

Don't leave people behind

By Peter Bates

The modernisation of day services presents many challenges. One key one is not to abandon the people they have traditionally supported. Peter Bates from the National Development Team makes a plea for a modernisation process that clearly recognises the needs of this important group ...

Don't leave long-term day centre users behind!

In their attempts to modernise, new services should not abandon long term users of day centres. Most day services include a number of people who have been around for ten or more years, but their place in the new service can be under threat from six forces:

1. **Focus on Employment.** The government intends to take a million people off Incapacity Benefit and meet PSA goals of getting more people with mental health problems into work.
2. **Quick wins.** Jobcentre Plus talks about working with people who are 'closest to the labour market.' This diverts attention away from people who are older and have been out of the workforce for decades. 'Come back when you are younger', someone was advised at a job interview.
3. **Inclusion outcomes.** Commissioners are starting to ask for a big increase in the numbers of people who move into individually designed, inclusive community settings, via self directed support and direct payments. This can press us to discover a new group of people who will benefit from our shiny new service. Day services that cannot show employment or social inclusion outcomes are in deep trouble.
4. **Primary Care.** The focus on early intervention and primary care can divert resources away from people who have been in specialist services a long time.
5. **Brief Therapy.** The emphasis on health and social care outcomes, evidence based interventions and brief therapies all press us to work with people that will show obvious changes, and neglect people who are less easy to fix.
6. **Cuts.** Financial troubles in some areas mean that day services are being reduced in size or closed altogether.

These six forces make some services reluctant to work with people who have been around a long time. I would like to encourage you to find a way to safeguard support for this group of people. I'd like to encourage you to keep doing what you have always done – blend untiring ambition that people's lives can get a little better with an unflinching determination to value the hidden treasure, the tiny wins, the small steps of progress – even if these small steps don't appear on the outcome statistics.

These days we have disposable nappies, disposable cameras, disposable marriages, but we still do not have disposable people. I'd like to make a plea for modernising services in a way that respects those who have been with us on a long journey to this place. Please don't leave long-term day centre users behind by withdrawing their service.

Don't leave people behind in unstimulating and pessimistic services!

It's really, really hard to modernise some day services. There are four common problems.

False Dawns. Sometimes it is the legacy of previous false dawns. Last time we tried to modernise it turned into a fight, and local councillors, MPs and the newspapers got involved. People didn't always behave well, and people still nurse their wounds, remembering the hurtful things that were said. Councillors or senior managers decided that the damage to reputation was just too expensive, and they gave up on the modernisation task.

Sometimes modernisation is less like a big fight and more like one of those puzzles with tiny balls in a clear plastic box. You spend ages trying to balance everything in the right place, and just as you think it's finished, someone comes along and nudges your elbow. Someone leaves for a new job, budgets get into trouble, an inspection body turns up on your doorstep or any of about a dozen things happen to tip everything up and you have to start all over again.

Muggles. Lots of you will have read the books or seen the films of Harry Potter and the wizarding school at Hogwarts. Despite all the focus on Essential Shared Capabilities, evidence-based practice and outcomes, running a great day service still requires a bit of magic. You have to be able to

- see the shadowy, hidden potential in people well before it explodes into a brilliant patronus.
- Enduring scars and pain, you have to find courage in yourself and inspire others when they are feeling rebellious or squabbling with one another.
- You have to balance on a bit of old yard brush to fly above the depressing, downward drag of gravity.

I'm sorry to say it, but some day services simply don't have any magic in them. There are still some pessimistic, gloomy places where people are fearful, reluctant to engage in change. It might be worn-out staff, hurting users, or managers who are great people, but who were never cut out to be leaders. Give them a new building, a Service Level Agreement full of shiny new outcome measures, a mission statement about recovery and inclusion, and even call them a social firm – and nothing changes. It's really hard to move forward with day service modernisation when everything you do just seems to make no real difference to the fundamentals.

Abandoned. The third way in which people get left behind in unstimulating and pessimistic services is to do with user-run groups and services. Some user-run initiatives have mixed a magical potion of support, recovery and inclusion that transforms people. Other user-run groups have lost their way. Meanwhile, their commissioners and providers have forgotten that user-run groups are also commissioned, and so have the same responsibilities. In reality, any group that receives money, room space or staff support has a duty to promote recovery, provide support and encourage inclusion.

Many groups that begin as staff-run are finding their way towards user-ownership, and navigating the challenges of this transition. Service users are taking control, helping one another balance staff support, peer support and natural support.

Trade-off. In order to accomplish something close to whole-system change, some managers are cutting a deal with the people who want to retain old-style services. In return for agreement on 90% of the modernisation plan, they allow the old smoke room to continue (now smoke free, but with no other changes), tear up any outcome targets, give up on trying to get individual plans and reviews for everyone and hope that the inspection people are seduced by the shiny new bits of the service.

Please don't leave people behind in unstimulating and pessimistic services. This is a plea to remain ambitious for all the people in the day service. Sometimes we have to be honest with ourselves and admit where the magic has been lost. Rediscovering it can be hard and might mean uncomfortable changes and help from new people. Service users deserve better than pessimistic, depressing and unstimulating services. We need to acknowledge the difficulties and press on to find solutions. Many of you have learnt some precious lessons about how to transform fighting into cooperation, how to solve the puzzles, how to add the magic.

Don't leave staff behind!

The government has decided that the third sector - what we used to call the voluntary and independent sector – can usually do a better job of running a day service than their counterparts in the adult care services or the NHS. I'd agree that it is hard to find commercial expertise in statutory services, but that doesn't seem a sufficient basis to me to write off the whole of the statutory sector.

I fear that the re-tendering process has the effect of sidelining the task of developing staff competence. It's as if all we have to do is to decide on our outcome measures, ask an organisation to deliver them, and threaten them with sanctions if they fail.

The reality is that promoting recovery and inclusion requires a new set of skills. In the past, few frontline staff in day services have studied how to create a recovery enhancing environment or how to work with people and communities to improve access to valued social roles.

Real skills and support are needed to:

- Support someone one-to-one in the community when they are experiencing awkward emotions or behaving in an unusual way
- Offer deep acceptance whilst provoking change
- Work with mainstream community organisations and groups to assist them in overcoming their negative stereotypes about people with mental health issues and offer a respectful welcome.
- Help people unhook from doing everything in groups with staff in attendance and start finding individually tailored support, much of which will be in ordinary community groups with fellow citizens.

I remain convinced that a deliberate programme of staff development is a vital ingredient of any day service modernisation programme. Such personal development and training should of course be done with staff and service users learning and teaching together so that experiences can be shared and we can all learn from one another.

Don't leave people who don't fit behind!

We do love putting people into categories. Eligibility criteria provide a neat framework for deciding who gets a service, and in many places, the bar is rising all the time. Some seven years after the Fair Access to Care Services guidance was announced, it is at last beginning to be applied to some day services. Demographic changes and increasing demand means that we have to find new ways to ration. As a result, the Government has realised that we need a new contract between the citizen and the state. We are now into co-production. Our health is not like our specs that we lose and then the clever medics find it again for us – we share responsibility for understanding and looking after our own bodies and minds - diet, exercise, smoking, wellbeing.

This new social contract between the citizen and the state includes building a society fit for all. If we have better homes we will have fewer colds. If we have more friends we will need fewer counsellors. If more of us have jobs, there will be less need for day services. And so the list goes on. In mental health, some day services are beginning to contribute through offering mental health promotion, mental health first aid and initiatives that strengthen community happiness and wellbeing.

So we have two diverging tracks. In one, tightening budgets and narrowing eligibility criteria means that the number of people getting a service is falling. In the other, the concept of a healthy community is getting wider and wider, as it engages with the big project of building a community that is worth joining.

Rather than just leaving behind the people whose needs are considered to be outside the target group, imaginative services know that the only people who fit neatly into boxes are dead. The mental health day service is doing deals with learning disability, addiction and forensic services, with colleges, Jobcentre Plus and community centres.

One service in Scotland has just won a million pounds to work with people who have low support needs – to help people before they get into big difficulties, to help people hold on to their lives. Elsewhere, day services are running inclusion surgeries and timebanks in primary care, setting up mixed groups where service users can bring along friends, offering shopfront advice to the general public, working with Neighbourhood Renewal and Community Development. It's about employment, yes, but this rich vision of a good community celebrates life beyond the job. There's more important things in life than just making money.

Operating in this complex environment where we have to target scarce resources and work with almost everyone is a clever trick, but some services are pulling it off, and in so doing, they offer hope. They have not sold out and left behind the people who don't fit.

Long term service users. People stuck in pessimistic services. Staff who are untrained and unsupported, especially those in the statutory sector. People who don't fit. Please don't leave them.