

## **Young Service Users Participating in the Development of Services**

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When the Norwegian National Action Plan for Mental Health was launched in 1997 one of the main aims was to strengthen and increase the participation from users of health services. The Action Plan emphasized that the user perspective should permeate all aspects of mental health services on all levels.

Children and youth comprise a big group of users of mental health services, but they are very rarely asked to participate in the evaluation of services or in processes to develop and improve the services. When services for children have been evaluated it is almost without exception the parents or the service providers who have been asked to contribute.

User participation, both on an individual basis as well as at a system level, is firmly established in Norwegian legislation. In order to secure the rights of young service-users related to user-participation, there is a need to establish routines and develop methods that guarantee this.

It is very often difficult for young service-users to communicate their message to authorities and service-providers. In order to achieve the political aims expressed in the National Action Plan it is essential that user-organizations and service-providers co-operate in order to include this group of service users, thus contributing to the development and improvement of services in the field of mental health.

The Norwegian NGO *Voksne for Barn* has for several years co-operated with local service providers and authorities to develop methods that ensure the involvement and participation of young users in processes where services are evaluated and developed. In this presentation we will describe a project related to the evaluation of the child perspective in adult psychiatry. Children of parents with mental illness were invited to contribute their experiences as relatives and their views on several topics:

- How can we identify children with mentally ill parents?
- What are the challenges you are facing when your parent is ill?
- What kind of help and support would you wish for?
- Responsibilities and tasks for the different service-providers

The contribution from the young participants has been essential in the evaluation of how the hospital and other agents have carried out their task to provide services for children with mentally ill parents. Moreover, they have contributed to the development of new services and to general knowledge on this group of children and youth.

