

INVOLVING people in the development of policy:

This study was funded by the Scottish Executive and conducted by the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships at The University of Edinburgh in conjunction with Carers Scotland. A full report and more detailed summary can be found at: www.crfr.ac.uk/pfc.htm

**examples
from the
experiences
of carers in
Scotland**



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March 2004

Carers were active throughout the policy process leading to the Community Care and Health (Scotland) Act 2002 and found their experiences of interacting with the policy process in post-devolution Scotland to be both productive and personally rewarding.

A team of researchers from The University of Edinburgh studied what helped carers become involved in this policy process. The findings highlight elements of good practice that could help policy makers and voluntary organisations in their work to engage with the public in policy making.

How did the policy processes help public involvement?

- Carers and their representatives were involved from the beginning of the policy process and participated in making recommendations on legislative changes and guidelines on interpreting future legislation.
- A wide range of participants and organisations were invited to attend Scottish Parliamentary Committee meetings which ensured that a diverse range of opinion was taken into consideration.
- Individuals were invited to participate in policy making Parliamentary Committees and give evidence to the Scottish Parliament.
- Meeting times took into consideration the needs of public participants.
- Information was distributed with enough time to allow all participants to prepare properly.

How did voluntary organisations help public involvement?

- Voluntary organisations had a culture of involvement, and involved their members and service users in all levels of decision-making. Including users on management committees allowed them to contribute to fast-paced strategy and take part in lobbying decisions.
- Voluntary organisations, whilst recognising commitment to their members and service users, sought to obtain the views of as many people as possible and support non-members to enter the policy process as individuals.
- Local and national voluntary organisations worked cooperatively and shared skills, resources and information throughout the policy process, whilst also respecting each individual organisations right to make their own representations to policy makers.
- Voluntary organisations took a long-term approach to involvement in policy making and aimed to build long-term relationships with policy makers at local and national levels.
- A key national voluntary organisation appointed a Policy and Parliamentary Affairs Officer who was able to provide regular accessible information on the progress of the policy process.

What did individuals find helpful to support their involvement?

- Practical support, through access to expenses, information and resources, and emotional support, by being treated seriously as people with responsible and intelligent opinions.
- Being involved in the policy process in a manner that suited them: choosing when and to what extent they participated.
- Participating through local and national voluntary organisations and also by making individual representations.
- Access to experts in the policy process, as well as regular mailings of accessible information on the progress of the process.
- Support and training to enable active participation in evidence-giving sessions and committees.
- Having more than one individual representative on any committee would help participants to support each other and ensure that one representative can always be present.