



Options for Life

Business Strategy and Plan

2014 to 2019

July 2014

Introduction

Options for Life supports and enables adults with learning disabilities to live their lives to the full and advance their personal development in the community. We support people to enjoy the same rights and opportunities as non-disabled people.

Options for Life is a not for profit voluntary organisation, a registered charity and company limited by guarantee. We were founded in 1988 and today have an annual budget of around £1.8 million approximately 80 paid staff and a team of locally recruited volunteers. We also have six volunteers from across Europe placed with us each year, as part of the European Voluntary Service.

Increasingly we are working across the wider West Midlands. We started in Sandwell which is where the majority of our current participants* live and we have a small number of people from Dudley, Walsall and Birmingham. In the coming years we do expect to work more and more across the wider West Midlands and are currently undertaking some developmental work in Staffordshire.

We provide training for undergraduate social workers from three universities and post graduate training for a further university. Options for Life is one of the key placement providers for university social work students in the West Midlands.

We have two modern apprentices and are exploring developing this further as well as project focused internships.

The Sector

The current political, economic and sociological environment is extremely challenging. Central government and local authorities are continually seeking to reduce costs and this is putting an immense squeeze on providers, with many finding themselves in direct competition with each other. This is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future and many of the smaller third sector organisations are looking for opportunities to collaborate in order to maintain existing contract levels.

We are continuing to develop incrementally in our existing areas. We also need to continue to develop new areas and have a proven track

* 'Participants' is the term we use for people who access our services.

record in this. This is in response to the changing needs, wants and expectations of people with learning disabilities. For example meaningful training, skill development and getting people to view employment as a realistic option, must become a bigger part of what we are about. Our development as an organisation is, and will continue to be, an organic process, ensuring it is in line with the ongoing skill development of our staff and volunteers. This will depend upon the extent to which people with learning disabilities are enabled to purchase our support.

The past five years has seen Options for Life begin to develop our marketing expertise and further establish ourselves amongst the 'best-in-class'. With the growth of the personalisation agenda and Direct Payments brokered by local authorities and the NHS, more and more participants are able to choose how they spend their money. We have chosen not to position ourselves as a low-cost provider and have therefore been able to ensure ongoing quality at a standard other providers are unable to deliver. This has meant that growth has been slow, but steady. High service quality has always been a strong component of the Options for Life 'brand', but there was little quality control traditionally associated with the previous block contract approach. With the personalisation agenda and participants' ability to choose between providers, rather than being restricted by the block contract, we are in a stronger position to further build on quality and have recently gained both Care Quality Commission (CQC) and International Standards Organisation (ISO) 9001 accreditation. We continue to retain our Investors in People charter mark.

Options for Life's Position

Options for Life is now considered to be among the best in quality, and to be mostly priced around the middle of the market. Because of our ethos, emphasis on quality and developing the skills of our staff, Making Tracks, our programme for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD) often takes participants that other providers are unable to.

We have established community hubs from which we provide a range of opportunities and experiences for participants. As we continue to develop in response to people's needs we may need to expand some of our existing space, seek out new venues that we can work from and look for opportunities to work in partnership with other organisations such as places of worship and other community organisations. Our focus is on what is the right package of support for each person. We ensure we have sufficient resources in place to enable appropriate level of support,

working with other organisations as appropriate in a co-operative multi-agency environment.

The level of debt that Options for Life is currently carrying is well within affordable margins, and is likely to be fully paid off within the current year. There may be a requirement for additional loan capital in the future in order to meet our capacity demands, in which case an appropriate financial appraisal will be undertaken that measures the return on investment.

Options for Life, whilst being a major provider of services for adults with learning disabilities in Sandwell, is none-the-less still a relatively small organisation when compared to others in the wider regional or national care market. We are currently exploring opportunities to develop as a regional charity in response to people's needs.

Whilst the associated costs are relatively high, especially for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities, the main threat to us over the next five years is those organisations, both local and national, which are providing lower cost services. This is currently extremely attractive to commissioners who are looking to drive down costs as much as possible. Unfortunately, this inevitably means quality in the sector is now at risk of being compromised. It is important that Options for Life continues to provide value for money and quality. However, this means we are very unlikely to be the cheapest provider in today's climate.

We will continue to be part of the broader conversations which take place locally, regionally and nationally in terms of how best to support and enable people with learning disabilities to ensure they have an excellent quality of life, that they are in control of their own lives and able to make choices.

The personalisation agenda means that participants can and will increasingly decide to do something other than use, what are now viewed as, the more traditional services including wanting to access the universal services that are generally available to everyone in the community. Participants have continued to choose to spend their money with us. However Options for Life cannot be complacent and we must be a step ahead of policy development in what is now a constantly changing world.

In the past local authorities as commissioners largely decided what they would pay for services purchased, there was limited negotiation and Options for Life had to fit within the set budget. This is changing with the

personalisation agenda and the power has very much begun to shift to people with learning disabilities. Prices will depend as much on what other providers in the market-place are charging and the amount individual participants are willing and able to pay. The significant continuing financial pressures on local authorities and the NHS are resulting in a downward pressure on costs.

Five Year Strategy

Options for Life's strategy for the next five years is outlined below as a series of strategic objectives that will inform the business plan.

- **Participants at the centre of Options for Life:** Participants will influence and be involved in how decisions are made and we will make sure we have regular feedback from them. Our publicity, marketing and promotional material will truly reflect this by being designed for and addressing people with learning disabilities directly.
- **Organisational development:** We will continue to develop our existing programmes and projects building on our established position and reputation. New areas aimed at our existing participants and potential new participants will be developed.
- **Nurturing talent:** We will establish Options for Life as an excellent employer, nurturing and developing the talent of our paid staff and volunteers. We will provide development and training opportunities which will be embedded throughout the organisation establishing a learning culture reinforced by excellent ongoing day to day management and support.
- **Volunteering:** We will provide excellent volunteering opportunities for local people and for people from further afield. We will support them to develop their skills and talents which in turn will be utilised to support our participants and will bring 'added value' to the programmes we offer and provide.
- **Opportunity ready:** We will continue to develop and build on our relationships with other voluntary and community sector organisations in order that when opportunities for collaborative work such as local authority tenders arise we are ready to exploit these.

Options for Life - Business Plan 2014 -2015

The following sets out the headlines of the first year's business plan designed to deliver on the initial building blocks of the five year strategic plan. The business plan will be further developed is to ensure the realisation of the strategic objectives identified in the previous chapter. This is achieved by identifying a series of objectives along with timescales, lead person and any resources implications to achieve them.

- Marketing and promoting
- Community-based programs and project development
- Training and development
- Social businesses
- Financial management
- Ensuring quality and standards