

A simple traffic light system can help guide the modernisation of day services

Moving to inclusion

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People who have mental health issues or learning difficulties tend to spend a lot of time in segregated places when, in general, services should be helping them move more into places used by everyone, and to get involved in activities open to everyone. Government policy encourages health and social care agencies to provide more support in inclusive settings, and work towards supporting clients to make use of community and public facilities.¹⁻³ This is where most people want to live their lives: roles and relationships in the wider community increase life opportunities, challenge stigma and confer status.²

The National Development Team has developed an 'inclusion traffic lights' system to help staff think about what they are doing now, and how they could support service users towards greater social inclusion. In this article we will describe the model and then show how it has been used by day services.

How it works

The inclusion traffic lights system classifies day services under the three colours on a UK traffic light (see right). Red services are those that are provided in a segregated building (a mental health centre, for example) solely for people with mental health problems or learning disabilities. Amber services are those that are again only for people from a particular client group, but they meet in a building that is also used by the general public (a community centre, for example). Green services support people to pursue their own interests, using services and facilities that everyone uses.

A good example is the development of links between mental health day care and further education colleges. Bringing a college tutor into a day centre to run a computer class for mental health service users is an example of a 'red' service, because the class is held in a segregated building (the day centre) and all the students

are people with mental health problems. If the class is transferred to the college building, but the students remain together, then it is counted as 'amber'. If the service supports clients individually to participate in mainstream classes at the college, this counts as 'green'.

It is important to stress that the traffic lights system is not intended as an indication of the effectiveness of a service: all levels of service are likely to be needed within a given location, depending on the needs of clients.

Undertaking a review of day provision begins with finding out what the service currently provides. The inclusion traffic lights can be used to do this at four different levels of detail, starting at the most obvious, and gradually becoming more detailed.

At level one, a day service would simply list all its current projects and categorise them as red, amber or green. This provides a simple snapshot of the range of services available that can then be used as a basis for deciding what new services need to be provided and what services are already available. The potential limitations are that services are not easily categorised into a single type: often they will combine elements of all three. Also, services that are categorised as red are not necessarily ineffective or unnecessary; they could be providing a service for clients who are not yet ready to move on to more inclusive activities. It is also the case that users of the service might not feel adequately supported in a 'green' activity.

Level two looks at actual activities provided by a service. In Nottinghamshire (see box) the learning disabilities service decided to review the timetables of its eight day services, to compare the amount of red, amber and green activities. This was relatively simple for the day service managers to do, and they also paired up to discuss each other's results as a check on consistency.

This timetable review showed staff that there were probably too many red activity sessions taking place, and

that there was a need to stop and think about why certain activities were taking place in red settings.

Level three looks at how staff actually spend their time. In Leeds (see box), the project managers of the i3 mental health day services modernisation programme decided to look at how staff spent their time in a typical week. Each manager was asked to review the timetable of every staff member that reported to them and categorise their use of time under four headings that corresponded to the three inclusion traffic lights, plus 'time out of direct contact with people using the service'. The project managers visited each service in person to collect the information, so they could discuss any queries with the managers.

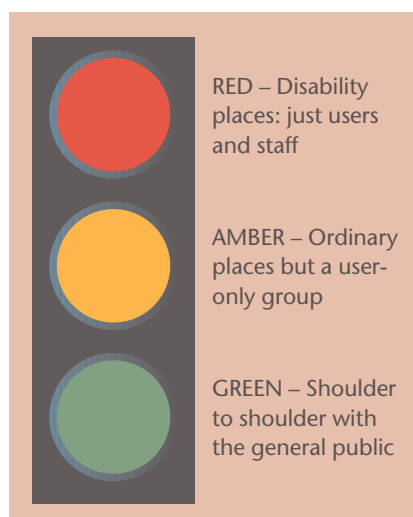
The review showed that, on average, across all the services, three quarters (77%) of staff time was spent with service users, but that the staff-service user contact time varied between projects. In some contact was 60% of staff time, and in others it was 90%. It also showed that the amount of time staff spent with users was not always proportionate to the size of the service: ie. a larger project with more staff didn't necessarily mean more staff-service user contact time. Indeed, the smallest service achieved one of the highest ratios of contact, because staff weren't having to deal with buildings and other management issues.

Information on 2927 staff hours was collected – the equivalent of 79 whole-time working weeks. Two thirds (69%) of the user contact staff time was spent supporting red activities, with the remainder divided evenly between amber and green. So, in an average eight hour working day a member of staff would spend two hours away from service users, four hours in the day centre (red), one hour with a group in a community venue (amber), and one hour supporting an individual in an ordinary community activity, or preparing to do so (green).

However, again the individual projects varied: in one project 100% of the user contact time was classified as red; in another just three per cent was red, and the remainder divided evenly between amber and green. However, the majority of projects had a fairly similar profile, with three quarters of user contact time spent in red settings.

The project managers felt that the exercise was useful in that it made some staff recognise that their services still had some way to go, and highlighted the need for training, information and strategic help for teams. One difficulty encountered during the review was that staff misunderstood the traffic lights as indicating that a 'red' activity was bad, and 'green' activities were good, rather than simply providing a descriptive label. As mentioned above, it is important to stress that all categories of service may be needed within a location, to meet a wide range of needs. The aim is to create an awareness of the importance of progression, on the part of the service, the staff and the clients.

While one of the goals of modernisation is to restructure the way in which staff spend



Inspire, include, improve

Helen Gee and Ursula Klingel are project managers for 'i3' ('inspire, include, improve'), a two-year project in Leeds to improve day services for people experiencing mental health difficulties. The project is looking at services provided by social services, the NHS and voluntary agencies. Day services include day centres, drop in centres, some mental health support groups in the community, self-help groups and befriending schemes. They have adopted the inclusion traffic lights as a way of thinking about their task. Helen says: 'Although we had a certain amount of information about our services in broad terms we had nothing on social inclusion. We needed a way of conceptualising the level of social inclusion in our day services that was easy to grasp, and that eased the process of collecting information. At the risk of over-simplifying things, categorising what is being done into three groups gives a visual and graphic representation of services in Leeds that is hard to ignore.'

Wendy Lippmann has a similar role in the learning disability service in Nottinghamshire. She says: 'Many people felt that our day services were already delivering what the government wanted (work, education, sports, arts, meeting friends etc) within the safe environment of the day centre, and that this was what people who have a learning disability wanted. The inclusion traffic lights seemed to offer a deceptively clear way to express the extra dimension of social inclusion, in a way that was acceptable within the day services because it was still possible for people to carry on participating in activities that they valued and also travel along a path towards inclusion, at a pace that was right for each person.'

time, it is vital to examine the kinds of opportunities available to people using services. This takes us to the next level of detail.

Level 4 looks at the support provided to individuals. Having categorised the day services timetables, the Nottinghamshire learning disability service wanted more information about what was happening to individual users. They realised that simply looking at the activities on offer did not provide any information about what the social inclusion experience was like for people with differing levels of need, and also the timetable categorisation did not show how many people were engaging in those activities.

This led to the development of a guidance paper and flowchart⁴ that enabled each day service manager to colour code the weekly timetable of some 950 individual service users as red, amber or green according to what they were doing and where. Particular attention was paid to ensuring a shared understanding about what counted as green: staff-supported inclusive activities would be counted; inclusive activities that the person engaged in without support from the day service would not be counted. However, merging an established group of →

Table 1: Who gets support in inclusive settings



Table 2: Who gets support in segregated buildings



→ learning disabled people with a group of non-disabled people from the community was counted as green, even though the proportions of disabled to non-disabled people would be very different from that found in the wider community.

The study revealed a similar pattern of variation to the Leeds exercise. As the service already used a method of categorising service users into those needing high, medium or low levels of support, it was possible to combine this with data from the inclusion traffic light survey to find out whether socially inclusive opportunities were equally available to all, irrespective of the level of disability. Again, there was a wide variation between services. Looking at who received support in inclusive settings (table 1), it is clear that inclusive opportunities can be created for everyone. However more than a quarter of red sessions were being provided to people who were classed as needing low levels of support (table 2).

This analysis was useful in that it enabled the Nottinghamshire learning disability service to:

- explore the factors that enabled some services to offer more green sessions and to include people with high support needs in community opportunities
- challenge those services that were still offering largely segregated provision or that restricted inclusive support to people with lower levels of need
- identify and prioritise for support those services with the most changes to make

- identify barriers to inclusion (ie. the lack of accessible leisure facilities) in particular parts of the county
- measure progress over time by repeating the exercise.

Drawing conclusions

A number of caveats must be identified before conclusions are drawn. First, managers, staff and service users must be prepared for the exercise. Teams need to be included as early as possible in the process so that they are clear about the purpose of the study – that it measures one aspect of social inclusion and the traffic light rating is not a measure of effectiveness.

Second, mechanisms to achieve consistency of reporting are helpful, such as a script for interviewers, pairing respondents to discuss coding, or creating a set of example scenarios with the answer codes. If the exercise is intended to capture accurate data on day services and to set targets and monitor change, then inter-rater reliability and repetition of the exercise is vital. If the exercise is simply intended to clarify or challenge thinking and attitudes, then methodological rigour is rather less important.

Third, discovering that there is variation in access to socially inclusive activities begins the search for both explanations and equity of opportunity. None of the services described in this article currently use a formula for linking individual support needs with staffing ratios. Differences found between day services might be a result of a number of variables: different staffing levels, different levels of resources (such as funds for room hire, admission costs and transport), the characteristics of service users (their degree of independence or interest in inclusive activities) and carer perspectives.

Finally, there may be differences in the skills, attitudes and behaviour of day service staff and their immediate managers. Supportive, developmental supervision can harness and co-ordinate the ideas and energies of frontline staff and overcome an unimaginative, timid or blaming culture, leading to new possibilities for the people using the service.

While these simple red, amber and green scores tell us nothing about the meaning of opportunity in the life of the individual – we need person-centred or recovery plans to reveal that – they do provoke reflection on the complexities of managing and modernising day service provision, and challenge services to set targets for improvement.

The NDT has published a guide to the inclusion traffic lights system to help those using it avoid potential hazards. *Accidents at the Inclusion Traffic Lights*, by Peter Bates, is available free at <http://www.ndt.org.uk/ETS/ETILT.htm>

- 1 Department of Health. Valuing people. London: Department of Health, 2001.
- 2 Social Exclusion Unit. Mental health and social exclusion. London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2004.
- 3 London Development Centre for Mental Health. Redesigning mental health day services – a modernisation toolkit for London. London: The London Development Centre for Mental Health (CSIP), 2005.
- 4 Nottinghamshire Social Services Department. Guidance paper and flowchart on using the Inclusion Traffic Lights to survey day services. Nottingham: NSSD, 2004.