

Staff Away Day with George House Trust

Context

George House Trust (GHT) is the HIV voluntary organisation for the North West of England. It supports people living with and affected by HIV, and campaigns for the best quality of life for all people with HIV.

ICA:UK was approached in July 2007 to design and facilitate a staff Away Day later that month.

GHT had undergone substantial change in the last couple of years - including significant expansion of



participants during the World Café session, with the morning's Wall of Wonder behind on the sticky wall

the staff team and its service delivery, turnover of some senior staff, and subsequent restructuring of management posts. A need had been felt for an externally facilitated process to allow staff to unpack and reflect together on this recent past, at what was felt to be a turning point before looking ahead by means of a fresh strategic planning process later in the year.

Around a dozen of the full staff team of 14 were to attend - including one very new, a few new within the past few years, and others with a long history of service. As an organisation involved in hard campaigning on controversial issues in a sometimes highly politicised environment, the staff team comprised strong advocates and activists.

Aims

The day was designed and facilitated to provide a safe and supportive space to reflect together on the staff team's shared recent past, and how it had affected them as individuals and the organisation as a whole. The aims of the day were articulated as follows:

- to allow stresses, frustrations and challenges to be aired, balanced by successes and achievements as well;
- to 'draw a line' under the past, and lay a firm foundation for forward strategic planning later in the year;
- to have some fun, and rebuild stronger bonds and a sense of team spirit.

Process

The two key elements of the process design were the ToP ‘Wall of Wonder’ (or ‘Historical Scan’) method, used in the morning to enable the group to reflect together on its recent past, and the World Café method (www.theworldcafe.com), used in the afternoon to enable the group to articulate creatively “how it would like to be able to describe the culture of GHT”.

These were complemented by a number of shorter exercises and sessions to frame the day, set the tone and build the team. These included sharing hopes and fears, expectations and ground rules; People Bingo, Two Truths and a Lie, and a balloon race; and a reflective self-assessment and sharing of strengths and weaknesses, and offers and wants of support.

The timetable of the day was as follows:

9.30	Arrivals & coffee
10.00	Opening, housekeeping, aims & process
	Expectations & ground rules
	Energizer & introductions
	‘Wall of Wonder’ small group work
	Tea/coffee break
	‘Wall of Wonder’ plenary
12.30	Lunch
1.15	‘World Café’ conversation
	Tea/coffee break
	Team-building exercise
-4.00	Evaluation, next steps & close

Outputs and feedback

The documentation of the day included the aims and outline of the process, participants’ hopes & fears and ground rules, a full verbatim record of the Wall of Wonder and World Café sessions with photos of the sticky wall and decorated table cloths, and detailed feedback from participants’ evaluation forms.

Participants’ feedback included:

- *the timeline really enabled us to address many key issues for ourselves*
- *lots of issues bubbling beneath the surface got a good airing*
- *I feel a line has very, very clearly been drawn under some past events - I feel there will be more team cohesiveness and we will move on in strength*
- *I feel we have a better understanding of each other & better ways of working*

Impact

Michelle Reid, GHT Chief Executive, wrote in November 2008 of the impact of the day:

An effective team will always need to invest in “time out” in order to continue functioning well. The organisation had gone through significant change, and inevitably we needed to re-group and re-establish the frameworks that make the organisation such a formidable force to be reckoned with. ICA facilitated an excellent day which helped to enable us to go from strength to strength.