

Cancer Voices Conference 2011

Evaluation summary

Claire Alexander, 30/11/2011

Purpose of the conference

The Macmillan Cancer Voices annual conference bring together a range of people affected by cancer, with a common interest in user involvement in Macmillan, the NHS, and other health/social care/voluntary sector organisations. The conference aims to highlight examples of and potential for user involvement across the organisation and to encourage the sharing of knowledge and learning.

Attendees

There were just over 260 attendees including over 40 staff to run the event in either a facilitator capacity, as part of the event team or as exhibitors. The event was targeted at registered Cancer Voices only (in previous years it was open to support groups and other people affected by cancer who were not signed up as a Cancer Voice) – this decision was taken by the planning group as in past years the event has been over-subscribed, and it was felt that in inviting Cancer Voices and enabling them to bring guests, this would focus the event but also ensure first timers felt welcome and could be supported by a friend or family member if this meant they felt able to attend. There was a good mixture of new and experienced Cancer Voices and a total of 28 guests attended. Following the conference we had 46 new Cancer Voices registrations.

The feedback

We received a total of 107 feedback forms (50% response rate). The overall feedback for the conference was extremely positive with 99% of respondents rating the conference as 'good' or 'very good'. There were an overwhelming number of comments about how valuable attendees thought the event was for networking – meeting not just other Cancer Voices, but also members of Macmillan staff. The evaluation forms demonstrated that delegates at this year's conference were more engaged than at previous years' events, said they felt more like part of a team or family with the organisation and there were a lot more comments about how relevant the content was than in previous years. (9 Outcomes – I feel part of a community and inspired to give something back)

**UK Office, 89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7UQ Questions about cancer?
Call the Macmillan Support Line free on 0808 808 00 00 or visit macmillan.org.uk**

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Meeting the event objectives

The event aimed to provide clear information about Macmillan and user involvement, provide opportunities for attendees to get more involved in our work and allow them to network. The specific objectives and how they were met are outlined below:

1. To engage new Cancer Voices so that they have a better understanding of Macmillan, the organisations' user involvement offer and understand their role in it

With a range of plenary, workshop and learning and development sessions, the conference provided a vast amount of information on Macmillan, the work undertaken by different teams and departments, and how users are involved throughout. The evaluation showed that 94% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they learned more about Macmillan as a result of attending the event. 83% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they learnt more about Cancer Voices and User Involvement as a result.

When asked what they had found most useful about the conference, delegates responded:

"This is my first conference and I feel I have learned so much about Macmillan"

"Learning about new initiatives at Macmillan and making new contacts"

(9 outcomes – I know what I can do to help myself and who else can help me)

2. To engage more experienced Cancer Voices to become ambassadors for user involvement

Experienced Cancer Voices were involved in the facilitation of welcome groups and in a number of workshops. In inviting new and experienced Cancer Voices to attend the event, it ensured a variety of opinions based on cancer experience and user involvement experience, and provided a wealth of peer support.

When asked 'What did you enjoy most about the conference?' delegates responded:

"Hearing the stories and real life situations of some very amazing people"

"Meeting people, some I'd met in previous years and also helping those who were 'first timers'"

"Meeting old friends and making new acquaintances - met some wonderful people!!"

3. To engage other teams, so they have a better understanding of user involvement and that they provide an offer for delegates at the event

There was a much higher take up within the organisation from teams wanting to be involved in the planning of the event, requesting to run workshop sessions and exhibition stands. In total the conference was supported by 46 members of committed staff from across Directorates (Inclusion, wider CSI - VCAT, Healthcare, Information support, Survivorship, L&D, MICS, CPPA, Marketing, Digital Media, Legacies, Macmillan Shop, Information resource development)

"I thought it was a really well organised conference with a great atmosphere, so well done and thanks again for the invite." Member of Macmillan staff

4. To promote specific ways for delegates to get involved in the next 6 months and get them to promote these to others

Each of the conference workshops was designed to fit into one of the three following categories:

1. Macmillan focused – the outcome for these sessions is to provide a learning experience for the participants and educate them on a project or an area within Macmillan in which users have contributed/improved outcomes.
2. Macmillan service improvement - in this session the workshops will all be project focused, allowing delegates to contribute within the session to the ongoing development of a product, activity or event.
3. Training and personal development - the outcome for these sessions is to allow for individual development opportunities.

The workshop objectives were to:

1. Provide delegates with opportunities to learn more about Macmillan.
2. Provide delegates with opportunities to input into Macmillan projects
3. Provide delegates with examples of where user involvement has had an impact in Macmillan, health and social care projects
4. Enable/encourage delegates to further their own personal development.

84% of respondents said they will get involved more as a result of attending the event.

“It was great fun, very informative and I go away enthused to help more.”

The Inspiring Millions plenary session provided an opportunity for delegates to discuss with one another how they are currently involved with Macmillan, and how they might get further involved in the future.

“Inspiring millions session was really worthwhile. Highlighted successes that were ‘outside the box’. Provided fresh ideas. Could we do something based on ‘six degrees of separation’? It would be good for people to see that no one is far from Macmillan”.

5. To get input from delegates to design and promote new or existing offers in the regions that reflect Macmillan’s brand.

Many of the workshops focused on both the national and/or UK wide picture in relation to their area of work, but also included examples of local pilot projects, how people could get involved locally, or where local projects would be implemented in the future.

The ‘We are all campaigners’ workshop, run by CPPA focused on how delegates could develop a local campaign based on issues specific to their area or community.

Regional colleagues co-facilitated the popular ‘Talking to the media’ workshop highlighting how delegates can get involved in a range of local media projects.

Regional Macmillan Involvement Coordinators (MICs) ran welcome/networking groups and were available throughout the conference to answer delegates' questions on region specific involvement opportunities.

However there were a number of requests on the evaluation forms for more information or updates at future events, detailing Macmillan's activities at a local level.

6. To provide a safe and supportive environment that enables delegates to network during and after the event

This year, for the first time, all delegates were offered the opportunity to attend either a welcome (for those new to Cancer Voices or for conference first timers) or networking (for more experienced Cancer Voices) group. Delegates were able to sign up for these sessions at registration, and two thirds of delegates selected to do so. The sessions were run by members of the Inclusion team, MICs and experienced Cancer Voices. The aims of the sessions were to welcome delegates to the conference, to introduce delegates to one another and provide an additional level of support to delegates.

The number of requests for emotional support throughout the event, were significantly lower this year than in previous years. The event team/staff felt that the welcome/networking groups made people feel welcome, more supported and less isolated, which may in turn have reduced the need for emotional support.

"Thank you for giving us the opportunity to give our views and meet new people with the same aims."

"I was 'the centre of attention' and 'you' wanted to know what I thought - ie I was heard"

"I enjoyed meeting people who have been in the same position as myself. Although I was alone everyone made me feel welcome."

Conference delegates

99% of respondents said the conference allowed them to socialise and meet new people. An overwhelming number of respondents said the thing they enjoyed most about the conference was meeting new people and talking to people who had been through similar experiences.

(9 outcomes – A positive experience of the conference, networking and learning from how others coped with their cancer experience could contribute to the belief that with/after cancer "I can enjoy life")

Format/content

Overall the format worked well, offering delegates a mix of structured, interactive sessions, learning and development opportunities and networking time.

The plenary sessions were well received with respondents rating the three sessions as follows:

90% of respondents rated 'Making a difference today' as good or very good

84% of respondents rated 'Inspiring millions' as good or very good

89% of respondents rated 'One voice' as good or very good

Many people cited the 'One Voice' session as something they particularly enjoyed. This was a bit different for this conference as it involved music and singing as a way of leaving the delegates inspired for their journey home. However, 4% of respondents rated the last session as 'poor'. This highlighted the difficulties in finding an inspiring closing session which appeals to all delegates.

There were also a number of delegates who left early and missed the final session – for various reasons, but mostly travel. A number of suggestions for potential changes to the format were made by delegates which will be considered in the planning process for next year's event.

Recommendations

- Need a stronger more motivational ending – and promote much earlier on
- Consider changing start or end times
- Consider additional entertainment during/after dinner – after dinner speeches?

Workshop sessions

There was a wide variety of workshops on offer, with 19 workshops running in three time slots. As well as workshops on a variety of Macmillan projects, the conference also featured opportunities for delegates to learn more about user involvement as a series of activities and opportunities, to develop a user involvement action plan going forward, and to learn and develop new skills which may help with undertaking different opportunities across Macmillan.

The workshops were very well evaluated overall (full feedback data available on request by emailing cancervoices@macmillan.org.uk), with delegates frequently citing their workshop sessions as the thing they found 'most useful' about the conference (overtaking 'networking and socialising' which has rated most highly in the previous 2 years).

"The workshops were a vast improvement on last year. There was a real sense of thought through delivery and developed content. I never looked at my watch once for any of them. Thank you"

Conference delegate

However there were a number of constructive criticisms made of the workshops and facilitators in terms of skill base and effectiveness, and suggestions for improvements to workshop sessions at future events:

- *Please keep terminology simple and / or explain certain words you use to us 'normal' people!*
- *Be good to have 'exit' details on how to take it forward - postcard?*
- *Facilitators to wear mic to improve their voice to be heard by the audience*
- *If possible a handout from each workshop would be very helpful - or facility to access one on website*
- *It would be useful to receive a summary from each workshop session afterwards so that you can find out about the ones you couldn't attend. Plus how Macmillan is taking the info forward and will measure success*
- *Sometimes need to be aware that certain people can dominate the sessions, which doesn't give everyone a chance to speak.*
- *Would like very much to see outputs of all the workshops and conclusions you (Macmillan) reach from them and intend to take forward. Ideally to see this by Christmas 2011.*

Recommendations

- To provide structured training for facilitators on public speaking and skills relevant to the specific audience of pabc
- For future events we will be developing a speaker pack including more detail on the event and guidance for their particular role
- To develop a process in the planning stages, for checking the content of the workshops more thoroughly
- For those not able to attend sessions we would ask workshop facilitators to provide handouts after the event or a clear summary of what the session was about
- Ensure workshop capacities are set at registration and place staff outside workshop rooms to try and avoid workshops becoming over/under attended on the day

Exhibition

During the planning phase, we factored in additional time for the exhibition this year, allowing an additional session for delegates to visit (instead of attending a welcome or networking group) and longer exhibition/refreshment sessions. As a result, this year 93% of respondents rated the exhibition area (and the level of information provided about Macmillan and user involvement) as good or very good.

This year we also asked for feedback from each stand in the exhibition area. Exhibitors said that the event allowed them to speak to a whole new audience and promote and receive feedback on their latest projects. The Volunteering stand signed up around 20 delegates to take part in wider volunteering activities and the Macmillan Shop made over £200 by selling their Christmas card range. All exhibitors said that they will be completing follow-up work as a result of the event.

Quotes from exhibitors:

"I had a lot of interest in all of our publications and audio CDs and gave away the majority of the information that we brought to the event. People were very enthusiastic and wanted to get involved with the work our team do."

"It was fantastic to talk to a new group of people who support Macmillan in a different way to traditional fundraisers."

Recommendations

- Provide more seating available in the exhibition area for delegates both at the exhibition stands (to talk to exhibitors) and in the refreshment areas
- Ensure that the area is laid out effectively – for some it was a little cramped

Venue and costs

Working with the same venue for three years now has allowed us to make improvements with the venue, to the standard of service that delegates and staff receive, and the overall running of the event.

There were a number of requests on the evaluation forms for a venue that was more centrally located (ie the Midlands) but the majority fed back a very positive view of the venue, location and staff.

Questions around the venue and location were rated much higher than in previous years:

86% of respondents rated the location of the event as good or very good

93% of respondents rated the conference facilities as good or very good

84% of respondents rated the food and beverages as good or very good – and a few people even listed food as what they enjoyed the most!

A number of delegates mentioned that having an additional night's stay (before the conference started) would have meant that travelling times did not have such an impact on energy levels. In potentially hosting 2 conferences next year it will hopefully reduce people's travel time. However, it will also be made clear in the event information in the run up to the conference why (due to financial constraints) we are only able to provide one night's stay and still be able to offer the same event in terms of quality and enable people to attend completely free of charge.

Recommendations

- Consideration in the planning stage, of enabling delegates to choose their conference meals in advance – that way specific food requirements would be better met
- Consider the possibility of two conferences to allow more Cancer Voices to attend, one with a northern and one with a southern location. If we go ahead with this the 2 conferences would be of a similar or smaller size to retain the intimacy of the event and keep within budget constraints.
- Consideration of how to manage the risk of delegate no-shows – this accounted for 22 paid for delegate places. Although this can't be completely avoidable due to the target audience for the conference, it needs to be highlighted to delegates the cost of not notifying us if they are unable to attend (financially and also to other delegates who may have been able to attend in their place)

Conference registration and materials

A new event management system was used to develop a dedicated website for the event. Delegates fed back that they found the system relatively straight forward to use and appreciated the option to be able to add up to 2 guests to their registration (to enable couples to register together, individuals travelling or attending on their own, to bring a friend or family member for support – based on feedback from the 2010 conference). The online system also enabled the event team to easily collate conference data on delegates and their preferences.

Registration information was also provided in hard copy, although there were delays in both sending and receiving back the offline registrations. This delay meant members of the event team were required to chase further information from delegates, and some delegates were not able to attend all their first choices of workshops due to them having already reached capacity. Delegates also fed back that the confirmation of their registration could have included more details about what each delegate selected when they registered (accommodation details, workshop choices etc) as a reminder. For online registrants this information was available on the website, in the period of time between their registration and the event itself.

This year we piloted the Event Digest to replace the traditional delegate pack, which included the agenda, a map of the venue, details of workshops and articles on areas of Macmillan's work relevant to the conference. However, this proved to be a time consuming activity and required input from many staff members and delegates highlighted that they would in fact prefer a more personalised, and simple delegate pack.

Recommendations

- All online and printed materials need to be consistent in terms of the information they give to, and ask from delegates
- Propose managing offline registrations by phone. Only 20 delegates registered offline this year so this would be manageable, more personalised and responsive
- Plan to send postal invites earlier – to allow the workshop capacities online to reflect their choices as workshops fill up
- Need to make sure the confirmation includes what they've selected

- Review whether we produce an event digest for this event – or use an alternative that allows us to include everything we need to tell delegates and be flexible and print closer to the event

Other delegate suggestions for future events

- *Have a photographer who can take photos of groups and 'post' them to the website and send them to the group and post on Facebook*
- *When you email cancer voices to inform them of the conference dates, you could also invite us to volunteer to run workshops and activities for you.*
- *There was too much time when people were expected to stand around which is hard for some. Perhaps showing a video*
- *More patient experience stories- always interesting and inspirational.*
- *Provide an...address on evaluation form to enable it to be posted back at a later date*
- *Provide a... list of Macmillan staff and their roles and a contact email*

Overall recommendations...

- To start the planning process for next year's event (s) in January to ensure invites to be involved in the planning go out in a timely manner and people have sufficient notice to factor meetings into their diaries
- Invite Cancer Voices to be more involved in the planning process (invite to be sent out on the Opportunities Exchange Jan-Feb 2012)
- Invite key teams to be involved (who will provide more support to the event and planning)
- Ensure regional participation in the planning process

Conclusions

This was the largest Cancer Voices conference to date, involving over 260 delegates, with a wide range of workshops offered from teams across the organisation, and a vibrant and engaging marketplace. It was also the most positively reviewed conference to date, full evaluation data is available on request by emailing cancervoices@macmillan.org.uk.

Throughout the conference there was not only an increase in examples of user involvement across Macmillan, but also a growing number of teams and departments engaged to support and facilitate involvement – this is encouraging as it shows the extent to which involvement is becoming embedded across Macmillan.

Whilst the conference remains a 'safe place' for people affected by cancer, potentially new to both Macmillan as an organisation and user involvement, with appropriate staff and peer support available, this year the event took a step forward in terms of highlighting the opportunities ahead of us in terms of user involvement and delegates left encouraged and energised to continue to participate and even lead user involvement activities in the future.

"This was my first conference and I am amazed at how much work goes on behind the scenes and how successful the conference was. Everyone was treated with such care and consideration that even the shyest person would feel brave enough to have a voice. It is great to know that someone cares enough to give a platform to all those who have dealt with cancer as a personal experience or as a carer. This is a rare thing in this day and I would like to thank all those involved in organising this fantastic event. Thank you Macmillan for caring."

Conference delegate