

Build capacity in mainstream health services

Reporter

Hellena Kambadza at [Eden Futures](#) on 17 October 2014

What do you do*?

From time to time our residents need to use primary care or general hospital services, such as district nurse or opticians. The initial response from these mainstream services sometimes starts as fear and reluctance to engage, while some of our staff are worried that the level of understanding and skill held by mainstream services will be insufficient to meet the needs of people who use our services. So we meet with them and discuss the needs of the people we support and offer ongoing assistance so that they have access to our expertise and advice in providing a personalised response to the individual.

What is excellent about it?

We know that physical healthcare needs are often overshadowed by learning disability or mental health issues, and even people in hospital can receive poor physical health care. We resist the temptation to try and address these needs ourselves and instead help mainstream services to develop their skills and confidence, which upskills our colleagues to work more effectively with other citizens too.

So we adopt a quiet but firm insistence that our service users should have equality of access to mainstream health services. In support of this, we offer advice, knowledge of the individual and expertise to ensure that the person has a positive experience while our colleagues working in mainstream health services gain in confidence, understanding and skill.

In one situation, a resident needed an infected wound dressing and the district nurse was apprehensive about the person's challenging behaviour, especially when meeting strangers. Our team introduced the district nurse and talked about the treatment, remaining in the room at first, but standing back while the district nurse gained in confidence.

Stories of Striving for Excellence in Locked Rehabilitation Services

After a series of such meetings with our local GP practice, they are now asking for some more formal training from us. Each of these meetings focuses on how to support that particular individual and ensure they receive the care they need.

Even better next time?

We talk to family members and other advocates about this liaison work. Most of the service users we support lack mental capacity, so we think clearly about how to respect their confidentiality and keep everyone safe. By focusing on long-term capacity building, we have built friendly relationships with our colleagues in primary and secondary care.

* [NDTi](#) was commissioned to deliver a staff development programme promoting a more personalised and inclusive approach for those living and working in locked rehabilitation services in the English East Midlands. While the current inspection routine has a focus on risk prevention, our job is to focus on sharing positive practice and innovation. Peter Bates led the programme and wrote up these stories.

The Excellence Programme is for independent and voluntary sector providers of locked residential rehabilitation services for people with mental health issues or learning disabilities living in the East Midlands. It has delivered:

- *A series of seminars for key staff and people using services to promote a more personalised and inclusive approach*
- *A shared sense of what excellent services look like, captured in an [Excellence Framework](#) document.*
- *Learning exchange visits between members which lead to individual action plans for each service*
- *Excellence stories that capture and share ideas for service improvement.*

These case studies have arisen from members of the Excellence programme and NDTi has not independently verified what we have been told. Some are radical and ambitious approaches that transform the whole service, while others consist of small steps that may not seem especially exciting to other readers, but make a difference to one person. Some readers might even question whether progress is being made at all! The overall purpose is to stimulate reflection and celebration for every step forward, whether large or small.