



Ten Green Bottles...

the characteristics of a good service as identified by a group of current day and employment service users

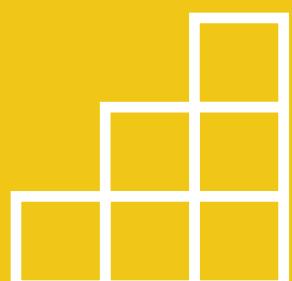
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In partnership with...



Level Up
Listening to the voices of service users in
the re-configuration of day and employment
services in Central Lancashire



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Context

NHS Central Lancashire and Lancashire County Council jointly commission a range of day and employment services for people with mental health problems across Central Lancashire.

Recent policy shifts towards personalisation, social inclusion, recovery and improving value for money have prompted a review of current service provision.

Department of Health Guidance in 2006 emphasized the need for mental health services to be provided in community settings rather than on segregated mental health sites. The principles of recovery are well rehearsed and include the following ideas:

- That people do not recover in isolation – that recovery is closely associated with social inclusion and being able to make meaningful, satisfying social roles within communities rather than in segregated services ;
- That recovery and social inclusion is about building a meaningful and satisfying life as defined by the person themselves, whether or not there are on-going symptoms or problems;
- That recovery and social inclusion represent a move away from pathology, illness and symptoms, to good health, strengths and wellness;
- That self-management is encouraged and facilitated;
- That hope is central to recovery and can be enhanced by each person seeing how they can have more active control over their lives and by seeing how others have found a way forward;
- That recovery is about discovering or re-discovering a sense of personal identity, separate from illness or disability.

Data collected and analysed jointly by Lancashire County Council and NHS Central Lancashire from a recent snap-shot review of day and employment centre use in May 2011 suggested that:

- existing day and employment services have limited geographical reach – that is they tend to be used by people who live close to the centre base and that people in rural areas are less well served;
- existing day and employment services are better at attracting and engaging with users aged 45 and over and that younger people, and especially younger women, may be less well served;
- existing day and employment services are especially poor at engaging users from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds

In light of the above, a number of specific questions are being asked of current services:

- To what extent are services meeting the needs of the people that they exist to serve?
- Are services reaching out sufficiently to all groups of potential service users (for example, across all ages; rural and urban areas; different ethnic groups etc.)?
- To what extent are services having an impact on the lives of people?
- Could services be doing more to integrate service users in to the community to reduce stigma and isolation?

¹From Segregation to Inclusion: Commissioning Guidance on Day Services for People with Mental Health Problems, Department of Health, 2006

²A Common Purpose: Recovery in Future Mental Health Services, Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2007

³Mental Health Day Services Public Health Report: June 2011, Central Lancashire NHS



Level-Up is a community arts based initiative run as a partnership between Alison (Artists living in situations of need) and the Mental Health Equality Team. Funded by Central Lancashire Primary Care Trust the project uses an arts based methodology to promote service user engagement. A range of different mediums are used including painting, poetry, creative writing, modeling, photography, music and computer design.

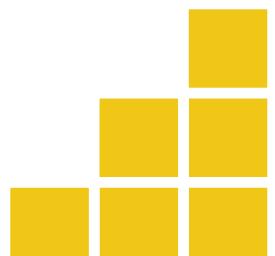
Between September and November 2011 the Level-Up Team facilitated a number of sessions with users of Making Space in Skelmersdale with a view to eliciting the views of service users about current day and employment service provision, configuration and reform. Some sessions were discussion focused but others revolved around the provision of activities, such as the development a web-site, the creation of a book, painting, photography and music. Some of the sessions were delivered at Making Space and some were delivered at Soundskills, a community arts resource in Preston.

Sessions were observed by a researcher from the School of Social Work at the University of Central Lancashire. By listening to the conversations that service users had it became possible to distil a number of features that users valued in day and employment services.

The conversations were recorded and transcribed; played back and reviewed; analysed and discussed; and finally drawn together and summarised thematically to provide the narrative below.

This report is a reflection of the sessions and is intended to assist NHS Central Lancashire and Lancashire County Council in their attempts to re-design day and employment services for people with mental health problems across Central Lancashire.

Thanks are due to the staff and service users at Making Space, Skelmersdale and the staff at Level-Up. Photographs of service user work is courtesy of Chris Davies.



Findings

A cautionary note – the impact of change and the risk of ‘throwing the baby out with the bathwater’

Many people find change a difficult process. In particular, people who are vulnerable and powerless often find change extremely stressful. This was clearly evidenced by the service users who took part in this consultation. One service user refused to come back to a follow up session because she had found one of the initial sessions so stressful and a number of service users expressed fears about what would happen to the services that they used and felt that they depended upon:

If I didn't have here I wouldn't go anywhere else. I might not be here at all you know...I have suicidal tendencies.

A number also expressed concerns about feeling under-pressure and under-valued:

It feels like there is a pressure to move on. It is a pressure. People feel like they are a nuisance.

It is putting pressure on people to say that they have to move on. It is putting us down. It is saying that we are not normal now. That we are not good enough as we are.

Furthermore, it is clear that many of those service users who do use existing day and employment services do value them.

It is hard for us to go and meet people in other places. It takes a lot of confidence and other people are prejudiced against us

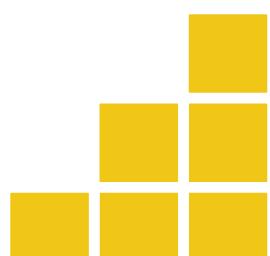
I spent four years looking at a wall – you need places like this to get you out.

There is a lack of resources. Some sort of community centre where people can meet and get together is a good idea. It is all being phased out now.

This scheme has helped me. I had given up on everything. I had no social life or anything. I was in such a bad way.

Commissioners are therefore advised to act with caution. There is a risk of ‘throwing the baby out with the bathwater’. If the aim of any service re-design is to improve the lives of service users then care must be taken to ensure that the process of service de-design does not in and of itself worsen or damage the lives of the very people who are intended to be its beneficiaries.

⁴Steps were taken to follow up with this service user to re-assure her and she did later re-join the group



Pragmatic and appropriate service outcomes

Service users advised commissioners to take a broad and pragmatic approach to service outcomes, not setting standards that are unrealistic and that fail to take account of the real world:

If you go to work in a factory you are seen as engaging in the community, but all you do is get up, go to work in the same place, see the same people, eat in the same café, do the same thing day in day out and go home. Are they so different to us?

If I did stuff in the community I would just get stoned all day.

Do commissioners measure the right things? Do they measure that this place keeps people out of hospital? Why are they only interested in what you are moving on to?

I agree. I have spent three times in hospital since I have been coming here, but I would have spent more time in hospital if I wasn't coming here.

Commissioners need to recognise and value these less tangible or softer outcomes as well as some of the more tangible ones:

What is progression? What is moving on?

Commissioners say there are going to be changes, but they are moving in the wrong direction.



Ten characteristics of a good service

Service users identified ten key characteristics of good day centre provision. These included:

- Providing somewhere to go and something to do
- Accepting you for who you are
- Providing mutual and peer support
- Giving you a stable base that you can go back to and work from
- Being flexible and responsive and accepting that you may need to dip in and out of services
- Being outward looking, both in terms of helping to bring users in to the centre but also in terms of connecting them to other services and resources
- Looking out for people on a day to basis and monitoring how people are getting on
- Building confidence
- Challenging external barriers and prejudice
- Recognising and working within a local context

1. Somewhere to go

At its most basic, a day service needs to provide somewhere where people can go, somewhere where they can meet people and something to occupy their time.

Somewhere to go.

Somewhere to meet people.

Something to occupy your mind.

2. Acceptance for who you are

Beyond this however, day services need to reflect a number of core values that allow people to feel accepted and to be valued for who they are. Often users felt that in the world outside they had to put up a front a lot of the time. Both staff and users at day services conveyed values that allowed people to feel welcome, accepted and safe.

You can be yourself here.

You don't have to put a face on here.

Being around other people who are mentally ill takes a burden off you. You don't have to put up a front. We know that we are ill. We won't take the piss out of each other.

Being accepted; feeling safe and secure; and made to feel welcome were recurrent themes.

Before I came here I felt like a freak. Then I realized that other people have problems like me.

People here are not watching the clock all the time. In some services you know they are busy and they can only give you ten minutes. It comes across – you can see that they want to get you out of the door.

You know you can talk to people here. Staff and other people who use the centre. You know it is not going to go any further.



3. Mutual and peer support

Good services are able to build support for users based not only on staff support, but also on mutual help involving other users:

Everyone helps everyone.

You can come here when you are feeling down, talk to someone and get support.



4. A stable and solid base that people can build from

Services should provide a stable base that people can work from, but from which those who are able should be able to access or try new things:

A base that we can work from.

You need to be able to access things to occupy your mind. To learn new skills both in intellectual environments such as colleges but also to be able to do some practical things too.

5. Flexible and responsive

Good day services need to be flexible and responsive to people's needs, recognising that people are different and that they will proceed at different paces. They need to build support for people that on the one hand seeks to raise aspiration and to motivate people but which at the same time recognises the realities of people's day to lives and is not prescriptive.

You can come here when you want and commit to the level you want.

People move on at different paces. For one person, starting to shop for yourself can be a huge thing.

This is moving on for me. I was sitting at home and drinking all day. Coming here has stopped me.

I wasn't washing, shopping, going out. They enabled me to come here.



6. Outward looking: working beyond the four walls of the centre – reaching out

A good service would be inclusive. It would have a role reaching out to people in the community and would try to pull people in. It would need to have the capacity to help to build people's confidence and to handhold people in to services.

A lot of people were brought in gradually. Staff would come out and get you and bring you in.

At first I couldn't come on my own. I used to suffer with really bad panic attacks. But gradually I built up so that I could get the bus on my own.

In the push to get people involved in community activities some people have simply been left in the house doing nothing.



This capability would extend to people who had also left the service, ensuring that they are appropriately followed up.

Who is looking out for those people who no longer come here? There used to be loads. This place was packed. They are all supposed to have moved on but most of them are not doing anything. They are just sat at home.

It would also exist to help users to connect to other services:

They could take you to places like college and stay with people who need support.



7. Day to monitoring of health – someone to look out for you

Service users valued the role that services could play in monitoring their health. A number talked about feeling like they were 'part of a family' with both staff and other service users 'looking out' for them:

Staff here know how you are. They know you and they can tell if you are not right.

Staff can monitor me.

We know people. We see them everyday. If people are not OK, we see it first.



8. Building confidence

Key to an effective service is its ability to identify and overcome the range of barriers that many service users face to progression. Some of these relate to confidence, and a number of users talked about how services had helped to build their confidence and inspired them to try new things:

We need to create some safety from which we can build.

I never thought I could achieve anything like this (talking about pottery). I was very nervous about going.

It gives you courage to try other things.

When we saw what (names another service user) had achieved we all thought, wow, if he can do that, I can do it.



9. Challenging external barriers – challenging and developing mainstream services – challenging stigma

Many of the barriers to progression relate to things that are external to both the service user and the service, and these present very real challenges for service providers and commissioners alike. Sometimes helping users to connect to other services might need to include a development role, challenging (and supporting) wider services to change the way that they work in order to become more inclusive:

Colleges have an expectation that you will attend all of the time, but if your illness fluctuates you may have trouble attending or you may find it difficult to concentrate throughout a whole session.

If colleges are going to ask you about disability they need to make it clear that they are asking because they want to help you. They should say clearly, tell us if you have a disability so that we can help you.

I went in to college and asked to see the disability coordinator and they didn't know what I was on about. If they can't signpost you on, what do you do?

10. Working in the local context

Another key barrier is the attitude of the wider community towards people with mental health problems and the stigma and prejudice that service users often face as a result. There is a longer-term need, possibly beyond the remit of day services, to work to reduce stigma and promote a more accepting and tolerant attitude:

I couldn't go to college. I would stand out, I know I would.

The idea of sitting in a group with people I don't know...I couldn't do that.

People are cruel aren't they.

One of my neighbours saw me having a cigarette outside by the garden and said, 'Hello, what are you doing here?' I lied, I was so ashamed. I said I'm a volunteer here.

If you talk to somebody outside...well you can't talk to them...they don't understand. They look at you like you are on another planet.

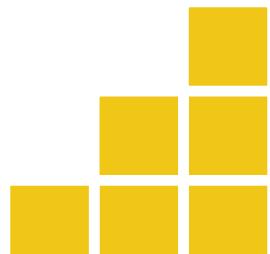
I would be worried that everybody would talk about me...well, they would talk about me.

Issues such as transport, the availability of wider community facilities, and local employment opportunities also present obstacles. In this context service users identified Skelmersdale as presenting its own set of challenges which service users in other localities may or may not face. This raises issues about commissioning according to local needs and context. A major challenge highlighted by service users in Skelmersdale for example appeared to be the lack of good quality public transport. A good quality service in Skelmersdale would therefore be one that found ways of overcoming the considerable problems that this lack of transport posed.

Public transport is crap.

It is OK if you want to go to Southport, Ormskirk, Wigan or Liverpool but otherwise it is useless.

If you take away our mini-bus we simply won't be able to get to places.



You can't be lugging spades and equipment on a bus.

In Skem doing anything is hard work and takes a lot of planning. In a city you can just go for a coffee or go to the cinema. In Skem you have to plan it all out and it takes hours to get anywhere.

A lot of things are close by, but you can't get there.

Users also bemoaned the poor quality of many of the local amenities which meant that they had a poverty of opportunity locally. This lack of opportunity represents the stark reality of the backdrop against which people's lives are lived.

The walks are spoilt by fly tipping, shopping trolleys, and sofas.

If the swimming pool was better people might be more active.

The old cinema only ever showed films that were a year old.

There is only one supermarket. Would you start a business here? Only businesses like cash generator work.



There is only a limited type of job in Skelmersdale – most of the jobs are elsewhere. You need to be able to get out of Skem.

At 5 o'clock Skem shuts down. There is nowhere to go other than the pub.

There is a Bannantynes gym, but membership is £45 per month. It is not for the people who live here. It is for people with cars who can come and go.



Conclusion

Reconfiguring day and employment services poses a real challenge for service users, service providers and commissioners. The understandable anxiety of service users about the prospect of change and of losing cherished services needs to be managed. Staff employed in day and employment services have similar anxieties.

Services are doing much that is good and valued by service users, especially in providing safe, secure and welcoming environments in which they feel valued, accepted and cared for. It is crucial this aspect of current provision is not lost.

That said, it is also clear that services are not reaching everyone that they could. Issues such as the awareness of services among potential users, the appropriateness of what is being offered, transport, confidence, the provision of outreach and the functioning of referral mechanisms may all be factors that come in to play here.



There is also evidence that service users face a number of barriers to becoming more integrated in to mainstream provision. Such barriers include issues which are at least in part internal to the individual, such as confidence, but also factors which are external and rooted in a wider social and economic context including location, transport, employment and community. There is also a complex interplay between the two – for example, confidence will be impacted upon by the lived experience of the individual in society and their experiences of relationships, employment, achievement, belonging, security and connectedness.

Designing a route map for reaching the end point of service reconfiguration is thus far from easy. What is beginning to emerge from this work however is a sense of what the end destination might look like. Key characteristics would include:

- A service that is accessed by people of all ages, ethnic groups, sexual orientations, faiths and localities in accordance with the characteristics of the local population. Such a service would also be accessible to people with disabilities.
- A service that is under-pinned by an ethos and culture of acceptance, respect, care and aspiration and that gives service users a sense that they are valued, safe and secure.
- A service that reaches out to people, building bridges to bring people in to the service and to maintain contact with them. This will include handholding and confidence building activities as well as follow up support and aftercare.
- A service that is flexible, recognising that individuals will have different needs and aspirations and that these will change over time and will need to be subject to review.
- A service that recognises the talents of individuals and seeks to build on them.
- A service that has a key role to play in monitoring people's health (both physical and mental) on an on-going basis.
- A service that provides challenging, stimulating and meaningful activities, in partnership with others where appropriate, recognising that service users may have needs extending beyond the hours when day and employment services are available.
- A service that encourages mutual peer support, both within and beyond the direct provision of the service.
- A service that connects to the wider environment, seeking to identify and work with wider partners to open up opportunities. This will include looking at the support that wider partners may need in order improve their accessibility.
- A service that challenges prevailing attitudes towards mental health within the wider community and which promotes inclusion.
- A service that recognises the wider barriers and challenges that exist and that works with commissioners and connects to wider partnerships in order to address these.
- A service that is responsive to local needs and context, taking advantage of local opportunities, strengths and assets and seeking to address local challenges and gaps.

In re-configuring services Commissioners need to recognise the value and worth that current service users feel that they get out of existing services and seek to build on and extend this. Care must be taken not to destroy the good work that has already been done and that continues to be done by focusing only on hard outcomes that are too narrowly defined. The ten service characteristics can be developed and used as a qualitative framework within which to measure the impact of the proposed changes and re-configuration and could act as a cornerstone against which to measure and mitigate against unintended or negative consequences.

