

# Challenge Fund Lived Experience Panel Reflection

June 2021

## Summary

Panel members offering input and advice to the Challenge Fund generally felt it was a positive experience. The effective recruitment, welcoming atmosphere and sufficient material supplied meant that the members all understood that they were there for the same reason and felt comfortable to share their feelings and views.

## Background

The Scottish Government's Substance Misuse Team's Challenge Fund (Challenge Fund) aims to support statutory and third sector partners shift to more preventative approaches to drug and alcohol addiction. Work is focused on helping break down barriers for people accessing services for support with their alcohol and/or drug use, making sure they receive the right support at the right time.

Corra Foundation's Partnership Drugs Initiative (PDI) team administers the Challenge Fund with grants provided to enable Integrated Authorities (IAs) and/or Alcohol and Drug Partnerships (ADPs) and their partners to:

- Provide space to re-think the system (or parts of the system).
- Test, change and implement new ways of working.

Learning from the first round of the Challenge Fund identified an increased need for the inclusion of lived experience in reviewing the proposals.

## Lived Experience Panel Process

Two open rounds of funding have been available through the Challenge Fund. In 2019 a lived experience advisory panel was established to support the second round.

The panel members brought lived experience relevant to the Challenge Fund aims. Panel members were invited and supported with the help of the Scottish Recovery Consortium (SRC), Scottish Drugs Forum (SDF) and Faces and Voices of Recovery UK (FAVOR). Corra's Grant Advisor developed a process and guidance pack to support the panel in its role.

Corra's Grant Advisor spoke with all panel members, and emailed application paperwork to participants in advance of the panel's first meeting. The advisory meetings took place in a venue that was familiar to many of the panel members. Two panel members were supported by a worker from SDF who also had lived experience. The worker attended the meetings and offered additional support to the two individuals in reviewing reading materials prior to the panel meeting.

The meetings were held over three days, and the advisory panel assessed 39 applications, giving us extensive insight and time. For this, all panel members' expenses were covered, lunch was provided, and vouchers were given as a thanks.

## What we did (evaluation method)

We asked those who were involved in the Challenge Fund lived experience panel to chat to us after the sessions had ended. This included SDF and SRC who assisted in the recruitment of the panel. Over the phone and over video conferencing, we asked questions about the recruitment process and understanding the reasons for being invited. We asked about the support and information made available prior to the panel, and feelings of influence in shaping group decisions. Finally, we asked how our staff facilitated and whether the panel members would want to take part in a Corra panel again.

We spoke with eight people and the interviews were conducted by a Corra staff member not involved in the panel meetings. Observations were also gathered from Corra staff who designed and attended the panel meetings on their views of the panel process and outcome.

*'Meaningful engagement of people with lived experience is an essential principle and one that is increasingly recognised in service design, delivery and evaluation and also in grant making. It takes a bit of planning, but if you get it right, it adds incredible depth and rigor to the assessment process.'*

– Matthew Gilbert-Straw, Challenge Fund Panel Coordinator and Grant Advisor

## What people felt

Everyone described getting on together well, and many said there was a feeling over the sessions that everyone in the room was on the same side, reaching towards the same goal – to help organisations make meaningful and lasting progress. Reasons that people felt this way were put down to open and honest communication, respecting and valuing the experiences of others, and knowing they were all reading from the same pages (both literally with the applications, and in some cases through experiences of support and care in Scotland).

There was awareness of the wisdom and the knowledge amongst the panel members and with Corra staff. Corra staff reflected on how much commitment people gave to the panel. Everyone was able to contribute and speak about the applications.

Everyone also agreed there was the space to chat. People felt there was enough information but the discussion on the day helped by adding a lot more intelligence. The key thing was the conversation and chatting through ideas.

It helped that the space was familiar, as many of the members didn't have anxieties about the idea of a new space and people.

## What worked well

- **The people.** The majority of people felt it was a good mix with a wide range of backgrounds. Working through the partners to help identify, invite and engage people worked well. People trusted the partner organisations, this helped engage in the panel as meaningful connections were already there. It helped ensure the panel wasn't tokenistic and meant there was a broader reach.
- **The atmosphere and space used.** Everyone agreed having a space that was familiar to most people helped. There was plenty of food, chocolate, tea/coffee etc to make people comfortable. Things like breaks being regular and always available, without question also contributed to having the right atmosphere. The staff, including those attending from SRC and SDF, were always friendly and approachable, and everyone's needs were cared for. This also improved feelings of respect, confidence and equality.
- **Corra staff were seen as extremely important.** People commented on the great working relationships, ability to offer plenty of support, and it was clear that lots of thought went into the development and delivery of the panel sessions.

All panel members spoke highly of Corra's facilitators and described them as welcoming and natural, comfortable to be around and made the members feel the same. They did this by consistently communicating information from applications, actively listening to what everyone had to say and encouraging discussion from the group. It was clear they had extensive knowledge of the fund and the organisations applying. Other words used to describe the staff were: grounded, practical and impartial. Members said they felt safe with their opinions and were able to express them clearly through the equal facilitation of discussion. Everyone said that the staff were a key factor in their positive experience.

*'Corra staff a shining example of how to properly organise and host a lived experience panel.'*

### Partner organisation

- **The information.** People spoke about the content being clear and concise, and there was enough information to form opinions on the practicality of the application.

Due to the diversity of the panel, it was recognised that it wasn't always possible to present the information at a level that meets everyone's needs. Everyone we spoke to mentioned that having the applications in advance was a huge help when preparing for the sessions. The information given was said to be clear - not simplistic but not too complex either. The depth of the content was valuable, and most members said they had everything they needed to make good judgements and reflect on the applications.

The pace at which the applications were assessed throughout the sessions was well received, with members saying they felt able to stop and discuss their thoughts when needed.

Having support in place to those who required further clarification helped to make the information accessible. Clarity from Corra staff outlining the purpose was seen as important. At the beginning of the panel meetings people felt that they knew what their role was, particularly in the decision-making.

## What could have been different

- While it was noted that there was a diverse range of backgrounds given the nature of discussion it was felt that future panels could include more members who are currently using drugs and those early on in their recovery. This would give valuable learning to those not yet in recovery, and valuable insight into the current and ongoing support needed today.
- The majority of attendees were from the central belt of Scotland. Everyone agreed that Glasgow was an accessible location for the panel to take place, however one panel member travelled from the Highlands. It was recognised that it is important to bring people from a range of backgrounds and geographical areas together, however there are practical and budget implications.

It was suggested for future panels that additional costs and time implications should be considered for those travelling from further away. It did not deter one of the panel members from wanting to come to future panels. However, it was part of the experience that could have been better. For example, the sessions took place over the course of three days, with a break day in between. For someone travelling and requiring overnight accommodation this could equal nearly a full week. Future panels will need to consider locations and budgets that support equity of contribution from across communities.

- Some panel members were able to meet up and reflect on the applications prior to the group sessions. This was said to have worked well for those involved and the worker said they felt more prepared this way. While this may not have been possible for everyone, it may be beneficial to have a preliminary group session prior to the panel where members are given time to assess the structure, content and requirements of the applications so that they can respond confidently.
- The skills, experience and warmth of Corra's staff were seen as key components in how well the panel sessions went. It was recognised that Corra needs to find ways that will ensure these qualities are there for any future panels.
- Members noted that for future panels, printed copies of the applications in advance would have been appreciated. For some people, the applications sent via e-mail were only able to be viewed on a smartphone, which could make it difficult to read such extensive documents. In the future, Corra needs to be aware of digital barriers that may prevent some people from feeling able to contribute.
- It was suggested that a financial breakdown of costs could be a part of future applications. While not all members may find this information of relevance or interest, one member suggested that it can make the understanding of funding in general more accessible instead of numbers alone. For all members, a positive side of the experience was getting to know more about the funding side of support.
- A more general view was that future panels should provide the space and opportunity for members to offer insights that go beyond the applications. A further session or space in the day to have broader conversations where members could discuss what they felt was missing from the applications and what they would like to see more of from charities in the future. This would help address gaps in support and provide people with lived experience a direct role in informing funding decision making for the following years. This could prove directly beneficial for funds such as Henry Duncan Grants where topics are decided annually.

## Conclusions

Overall the Challenge Fund lived experience panel was positively received. Everyone talked about the informality of the structure which supported open conversations. Recognition was given to the steps taken before the panel meetings and the contribution partners had in the recruitment process. The role of Corra staff was seen as critical in helping people feel able to contribute and the conversations to flow.

There were practical aspects that could be improved upon if Corra was to deliver future panel meetings. These included further steps to reduce barriers to attendance and approaches that would help support equity. More thought should also be given to the budget necessary to make panel meetings work well. This could include payments for people attending and reading in advance, payments for staff time to support people and increased travel or food budgets for people who need to travel further.

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## About Corra

Corra Foundation exists to make a difference to the lives of people and communities. It works with others to encourage positive change, opportunity, fairness and growth of aspirations which improve quality of life. Corra wants to see a society in which people create positive change and enjoy fulfilling lives.

In 2020 Corra launched a ten-year strategy. It is long term because making a difference on the big challenges will take time. At its heart is the strong belief that when people find their voice, they unlock the power to make change happen.

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