

rsun

regional service user network



background

Until quite recently people who used drugs were rarely involved developing services that they needed. There were few opportunities to get involved: people who use drugs were often seen as having very little to offer governments, services and the community. In reality, nothing could be further from the truth.

Those with experience of drug use (irrespective of whether they've ever engaged with services), and those with experience of family and friends' use, clearly have unique experiences, skills and abilities that enable them to provide 'expert advice'. Because of their direct experiences, those who have used services know better than anyone what works, and what does not. Services shaped this way are more likely to be effective, be cost effective, and to meet the needs of those who use them.

The Regional Service User Network (rsun) is a NI wide network that connects people with experience of / interest in substance use issues. It was originally set up in 2011 by the Public Health Agency (PHA), and since 2013, CHNI has continued to develop the project.

before we go on...

...let's tackle the issue of the term 'service user'. It pops up all over - it's even in our name. We understand that the term means different things - sometimes negative - to different people.

We know that not everyone who has an interest in substance use issues/services will be a 'service user'. Some may not be currently accessing services, but might need them in the future. Some people might be unable to access services, refused services, cannot find suitable services, or do not want services for fear of being stigmatised. Some may be family or friends of those who have or who currently use substances. We also understand that a service user isn't simply someone who quietly receives a service.

We believe that those with experience of substance issues can provide 'expert advice' based on these experiences. rsun allows those with substance use experience an opportunity to share their experiences with a wide range of other people who use, design, and deliver services. This gives them a strong voice to improve services and gives them more control and say over what kind of service they want.

Who's it for? rsun is for anyone with an interest in/experience of substance use issues & services, whether they've accessed services or not, or whether they call themselves a service user or expert by experience, or anything else!

What's it for? To shape addiction & related services

Why? To improve standards and raise awareness for ourselves and others

purpose of rsun

- Supporting new Service User Groups (SUGs) & Trust level networks
- Empowering members
- Peer representation
- Advocating change
- Making new contacts throughout the network
- Information sharing
- Delivering relevant training

How we support you....

We currently employ two staff to support rsun.

Their role is to ensure groups are meaningfully involved in the planning of services at a local and regional level. This means making sure that service users are represented on key decision making bodies, and supporting them in articulating the views and needs of all those who use or have used substances.

Both staff work closely together to support the network, whilst providing specific geographical support. Joanne Branigan is based in CHNI's Belfast office and is responsible for activities within the Belfast, South Eastern and Southern Trust areas. Sherlyn Logue is based in CHNI's Derry office, and covers Northern and Western Trust areas.

Joanne and Sherlyn will support existing Service User Groups (SUGs) and trust level groups, and provide support and advice to new and developing groups.

To date, the rsun project workers have ensured service user representation on a number of regional decision making fora, including:

- Naloxone Steering Group,
- Needle Exchange Forum,
- Substitute Prescribing Steering Grp,
- Bamford Drug & Alcohol Subgroup,
- Alcohol Advisory Group,
- NSD Steering Group (oversees the ongoing policy development and delivery of the New Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Strategy),
- Prescription Drug Misuse Group, DACTS,
- as well as strengthening involvement with universities.

contact us

If you have any questions about rsun, about the roles of the rsun project co-ordinators, about starting up a group, or how to get involved with rsun in another way, get in touch.

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