

ILF USER GROUP MEETING

13 November 2007

The User Group was asked to consider what good customer service looks like, what the ideal qualities of customer-facing staff are and share examples of good and bad customer service.

It is worth noting that the overall feeling was that the customer service provided is usually of a high standard, especially considering the volume of work and the resources available.

Our customers see the ILF as unique – in terms of the service we provide and the way we deliver it. People prefer to speak directly to a person, rather than using an automated service. Generally, people find the contact they have with us to be a positive experience and praise the staff for providing a friendly and helpful customer service.

The views gathered at the meeting necessarily reflect less positive experiences people have had and how we might have avoided those, and how we might use them to improve and develop.

What do people expect?

- People expect to be treated as a person, not as a number or file. Some users said they should always be asked for their name first, then to provide their reference number.
- People expect staff to have experience of disability, or at least an understanding or awareness. They should also develop an understanding of a customer's situation.
- Staff should understand their own processes and rules. They should be knowledgeable.
- If a member of staff doesn't know something, they should be honest and admit this but ensure they get the necessary information for the customer.
- If someone promises to call a customer back by a certain time, they should do so.

- People expect that we should deal with them directly and not ask to speak to their carer or PA. If a person has speech difficulties we should still converse with them and allow someone to translate.
- People expect that we give an indication of how long something will take. They do not expect to go for long periods of time without hearing anything from us.
- If we are having problems getting information from the Local Authority, we should communicate this to the customer – they can help!
- People expect we will take a proactive approach to changes (for example, in legislation). If the National Minimum Wage or holiday entitlement increases we should inform all ILF users.
- People expect reviews to be dealt with quickly – especially if it is only a minor change.
- People expect clear advice about payments. (Rather than saying 26 days at £150 per week, tell the customer the amount they will receive).
- People expect letters to be clear.
- People don't expect staff to complain that something is too much trouble or creates extra work.
- People expect that they can speak to a person's line manager or an senior manager if they are unhappy – rather than go through a formal complaints process.
- People expect us to be human – empathetic, honest, approachable.
- People want reassurance.
- People expect us to anticipate “problems” or questions and to have this information to hand when dealing with customers.

- People look for guarantees. If we say we will do something we will do it. If something cannot be done immediately, give a realistic timescale and ensure it is done within this timescale.
- People expect staff to be motivated and to take satisfaction from having happy customers.
- People expect staff to receive feedback on their performance in customer service delivery.
- People do not expect us to go straight to their Social Worker – they want us to deal with them directly.
- People expect a named caseworker and to be told when there is a change to their named caseworker.

What qualities and behaviours make good customer service?

- Listening skills.
- Friendly and understanding of situations.
- Non-judgemental.
- Being aware of diversity and different disabilities and needs.
- Tolerant and patient.
- Honest.
- Able to get information and research if necessary.
- Not making assumptions.
- Giving people choice.
- Promoting independence/self-esteem.

Other issues:

- Review process takes too long, compared to Local Authority reviews.
- Some users are worried they will lose their funding if they complain about service or “rock the boat”. How do we negate this fear?
- Not everyone wants their Social Worker involved in the assessment/review process (i.e. being present at the visit).

- Not everyone wants the assessment visit carried out at their home. People should be given the choice of an alternative venue.

Training and recruitment solutions:

- ILF user/disabled person on the recruitment panel or involved in the recruitment process.
- In recruitment use role-play or scenario-based questions to establish disability awareness.
- More emphasis on disability awareness, diversity and equality in ILF induction training. Explore person-centred planning training. Possibly pay members of user group to speak to trainees about the experience of disabled employers.
- Avoid patronising disability awareness training – for example, putting able-bodied staff in wheelchairs.
- Find ways to support staff making telephone calls to users – for example, ability of manager to listen in and join call if help needed.
- Explore use of call recording to give staff feedback on their performance – praise good practice and identify training needs if necessary. (Customers are used to this and think it is a good way to monitor performance and train staff).
- Explore ways to motivate and reward staff.
- Explore ways of organising the workload better to avoid pressure on staff.

Monitoring and measuring quality of service:

- Questionnaires.
- Speaking to wider group than the User Group.
- Feedback postcards with ILF correspondence – prepaid, quick and easy to complete.
- Use of “smiley face” feedback sheets or use of CHANGE picture bank images.

- Check quality of letters and emails.
- Monitor quality of telephone service.

Telephone Service

- Some people prefer to be called back rather than put on hold while a staff member goes to get a file.
- Do we really need the file? Can the database be extended to include all the relevant information (scanned documents, etc.)
- People do not know they have a named caseworker.
- Opening hours should be extended for people who work during regular office hours and might need to ring before 9.00 am or after 4.30 pm.
- Some people would prefer to deal with one person and would like to direct dial.
- Can some work be done for a person while they are on the phone – giving them an immediate response? (For example, respite dates, minor change to award or lump sum).
- Can system tell us what people's preferences are for communication? (Email, phone, time of day, etc.)
- Do not introduce automated elements to the system as this causes problems for those with physical disabilities or impaired speech.
- Telephone calls should be treated as more urgent than a letter.