

Better meetings

The members of the 'What about us?' Reference Group were all young people with learning difficulties, some of them working with supporters. These young people helped us to make easy-to-follow lists of what we needed to do in meetings (agendas) and records of the things we had discussed in our meetings (minutes). We had different ways to do this for different members of our group. Some people liked words or text; some people found it helpful to have pictures or symbols to give them the idea of what that item was about. Some people liked photos best. We made sure these were sent round to young people in plenty of time so they could work through the ideas, with support if they needed it, before the meeting.

The young people ran the meetings for themselves. They made time at the start of the meeting to go over any papers that had to be discussed so everyone understood the main topics. They used 'ice breaker' activities to make sure everybody had a chance to contribute something at the start of each meeting. They made sure there were plenty of breaks for people to relax, have a drink, catch up with ideas or use the toilet. They took it in turns to be in charge of the meeting and to introduce agenda items (chairing). Often the young people shared the chairing of the meeting, either taking it in turns to introduce agenda items or playing a kind of 'pass the parcel' game with music so that each person got a chance to open the next agenda item and introduce it when the music stopped.

During meetings, we used lots of Power Point presentations to make sure ideas were presented to young people in interesting and exciting ways. One of the supporters would also keep notes and make drawings (graphic facilitation) on big pieces of paper on the walls as the meeting went on.

Thanks to the young people and their ideas, the Reference Group's meetings were much more interesting than most meetings. We learnt a lot from working with them.