



FoNS Improvement Insights

Involving Young People in the Development and Evaluation of Self Harm Services

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Duration of project: December 2009 – August 2010

Keywords: Self harm, adolescents, mental health, service user involvement, focus groups, young people, fourth generation evaluation

Project background

The Young People's Centre in Chester (UK) is a 14 bedded inpatient mental health treatment unit and a ten bedded acute admissions mental health ward for adolescents aged 13 to 18 years old. Young people are admitted to receive care and treatment for a range of mental health problems and disorders including psychosis, severe depression and eating disorders. Almost half of all young people are admitted in an emergency crisis and this often follows self harm or recognition of the risk of suicide. Research suggests that young people who self harm feel that their views are not taken seriously or, that they are misunderstood and often stigmatised by health professionals. Therefore any intended improvements in the service would include listening to and understanding the opinions of those young people before exploring ways of facilitating such improvements in clinical practice.

Aim and objectives of the project

The aim of the project was to enable the full participation of young people in the planning and delivery of self harm services. To achieve this aim the objectives of the project were to:

- Establish a baseline of staff views about caring for young people who self harm
- Facilitate a series of focus groups involving young people to explore their views about their treatment and experiences of care
- Agree a process with service users for how the information collected through the focus groups would inform the wider development of the self harm service
- Utilise a number of approaches to use the information to inform and facilitate staff development
- Evaluate the impact of the project on staff

Key activities and outcomes from the project

A baseline qualitative staff questionnaire was developed using a 'claims, concerns and issues' evaluative approach, and forwarded by email to all the multi professional team supported by a short presentation during a team meeting. Themes emerging from the questionnaire revealed; staff lacked confidence in managing self harm situations, were unsure about giving young

people appropriate responsibility to de-escalate their risk taking behaviours and were unclear about how young people experienced their care giving in crisis situations. Based on this data, an initial training session was held on the policy underpinning and practical management of self harm.

After presenting the project intentions to service users (n =43), eighteen focus groups were used to actively engage young people in the project to gain their views. Three main themes emerged; young people's experience of treatment, perceived lack of knowledge by caregivers and repetition of history taking. In addition six young people offered their own 'stories' as they expressed a view that they were never invited to share their experiences. They suggested that a form be added to the post discharge questionnaires that invited them to write their 'story'. Sharing stories guidelines and consent has now been incorporated as part of the discharge process.

Further areas of development arising from the focus groups include; feeding back opinions on self harm incidents to staff in 'real time', altering handover times (perceived as a vulnerable time for self harm), following up incidents through individual and group clinical supervision, enhanced communication leading to more effective care planning. Two specific areas of practice development are the redesign of self harm incident forms and use of a 'patient passport' to assist in the assessment process.

Six months into the project staff repeated the qualitative staff questionnaire and data was suggestive of; an increase in staff confidence in working with young people and self harm, a more reflective and open approach in group supervision and evidence of skill development in positive risk management associated with self harm.

Implications for practice:

- Young people in the unit embraced the opportunity to offer detailed feedback on their experiences
- The focus groups enabled the team to really listen to and hear the service users' experiences and use this to improve the service
- Introducing the self harm incident feedback system has enabled the team to celebrate good practice but also to learn and develop new ways of working
- It may have been useful to have included service users as part of the project group from the onset to access their views prior to the focus group involvement

A full project report including references can be accessed from: <http://www.fons.org/library/report-details.aspx?nstdid=16846>

This project was supported by the FoNS Patients First Programme in partnership with The Burdett Trust for Nursing.