

This transcript is a part of the Peer NSP Project from Coact for more details please visit: <http://co-act.info/peernsp>

Meaningful participation in NSP

Maria was a peer volunteer at the Healthy Options Team and her journey with the service, illustrates the meaningful involvement of people who inject drugs in needle and syringe programmes.

The Healthy Options Team operated for 16 years in the East End of London. It was a health service team that actively encouraged the employment of people who use drugs. Half the staff were ex or current drug users and the other half came from more traditional health service backgrounds.

Maria was an Italian injecting drug user who had moved with her peer group to live in London. Many of her friends were HIV+ve and she was one of the women friends within a mostly male group of well respected Italian drugs users. This group often played supportive and caring roles to other Italian drug users who were new arrivals, newly diagnosed or in need of drug services.

Initially Maria worked as a volunteer peer outreach worker with HOT's Italian worker. This involved delivering injecting equipment and harm reduction advice to people's homes and to squats for the homeless.

After a time Maria started to volunteer in the fixed site needle exchange. She took on the role of opening the door to the building, greeting people arriving at the exchange, making tea and coffee, and helping to manage people waiting when the exchange was busy. This role was very helpful but not essential to the needle exchange and this made it an easier steppingstone for people new to more structured work. It also allowed the NSP to take risks with people without negatively affecting the core service.

Maria was actually pretty reliable and quickly secured more responsibilities. This included giving out injecting equipment, delivering peer education and also being involved in harm reduction development projects. These involved working with groups of clients to test harm reduction ideas and then gathering people's experiences through groups or more informal conversations.

As Maria demonstrated her commitment and abilities so she was offered more training and support. She was worked paid relief sessions to cover for workers on leave and then she

was offered a paid training post which led to full time employment. Finally Maria became the coordinator of the needle exchange element within HOT.

Not all peers will be able or want to progress through the service but Maria's story illustrates the potential points of meaningful participation within a fixed site needle and syringe exchange.