

# Do We Lead Our Organisations?

## - Valuing the concept of User-Led

*by David Egan*

Centers for Independent Living should take note of the Private Members Bill proposed by Chris White MP which is currently progressing through the British House of Parliament. The purpose of the Act is to incorporate social value into all public sector contracts.

Social value is described as the “additional benefit to a community on top of the goods and services already being purchased by the public body.” If social value can be embedded into a contract, it can then be evaluated at the procurement stage. Many CILs deliver this added value but if it is not recognised it cannot be scored appropriately in a tender process.

Recognising added value could improve the chances of CILs being successful when bidding for contracts. If organisations are user-led and can demonstrate this, they may create even more added social value in a competing environment for the provision of services. For example user-led organisations may point to the impact of their work on social capital in whole communities, that is the extent to which people are linked to each other and can make use of that social capital through networking and peer support.

This is important because of the new HSE competitive tendering environment which is coming down the tracks. In such an environment CILs will be required to enter a bidding process with players from the private sector for the provision of personal assistant services. It is essential that price is not the only factor which is evaluated at the procurement stage. The cheapest tender will come from the private for-profit sector who pay salaries which are not much above minimum wage levels.

## User-led is about giving people choice and control over their lives and goes well beyond simply giving people a service

Speaking at the National Disability Authority's conference on Independent Living Susan Lloyd Selby, a Project Manager working for the Welsh Assembly said, "that in the current climate the challenge is to achieve better outcomes for less". Ms. Selby suggested that the Welsh Assembly had effectively rejected the UK competitive procurement model where "the organisation either prospers or withers, according to how much business it generates or can win through competitive tendering." The alternative 'Welsh model' seeks to "maximise efficiency gains through the scale economies of more effective co-operation and coordination between agencies. Users and producers of public services are enabled to be on the same side."

Which or whether the fact remains that despite all the civil service speak the Welsh model, although perhaps more benign than their neighbours, is still subject to competition and is value (price) driven. To ensure that price is scored equally with social value at the procurement stage CILs will need to prove to service commissioners that their model of service provision does deliver "additional benefits". They will also need to demonstrate that they are user-led organisations (ULOs).

The Department of Health in the UK has devised criteria for what they think a ULO should look like. At their most basic they are organisations where the management committee contains at least 60% of people using support services and they provide information, advice and services for their members.

ULOs recognise that people who use services have skills and expertise as well as support needs. User-led is about giving people choice and control over their lives and goes well beyond simply giving people a service. User-led means addressing the needs and aspirations of whole communities to ensure everyone has access to the right information, advice and advocacy to make good decisions about the support they need. It means ensuring that people from across the disability spectrum including intellectual disability have wider choice in how their needs are met and are able to access universal services such as transport, leisure and education, housing, health and opportunities for employment.

Typically ULOs might provide:

- Personal assistant services
- Information and advice
- Advocacy and peer support
- Support in using a care package/or direct payment
- Support to recruit and employ personal assistants
- Assistance with self-assessment
- Disability equality training
- Programmes to ensure that community services and facilities for the general population are available on an equal basis to persons with disabilities and are responsive to their needs.
- Encouragement to people with disabilities to fully participate in local public affairs.

How many Irish CILs currently fit that description? Less than we might like to think I imagine as CILs are forced by Government policy down the narrow channel of hard service provision and as a consequence are sucked into the never ending employer compliance environment.

In such an environment it is inevitable that 'user-led' as an organisational value gets squeezed into low priority territory and becomes an aspiration rather than an embedded experience for service users.

There are interesting times ahead for small organisations of people with disabilities who want to be genuinely user-led and to deliver services. The challenge is to prove the case that 'small' delivers good outcomes which are cost effective, and that user-led has a demonstrable value.