY WANT FROM THE SERVICE

- So what are the most important factors that make a good service (ask them to explain reasons for choice)? MODERATOR TO WRITE THESE ATTRIBUTES ON INDEX CARDS

MODERATOR TO ADD PRE-PREPARED SERVICE ATTRIBUTES PEOPLE HAVE NOT COME UP WITH (E.G. DELIVERY, TIMELINESS, INFORMATION, PROFESSIONALISM, STAFF ATTITUDE – WITH DEFINITIONS OF THESE*) TO THE ONES PEOPLE HAVE SPONTANEOUSLY COME UP WITH. (EXPLAIN THESE ARE FROM PAST RESEARCH)

- As a group can you rank these attributes in 2 ways:
 1. On what is most important to you (ask them to explain reasons for rankings)

THEN:

2. On what that particular service provider does best/worst (ask them to explain reasons for rankings)
 - Probe how distinctive these attributes are to this service provider?
 - On the positives: are these perceived as special/out of the ordinary? Why?

Customer responsiveness

- How much would you say this service takes your views and needs into account?
- Have you ever had to make a complaint? If so, what was it? Who did you complain to? How was this dealt with? Satisfactorily/unsatisfactorily?
- Would you expect this problem with other service providers?
- If you have not made a complaint, do you know how to go about making a complaint?
- Have you had any contact with more senior staff in the organisation?
- Have you been asked for your views on the service provided?
 - Can you give any examples of when they have made changes in their service because of what their customers wanted?

Expectations (15 mins)

- What services do you think this organisation should provide you with?

ASK EVERYONE TO CAST THEIR MINDS BACK TO WHEN THEY FIRST ACCESSED THIS SERVICE

- What services did you think the organisation would provide you with then? Have your expectations been met?
- How would your expectations have differed if the service was provided by
 - Local authority
 - A private organisation (prompt with successful models e.g. Virgin, John Lewis)

- A charity (e.g. Oxfam, Save the Children)

Strengths and Weaknesses of VCS (10 mins)

- The organisation providing your service is a voluntary/3rd sector organisation. Do you think there are any advantages to getting this service from a voluntary organisation?
 - Are there any disadvantages?
- If you were told there was likely to be a change in the organisation supplying the service (for example to public or private sector) how would you feel about it?

Specific Area of Delivery: Specialism and Innovation (15 mins)

- Do you feel that this organisation has any specific areas of expertise?
- How does it cater for these specific needs?
- How has this benefited you personally?
 - probe on whether they feel that the organisation sticks up for them or represents their interests in any way
- Are there any services that this organisation provides that you feel public services wouldn't provide?
 - Can you give examples? Probe on perceived specialness of the type of service and way it is delivered from PROBE SHEET
- Are there any aspects of their service that you think are particularly exciting, new and different?
 - Can you give examples of innovative things they do?

Future expectations (5 mins)

- How could this organisation develop to work even better for you?
- Do you have any hopes and fears for the future for the VCS sector and this organisation?

- Any final comments?
- Thank and close

* Definitions suggested are:

- Delivery: giving you the service they promised
- Timeliness: responding quickly to issues and not passing them on to others
- Information: giving you regular, up to date and accurate information on the service
- Professionalism: staff who are well trained
- Staff attitudes: polite and friendly staff