

Host a course on Christianity

Reporters

Adam Robinson at [Cambian](#), 1 July 2016.

What did you doⁱ?

A group of patients in a low secure forensic environment were keen to discuss their views on the Christian religion. Contact was made with an external organisation who provided guest facilitators to deliver an adapted version of an internationally known 8 week programme. Group meetings took place weekly for an hour and a half.

What was excellent about it?

This course gave the patients an opportunity to speak to external group providers who have expertise around Christianity and its history. The group provided an informal, safe place for people to express their views in an accepting environment. Questions were answered and information provided to help develop understanding and identify future interests.

The group spent most time in discussion, but also watched a 10 minute video clip from the Alpha series of lectures¹. The video clips helped to focus each discussion, while the discussion helped to broaden participants knowledge and interests.

The group brought people together who wished to discuss topics that are not usually spoken about on the wards; it allowed everyone to speak about spirituality. Attendees described the group as: “enjoyable”; “interesting discussion subjects”; “brought people together and allowed everyone to share their opinions”; “informative”; “we were able to facilitate discussions”; “enjoyed the speakers who had studied historical Christianity”; and “enjoyable and non judgemental”.

The group was so well received that it has continued to run after the initial 8 weeks at the request of the attendees. The future will be a combination of visits from the external facilitators, sometimes with guest speakers, and group sessions run by the unit staff. One member of the group became a regular attender at the facilitator’s church.

¹ Available as a free download from <http://alpha.org/>

Stories of Striving for Excellence in Locked Rehabilitation Services

Both the external facilitators had previous experience of working in forensic services, so were reasonably well attuned to the environment and some of the issues which might be raised. A member of the staff team also attended each session and joined in with the discussion, while helping to host the meeting.

Even better next time?

From the outset, the facilitators were clear that they came from a Christian perspective, and if residents wished to explore other worldviews, a different course would be needed. If a similar programme is run elsewhere, it will be equally important to ensure that the right non-coercive, non-judgemental approach is taken, whilst the group valued the opportunity to meet people who embraced their faith wholeheartedly.

The course gave an opportunity for members of the staff team to disclose their personal faith, and this prompted them to consider how much they wanted to tell residents about themselves. The group was very diverse in terms of its knowledge and educational level, demanding creative planning, flexibility in delivery and considerable groupwork skills.

The church that provided facilitators for the Alpha course was not especially close to the unit, and this added to the escorted leave time needed for some residents to attend services there. The follow up programme is designed to include guest speakers from time to time, and this raises challenges to the security arrangements for the unit, in ensuring a proportionate response.

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
- These 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.