



VOCAL (Voice of Carers Across Lothian)

About the organisation

VOCAL (Voice of Carers Across Lothian) is a carer led organisation which provides support to unpaid carers in Edinburgh and Midlothian. This support includes information and advice, training, advocacy and counselling. VOCAL was established by carers in 1993 to provide them with a voice and to support the development of services for carers.



Why PQASSO?

VOCAL has been using PQASSO since 2001 for self-assessment purposes. PQASSO was chosen because it was aimed at voluntary sector organisations and it provided us with a 'best fit' as a systematic quality assurance tool.

How did you implement PQASSO?

VOCAL has been implementing PQASSO as a self-assessment tool over a number of years and we have learnt how to use it to maximum effect. This has included having a PQASSO working group consisting of a Board member, staff members and volunteers. We have tried to ensure that the process is an inclusive one so that everyone can see the contribution they make to quality assurance in the organisation. The main difficulty was carving out the time to carry out the assessments and action plans. However, once you begin to see the benefits of these, this helps to build the momentum behind the process.

Why did you decide to go for the PQASSO Quality Mark?

As VOCAL had been using PQASSO as a self-assessment tool it made sense to go for the externally accredited PQASSO Quality Mark as this evidenced our commitment to quality assurance.

Your experience of the assessment process

The word that probably sums it up the best is intensive as you are looking at all aspects of the organisation and trying to ensure that it meets the standards. So

setting aside sufficient time and having a group to lead the process are essential – there is a lot to co-ordinate and time and attention are needed.

What were the benefits of achieving the PQASSO Quality Mark?

There are lots of benefits to achieving the PQASSO Quality Mark:

- ✓ Knowing that all aspects of your organisation are fit for purpose – staff, volunteers, Board, financial systems etc.
- ✓ The team building that results from involving staff, Board members and volunteers in the process.
- ✓ Having a recognised and respected quality mark to evidence your commitment to quality to carers, partners and funders.
- ✓ The pride everyone has taken in achieving the award.

Practical tips

- ✓ Establish a group from staff, Board members and volunteers to oversee the process. This not only engages different people in the process but also ensures you have different sets of eyes and different views overseeing the process.
- ✓ Identify one member of staff who will lead and support this group and do the follow up work – an overall co-ordinator who will involve and engage others as necessary.
- ✓ Involve the whole organisation to ensure that people understand and take pride in their contribution to quality assurance.
- ✓ Give yourselves sufficient time to do it properly – it cannot be done in a hurry.

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