

Get used to new things

Reporters

Tracy Jones and Stacey Clarke at [The Danshell Group](#) on 4 March 2015.

What did you doⁱ?

People living in our locked unit find change very difficult. It is tempting to restrict their life opportunities to a comfortable range of settings and people where they feel safe, but this does not serve the rehabilitation agenda. We gently support people to move beyond their comfort zone and take on new challenges.

What is excellent about it?

We have always tried to support people to become more independent, but this is sometimes challenging for people who become aggressive towards others when they are outside a familiar situation. As a result, we think very carefully about how to move forward whilst keeping everyone safe.

For example, one gentleman had been aggressive towards women some years ago and the organisation responded by creating a male-only service and generally avoiding community settings where women might be present. After some years of this arrangement, he had few opportunities to interact positively with women and this reputation had not diminished.

Thinking about discharge triggered a review of his support and we decided to adopt a positive risk-taking approach. A female staff member was identified and her name and photo was built into [social stories](#), which helped to familiarise the gentleman with the planned changes. Then the staff member attended an activity that the person liked to engage in, achieving proximity but not interacting at first. A further social story was used for a week to prepare the person for the next stage in which the staff member shared the same minibus, but again sitting apart from the person and not yet interacting. Further stages involved use of topics of interest and the gradual introduction of conversation. He now initiates contact with her, they have shared a restaurant meal and his behaviour towards other women has become more positive.

Even better next time?

This story illustrates the restrictive potential impact of old reputations and the need to adopt a positive and optimistic approach to risk enablement. Particular support needs to be offered to staff who were directly affected by the index offence or previous difficult incidents – but this should not prevent the service from offering opportunities for progress.

In order to help people to move beyond these old negative reputations, we have paid much more attention to current and recent behaviour rather than historical events. After the initial assessment, our review meetings rarely mention the long-term history and focus instead on the person's potential for progress in the future.

We have an ambitious approach to supporting people who struggle with change. This means that we strive to support independence and the skills required to succeed in the community, whilst the person has the freedom to adopt a personal lifestyle that expresses their preference for routine and familiarity. If anyone says that someone can't learn something or cope with something, then we challenge this view, whilst avoiding a reckless or coercive approach and controlling risk as far as possible.

Whilst this has worked well with one person, we are aware of the difficulty of making it work with some individuals who pose particular challenges. We hope to apply the principle to all our work.

ⁱ [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.