

## Creating Caring Cultures, Northern Ireland

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It was with some trepidation that I arrived for day one of the Creating Caring Cultures (CCC) Programme. Firstly, because I didn't really know what to expect and secondly, I was only a Band 5 Community Learning Disability Nurse and the programme was targeted towards Band 6 and 7 Learning Disability Nurses throughout all sectors and Trusts in Northern Ireland. However, a space had become available and in my usual fashion of 'sure, why not?' I agreed to attend alongside six other nurses from the Northern Trust.

So that first morning I was nervous but quickly began to relax. I was in a room with approximately 35 other learning disability nurses and whilst I had not met many of them previously, it soon became very clear that we all had one clear objective and passion – to support and empower people with a learning disability to live healthy, inclusive and fulfilling lives. The programme itself was run over six days and focused on how nurses, both as individuals and teams, can impact either positively or negatively on workplace cultures. It challenged us to look objectively at our workplace culture and identify opportunities to improve this using learning from the programme. On two of the evenings we also had the opportunity to have dinner with our Director of Nursing. This quickly became scarier than walking in the first morning as she challenged us to verbalise how we believed learning disability services within the Northern Trust could be improved and also realistically consider what was achievable.

The programme did not end after those six initial days. FoNS provided year-long support and facilitated lots of discussion and exploration around service development and promoting workplace culture. As a starting point, the CCC group (as we nicknamed ourselves) felt strongly that workplace culture begins with individuals and that the input of all the community learning disability nurses throughout the trust was key to this process. We arranged a workshop for all the nurses and using tools learnt on the programme, including exploring individual's hopes and fears and a team culture tool. We gathered their thoughts about how the service and culture could be developed. From that workshop a number of

clear themes emerged and we identified three projects the CCC group could promote: Trust-wide nurses' meetings, nurse-led anti-psychotic monitoring clinics and the development of a children's learning disability nursing service. These projects are on-going and will benefit both our service and culture.

Being part of the Creating Caring Culture's programme and subsequent service development has for me, been both challenging and rewarding. I cannot count how many times I have been pushed out of my comfort zone throughout the last year but also how much I have developed professionally and personally. The knowledge I have gained is massive. As a band 5 nurse, I had very little understanding of the bigger picture in service development, governance and strategic planning. I can no longer say that, as I have had the opportunity to attend meetings with our Director of Nursing, lead nurse and senior nurses, where discussion has centred on why we need a standalone children's learning disability nursing team. As a band 5 nurse, I was also always happy to listen; really only contributing when I had to. I cannot do that any longer – I am part of the sub-group leading the trust-wide nurses meetings so have to speak out. I have also grown in confidence and would like to thank the other members of the CCC group for that. Although all more senior than I, they never once let me use 'I'm only a Band 5' as an excuse for not doing something and have encouraged and supported me throughout the whole process.

Although the year working alongside FoNS is coming to an end its impact, learning and purpose of the Creating Caring Cultures programme are not. The projects we, as a group, have developed, will continue. As a larger group of community learning disability nurses, we will continue to 'promote' a caring culture – we don't need to create one as it has been very evident throughout this process that we already care greatly for the people we work with. And what about me? Well, I'm starting a new job as a band 6 so won't be able to use 'I'm only a band 5' for much longer!