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Bridge Building

Do

Create pathways from care settings to community settings.

The project offers long-term support to the person and key people in each community setting. (*Bates 2002*)

Story

The Mainstream project in Liverpool is run by Imagine, a mental health charity. Apart from staff offices, they are a day service that run no buildings or groups. When a person using mental health services wants to take up an activity, a staff member will spend time with them and then support them to select and engage in an ordinary activity in the community alongside other citizens.

Hints & Hazards

A named person provides a vital link for staff who do not know whom to ask. Avoid creating an over-dependence on one person for the survival of the work. Every agency should aim to work across boundaries so that people needing support have fair and equal access to life opportunities.

People who work on the margins of their agency face the harsh realities of exclusion on a daily basis and are in danger of burning out unless good support systems are in place.

Some agencies invite each Bridge Builder to focus on one type of activity in the community and build alliances with the agencies that are active in that 'life domain' and who are offering services to the general public (*Bates & Butler 2004*). Even better is to have a team share the life domain.

If bridge building is to be a significant part of the staff role then think about what skills they will ideally have and try to recruit people with these skills. The last time you were part of an interview panel, did anyone ask candidates to talk about their connections into involvement with their own community or how they had assisted others to build their own links?