

Understanding Chronic Uncertainty

The following may arise when facing long term uncertainty:

STAFF RESPONSES

- Fear of redundancy leads some into attempts to secure their personal future by appearing as the model employee
- Contradictory messages or silence create a feeling of being kept in the dark, that information is not being shared or there is a hidden plan behind the so-called 'consultation', which can lead to feelings of devaluation, suspicion and anger. Angry that no one else seems to understand the extent of the problem or the real impact on people's feelings and lives.
- Difficult emotions, including: worrying about what's going to happen next, distrust and suspicion; Self destructive emotions - people can be their own worst enemies; irritability and depression, regret at the decision to come to work here in the first place.
- Some people respond to uncertainty by becoming over controlling.
- Breakdown in communication between departments and higher management. Competitiveness and even hostility towards colleagues and other services, as: some people feel the need to share their distress and others want to put a brave face on things; some slow down their work rate while others speed up; we compete, sometimes aggressively, for the same job in the new structure. Managers have more desk work to do related to the changes and so retreat from contact with the front line.
- Signposting is harder as provider organisations keep changing.
- Frustrated at being obliged to manage on a smaller budget for the service, and so able to give only 'half a service'. Difficult to deny a service to clients and to plan endings for people who have faced rejection and find building new relationships very difficult.
- Inner conflict, as a political agenda is being imposed that clashes with my personal beliefs leading to denial – 'head in the sand'. Or perhaps feeling lots of inner conflict as it highlights the gap between my ideal and reality.
- Damaging behaviours and withdrawal: not wanting to come to work; lateness, sick leave, depression and anxiety, not giving 100%, escapism through increasing alcohol consumption etc.
- Financial uncertainty, sometimes triggering harm to family life and relationships as we 'rant' about work to the people at home or find we cannot plan for holidays or other home-based expenditure.
- The prospect of major change just around the corner creates planning blight – nothing happens because it will all be swept away shortly.
- It feels uncomfortable to try and sell new ideas to others that we barely grasp ourselves, or understand but do not support.

RESPONSES ANTICIPATED FROM PEOPLE USING THE SERVICE

- As service arrangements change very quickly, staff may struggle to keep up and be unable to give solid advice. Meanwhile the 'rumour mill' is churning out speculations and misinformation. Staff may feel hopeless or stressed and transfer this to the people they support.
- Uncertainty for the person, parents and carers creates anxiety, fear and distrust and even anger as people feel they are not acknowledged.
- Impedes clients recovery, makes it more likely they will relapse
- Breakdown in communication between staff and people using services, partly because reallocating caseloads is disruptive.
- Change in benefits and shrinking of entitlements and opportunities, including the number of free or cheap opportunities as the community and voluntary sector shrinks. Some people may lose their service entirely. Meanwhile, the poor practice of staff can remain hidden.

WAYS TO RESPOND

- Adopt a positive response such as becoming more self reliant, actively seeking new skills and better options – the old way may not be the best way. We need to remain open and think creatively to discover and create new opportunities. See the glass as half full and value how this crisis can help us re-evaluate our effectiveness, priorities and the bigger picture.
- We need to find different ways of achieving things and to share clear information. Involving people using services in decision making as much as possible can alleviate anxiety. Resist micro-managing.
- Remain positive and pay attention to the good things. Highlight personal resources and transferable skills. Find flexibility and freedom within constraints. Remember previous experiences where change has been good, such as where short term contracts made us focus on the task.
- Identify the areas that you do control and find the areas that can be flexed and adapted within the imposed situation.
- Support the 'Dunkirk spirit' by working together, supporting each other's emotional life in the team and welcoming change and building unity.
- Maintain person-centred professionalism and hold a safe space for people's anxiety. Be present in this moment, focused on responsibilities and tasks. It is tempting to give up on supervision – don't!
- Welcome some uncomfortable emotions, as they may not be negative.
- Keep life going beyond the work place, take a positive focus in one's personal life and sometimes a structured daily routine can help.
- Build a cash-free economy of mutual help with individuals and organisations. Explore how to achieve 'austerity with integrity'.
- Finish jobs, document everything and keep tidy in case someone else has to take over the work. Capture the moment in a time capsules.