



FoNS Improvement Insights

Working Effectively with People with Learning Disabilities and Offending Behaviours

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Project background

Nationally, it is recognised that with the closure of large institutions and a move towards community care, there are increasing numbers of people with a learning disability (LD) coming into contact with criminal justice agencies. This has resulted in many people with LDs and forensic needs being placed in unnecessarily restrictive residential facilities a long way from their local communities. The needs of this client group have been the focus of a number of studies and UK government reports resulting in several initiatives including the creation of Learning Disability Forensic Support Services (FSS) both locally and nationally. Whilst public protection remains a priority, there is a growing consensus that prison/secure environments may not always be appropriate for people with LDs who have committed an offence and that custody/detention can exacerbate client behaviour and heighten their vulnerability. With this in mind, the project team developed a proposal to enable Community Learning Disability Teams (CLDTs) to provide support in the community to service users with less complex learning disabilities and offending behaviours.

Aim and objectives of the project

The project aimed to improve the care experience by; identifying the educational needs of CLDTs; enhancing their understanding of what works well for service users with LDs and offending behaviours; and enabling teams to support clients with less complex offending behaviours. To achieve these aims the objectives of the project were to:

- Explore the current knowledge, skills and working practices of CLDTs in supporting service users with LDs and offending behaviours
- Explore what works well for service users with LDs and offending behaviours through the gathering and analysis of their own stories
- Develop and deliver an education package to local CLDTs
- Evaluate outcomes in relation to leadership skills, and the experiences of staff and service users
- Develop the leadership capacities of the project team to bring about change in local services and strengthen local service capacity to establish a supportive, team response to the needs and risks of people with LDs and offending behaviour

Key activities and outcomes from the project

A number of approaches were used to support the intended outcomes. The Context Assessment Index (CAI) was used at one CLDT meeting along with a 'claims, concerns and issues' exercise to gain the views and perspectives of staff about working with people who have LDs and offending behaviours (n=23). Analysis of both exercises revealed; a perceived belief that the team had no power or authority regarding change; a low regard for individual clinicians; an absence of feedback by senior management; and a lack of time, knowledge or experience to undertake work with people with LDs and offending behaviour. This work informed a practice development 'away-day' involving all staff from the six CLDTs in the region (n=60). Using an 'appreciative approach' helped to identify a shared vision for the CLDT service; recognise the challenges posed and enable commitment to realistic individual participant strategies for use in practice. 'Stories' were collected by the Speech and Language Therapy department to gain service user's perspectives/experiences of care and stakeholders within the criminal justice system e.g. police, probation, courts etc. Data included; the need for staff support with intervention planning; staff consistency and punctuality at meetings; difficulties in understanding terminology; and more involvement in their care planning and decision making.

The combined findings from the approaches used have influenced the development of an education pack that will be delivered in the coming months. It highlights that in addition to a working knowledge of forensic issues and procedures, there is a fundamental need for practitioners/clinicians to have a good understanding of the needs of people with LDs. An evaluation strategy has been planned and will be implemented when the education pack has been delivered.

Implications for practice:

- Assuming that the contextual factors that would enhance/hinder practice development would be similar across all areas/CLDTs could have impacted on the progress of the project
- Gaining support and guidance both internally and externally was valuable to project leaders
- External facilitation of the development day provided access to higher levels of expertise, new ways of thinking and the ability to ask the difficult question
- The away day enabled the project team to begin to break down some barriers to working with this service user group and demystify the role of the FSS

A full project report including references can be accessed from: <http://www.fons.org/library/report-details.aspx?nstd=16565>

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