

Learning from other people

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Good leaders are always trying to improve services. If you want changes to really make things better, you have to think very carefully about what you can do. You want to be sure that any new idea or invention will do more good than harm. It would be really helpful to know if anyone else has done anything like it before, and what the effect was. Enthusiastic leaders want to run with good ideas from service users and front line staff. However, they need to know that they are moving in the right direction, before they re-write the service plans and policies, re-train staff and learn new skills.

Services for disabled people and for people with mental health needs across the country are trying to reinvent themselves. Quite often service users, staff and leaders find themselves quite isolated in the process. It is hard to move to new locations and new ways of working. There are plans, proposals and budgets to be written. Then staff will need new job descriptions, new training and new ways of measuring and recording their work. Service users will need to be convinced that they have not been forgotten in this process!

Meanwhile in the next town, another service is trying to do similar things - but there is no time for the two services to talk. There may even be a service that several years ago, did what you are now planning to do. They could tell you

the best way to do things, and the problems you need to solve. This could help you avoid some serious damage to your service, and help you get the best results.

NDT aims for disabled and disadvantaged people to have more choice and control over their lives. We encourage and support major improvements in services. The NDT has worked with NIMHE to develop an approach that we call innovation mapping. This method can help services and their leaders make informed and balanced decisions.

We work in six steps:

1. The NDT team predict the key innovations for particular services.
2. From this we generate a questionnaire.
3. A telephone survey of services finds out the innovations that have developed and the problems encountered.
4. Our report (rather like a Which? Magazine) is a small catalogue that shows what other services have experimented with, or want to improve. We make this report available to the services working with us. They can quickly determine which projects or services may be able to help them.
5. We arrange seminars about specific innovations. From these the services involved can agree about the best improvements to make, and the most effective methods to use.
6. A 'Good Practice Statement' is produced from the seminar. Other services can then check out what is happening. Our questionnaire can be updated so we find out more about each innovation.

This process has been used in partnership with NIMHE – The National Institute for Mental Health in England. It was for a study of mental health projects promoting social inclusion. Information about innovations in 380 projects up and down the country was collected. Some activities promoting social inclusion were well established while others were less developed. For example, we contacted employment projects. We found that 82% of the services contacted used detailed vocational profiling approaches to find

- It is good to learn from other services
- NDT can help you find out

Summary