



## Spotlight On: Shared Learning Events

In January 2017, CES facilitated the first in a series of shared learning events with grant holders. The purpose of these sessions is to present some of the key messages from research on a challenge faced by *Reaching Out* grant holders and to bring together interested practitioners to discuss practice implications and to share learning. The first session focused on the challenges for organisations in engaging with parents with a learning difficulty/disability.

The NOW Group works with people with learning difficulties and autism to support them into education, training and employment. According to Bronagh O'Callaghan and Naomi Campbell, Family Transitions Officers on NOW's '*Here and NOW Project*', parents with learning difficulties face a number of challenges when engaging with services. *"Parents with learning difficulties/disabilities tend to have lower confidence and can be afraid of judgement. Literacy difficulties may mean that traditional communication methods, such as letters, are inappropriate. As a result, information can be misinterpreted, some individuals may not engage and supports may not be tailored to parents' individual needs."* Their work on the '*Here and NOW*' Project suggests that there is a lack of information for service providers on how to assess parents with a learning difficulty/disability and how to tailor supports to meet individual needs. This means that parents may not engage with a service.

The NOW Group was interested in exploring these challenges with other grant holders and to share learning with grant holders who may come across these challenges in their work.

### Connecting research with practice

The event was designed to share learning from research and practice in supporting parents with learning difficulties. CES presented some key messages from research, and those attending had the opportunity to reflect on these messages along with their own practice experience. Bronagh and Naomi from the NOW Group shared some of the experiences from their work, and some supports and approaches that practitioners can use if they come across this challenge. They told us: *"it was good to have the opportunity during the event to discuss the area of learning disability/difficulty with those who maybe do not normally work in the field and to consider approaches from their perspective"*. Some practice tips they suggested included:

*"Engage in personal development work with individuals, use innovative methods of communication (eg. text messaging), provide a safe, familiar and accessible meeting space, avail of Disability Awareness training. Overall, be persistent and patient, work with individuals to find what works for them, try alternatives where necessary and don't give up!"*

Feedback from the event was positive. One of those who attended was Joyce Rainey, from Sense's '*Touching Lives- Transforming Families*' project, which provides support to families affected by a deafblind or multi-sensory impairment. Joyce explained how she will use the learning from the day to support her ongoing work. *"The evidence was presented in a clear, digestible way, with a strong emphasis on application to practice. This was very useful. As busy service providers, we don't always have the time to source and review literature. One of the key messages that came across was how important it is to tailor supports so that they meet the individual needs of the people we work with."*

The next shared learning event will be held on **22<sup>nd</sup> March 2017** and will focus on **engaging and supporting fathers**. Interested in attending this event or suggesting an idea for a future event? Contact Louise Swindell [lswindell@effectiveservices.org](mailto:lswindell@effectiveservices.org).