GUIDE

FOR PROFESSIONALS
IN HOUSING SUPPORT

The Erasmus +Strategic Partnership Project Erasmus+ "Training for Housing Support Workers" in short "TrainHouse united organisations working with homeless people in the Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, Spain and the United Kingdom. The project aimed to develop training materials to be used by professional staff, peer support workers and volunteers in supporting homeless people on their way to independent housing. Between 2016 and 2018, the six partners exchanged good practices on supporting homeless people into housing.

For the purposes of the guide, the term 'housing' is defined loosely: in some countries, accommodation services (like temporary hostels) offer studio apartments, often with private bathroom and kitchen(ette) facilities, while in others the focus was more on independent housing, whether shared by several people, used by one single person or even a family with children. In all scenarios, the homeless people received additional support to help maintain their tenancies by professional staff, peers and volunteers.

To see how housing support is defined by the authors, click here

INTRODUCTION OF THE ORGANISATIONS

Arrels Foundation, Spain

For 30 years, Arrels Foundation has been providing support to the people who sleep on the streets of Barcelona and it also works on raising awareness and transforming that reality. To make it possible, throughout all these years it has launched different projects and services thanks to the implication of a great team of volunteers and professionals.

Over the last few years, the foundation has promoted the participation of people who have lived on the street, and it is now working on the possibility of introducing a peer role in the Individual Support teams. These are the teams in charge of providing long-term, intensive and longitudinal case monitoring for people who have slept rough for many years and now live in a permanent housing unit in accordance with the Housing First model.

For more information about the organisation click here

Arrels

BMSZKI, Hungary

BMSZKI is the biggest homeless service provider in Budapest, Hungary, with a wide range of services, from outreach to day centres, medical services, shelters and temporary accommodation for men, women, couples as well as families with children. In addition to these, housing support programs have been implemented for people who are engaged to cooperate with our support team after moving to independent housing. BMSZKI is launching a Housing First light pilot in the fall of 2018, involving 25 rough sleepers.

For more information about the organisation click here

Menhely Alapítvány (Shelter Foundation), Hungary

Founded 30 years ago, Menhely Alapítvány provides a wide range of services to homeless individuals and families in Budapest, and fosters cooperation among various units of society. In our teams professionals, volunteers and in some units also peer support workers work together. Apart from our services, we operate a street paper called Fedél Nélkül ('Without Roof') along with art competitions and community social work.

Since the beginning, all our services have been built on each other organically. Besides basic institutional social services we provide housing advice to find and sustain housing (e.g. "On the Road"), but we also provide financial support for those who have found their accommodation ("Práter", "KHEK"). We have also implemented a pilot housing project in the intensive program "CornerHouse".

For more information about the organisation click here

Platforma pro Sociální Bydlení (The Czech Platform for Social Housing), Czech Republic

Platform for Social Housing is an umbrella organisation that unites 79 members - service providers, experts in the field of social housing and people in housing need, advocating for a Social Housing Bill that would end homelessness in the Czech Republic. One of the members of the Platform, IQ Roma servis has specific experience and training in housing stability support services based on Housing First principles.

From the very origin Platform for Social Housing has been keen on involving experts by experience to have their say in formulating the policy priorities of the organisation and consulting the strategic documents. People in housing need have been active in Social Housing Bill consultations, local housing policy priorities in several municipalities or at public hearings and press conferences organised by the Platform. IQ Roma servis employs peer consultants in their effort to rehouse and stabilise homeless families in the pilot Housing First programme in the Czech Republic.

For more information about the organisation click here

Platforma

St Mungo's, UK

Established in 1969 by a small group of rough sleepers in London, St. Mungo's is a Homelessness charity working with people across the South of England. St. Mungo's provides support and services to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless through outreach, hostels, supported housing and Housing First models as well as access to recovery, education, training and employment.

St. Mungo's employs 1200 staff to support 2,700 clients across 350 services.

For more information about the organisation click here

St Mungo's

Vailla vakinaista asuntoa ry, (No Fixed Abode NGO), Finland

Vva ry

No Fixed Abode is an NGO founded in 1986 by homeless people themselves. Organisation is not committed to any political parties' or religious communities' agenda, but aims to influence Finnish housing policies together with other stakeholders. The aim of the organisation is to get rid of shelters and make it possible for everyone to live in her or his own apartment.

The organisation has a long history of participation and peer support work done by the homeless people. The first 10 years the organisation was solely run on a voluntary basis. The first hired person was a former homeless man, who was in charge of running a woodwork workshop where carpentry skills were transferred from a master to apprentices. Participation of people who have experience in homelessness forms the organisation's guiding principle, which permeates every level of its actions ranging from peer work to administration.

Today No Fixed Abode has around 40 employees of whom 25 percent have experienced homelessness themselves. Organisation runs two housing units (Housing first) which have all together 100 apartments. The support provided to the residents of the units is tailored according to the individual needs of every resident. No Fixed Abode has a night center, a peer support and volunteering center, an outreach team working at nighttime, housing counselling and floating support, support for scattered housing, specialisation in homeless immigrants' issues, and a summer villa run by the peers.

For more information about the organisation click here

	Traditional services	Supported Housing	Housing First	Rapid Rehousing	Volunteers	Peer Support
Arrels (ES)	√	√	√		√	√
BMSZKI (HU)	√	√				
Menhely (HU)	√	√		√	√	√
Platforma (CZ)			√	√		√
St Mungo's (UK)	√	√	√		√	√
Vva ry (FI)	√	√	√		√	√

This Guide for Professional Staff contains a summary of the common lessons learnt in the project. We hope that other services supporting homeless people into independent living can use this brochure to get new tips and ideas on how to provide help more efficiently, or more creatively.

For the Volunteer Guide, click here

For the Peer Support Workers Guide, click here

CONTENT

PRINCIPLES OF PROFESSIONAL WORKING

A professional approach to working with people in the supported housing sector

There are **common principles** for professional working which are applicable in a variety of supported housing contexts.

- 🡆 **People should have the right to housing -** Every person should have the right to live in a safe and stable environment. When a service user is placed in accommodation, this shouldn't be counted as a benefit but as a basic service to which they are entitled.

> *"Every person is able to live independently should they be given sufficient support."*
>
> *(Professional Support Worker, Vva ry)*

- 🡆 **Recovery Oriented -** 'Recovery' means living a satisfying, hopeful, and meaningful life, even when there are ongoing limitations. It starts with the fundamental belief that not only is recovery possible, but it should be expected, regardless of the situation. Recovery is achieved through working with a range of different services and believing that people who were formerly homeless can live full lives. Professionals working with people who have been homeless need to recognise that homelessness is not inevitable; people can recover from homelessness and go on to live independently.

> "If there will be a flat, it will be warm there and we can watch TV lying in bed. We will be working, go home, put on a film... For me, there on the bank of the Danube with the cold wind blowing, this was so warming that I saw it as my personal dream to achieve."
>
> (Service User, Budapest)

→ **Person centred -** As far as possible, service users should be able to direct how they would like to be supported, rather than professionals providing a 'one size fits all approach'. Service users are the experts of their recovery and should be encouraged and empowered to take responsibility for their journey, rather than staff dictating what they need to do. Service users are free to decide which services they wish to take part in. Cooperation of service users and professional support workers is tailored. An individual and personalised agreement is made with every service user and support is provided in whatever way they need it.

> "Professionals are there just to help; to walk alongside the service user on the path which they chose. But the service users themselves are choosing the path. Our approach is based on the notion of progressive engagement so the service essentially does not predict the level of the family needs and gets involved when needed. Support should be tailored to individual service users and so it should be prepared to change based on service users' needs."
>
> (Professional Support Worker, Platforma)

→ **Strengths based -** Service users will not be defined by support needs, but recognised as people with skills, gifts, knowledge and experience. While we are here to support service users and ensure their safety, too great a focus on support needs or safety concerns can be uninspiring and overly negative. Research[1] shows that the absence of something negative is not enough to motivate many to change; change is more effectively driven by pursuing a life with purpose and meaning. On this basis, the emphasis of support should be placed on the things a service user enjoys doing, the strengths they have and their aspirations.

> "The professional has to allow the positive growth of a person"
>
> (Professional Support Worker, Arrels)

→ **Measured -** Staff members should reflect on how much support a service user requires. Providing too little support can breach contractual requirements or set a service user up to fail, but providing too much support can lead to a service user becoming dependent on professionals or can perpetuate a service user's needs. Support workers should understand that service users develop their independence, but when crises arise, they should adapt support accordingly.

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1) The Struggle to Be Strong: True Stories by Teens about Overcoming Tough Times- Edited by: Al Desetta, Sybil Wolin (page 167.)
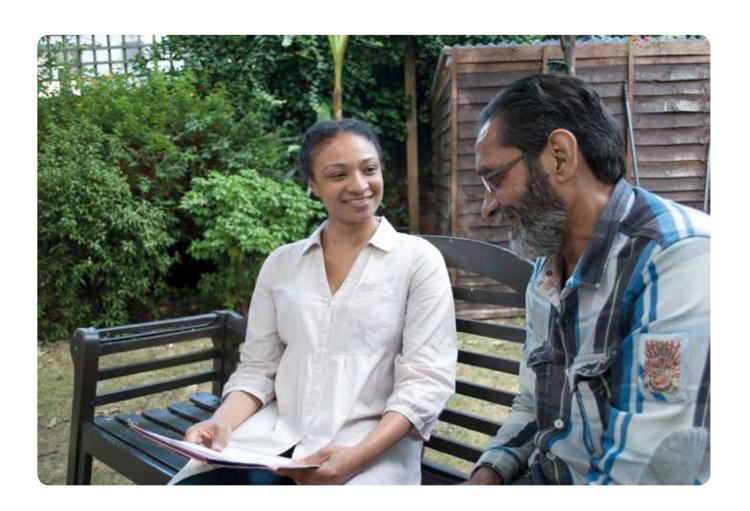
- **Non-judgemental -** Staff members should respond in a professional way even if they disagree with a service user's decision. While staff members should help service users to explore possible outcomes of a decision and consider any safety concerns, service users are ultimately free to choose the course of action they believe is best for them. Active engagement without coercion means offering our help without placing people under conditions. Professionals should turn to service users with respect and empathy.

> "Considering housing as a basic human right and it is not linked to further conditions such as participating in other supporting services or sobriety, selection is made based on needs"
>
> (Professional Support Worker, Budapest)

> "Statistically, people who have experienced homelessness have more problems concerning everyday life, including substance abuse, mental and physical health problems, previous incarceration and financial problems. A person driven into homelessness is consistently measured by their problems and through the problems of all people who are homeless. A person has the right to be regarded as a person with their own life history and all knowledge and experience involved with it, rather than as a collection of diagnoses and judgements made by the authorities."
>
> (Professional Support Worker, Vva ry)

- ● **Harm Reduction -** It is important to work towards the minimisation of risks. It is not about forcing service users to change their behaviour before they are ready. Instead, it is better to find safe ways to reduce the problematic behaviour which wouldn't have such a big impact on the health and wellbeing of service users. Housing provision should not be conditional on the reduction of substance use.

- ● **Equality -** Communication between professionals and service users needs to be as equal as possible. There shouldn't be any hierarchy between support workers, peer workers and service users. Respect for those we work with should be central to all services. Any information that we have about service users, and how it is used to form decisions, should be shared with them; it is their information, and their experiences. Distribution of information is one of the key features of egalitarian and radical social work. In traditional settings the professional worker has all the information of a person's problems and diagnoses over their life history, while the information that the service user receives is regulated. Service users' matters are discussed when they are not present and they do not always know how information is used. Professionals should try to share all information with service users and bring them to every discussion which concerns them.

"It is important that also our service users should not feel that they have to meet our expectations. We work with the service user to reach a point where they can reflect on their own situation objectively, set realistic goals, possess abilities and skills that help them to better position themselves in the future"
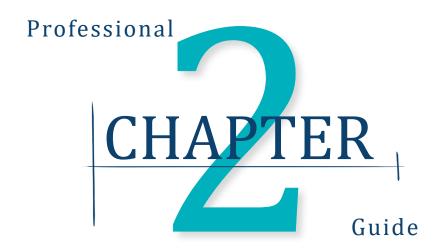
(Professional Support Worker, Menhely Alapítvány)

Principles applicable in a Housing First Context

Further to these principles, consideration for Housing First may also include:

- ● Supported services and housing support are separated
- ● Housing units are scattered and not located in the same block
- ● It is already known that while some service users are able to live independently after a certain time of support, others - temporarily or permanently - require support. It is important that service users should not feel left alone. The follow-up phase should be planned carefully, and service users should know the availability of the professional support worker.

AIMS OF PROFESSIONAL WORKING

What needs to be achieved as a professional?

UNDERSTANDING THE SELF

One of the mistakes many professionals make is to assume that their role is to 'rescue' people from homelessness, which puts the emphasis on the professional and not the service user. This can create power disparities, infantilise service users and create dependency. It is important to empower service users to make decisions and be the key to their own recovery. Professionals should help service users to identify their own needs and to understand what their strengths are and what they can do achieve their own goals. Staff need to relate to people and develop rapport and trust in this relationship. Professionals therefore need to understand how they communicate and influence other people and situations.

UNDERSTANDING THE INDIVIDUAL

It is important not to reduce service users to one thing i.e. that their problem is merely about substance use, lack of housing or mental health. We appreciate that a holistic approach to support is important and that without focusing on each area, any individual issue can worsen. If service users do not have the strategies to manage their own health or if they do not have sufficient positive relationships and networks, then they may not be able to sustain their accommodation.

Supporting people to recover from homelessness should involve improving their autonomy, dignity and quality of life. To do this, it is important to spend time getting to know the person without resorting to labels or judgements. It is important to consider the pace of each person's development; no one person is the same.

> "We were working together in the program when he decided to leave the hostel and move to his own flat. He required a whole year and countless conversations to feel strong enough and presentable to see a property agent and an attorney. By now he has bought the flat, but does not want to move in yet, because they started to like him at the hostel. But it is also possible that he does not feel ready to live independently yet."
>
> (Professional Support Worker, Menhely Alapítvány)

NOT TO GIVE ADVICE OR TO MAKE DECISIONS FOR THE SERVICE USER

It is important to strike the right balance when following a framework of support; it can be easy to be too 'laissez-faire' or too controlling. The latter is normally very typical in homeless services and accommodation and not preferred either by rough sleepers or by Housing First. Total laissez-faire with no expectations and rare visits is enough for some beneficiaries but not for others. This is when intuition comes into the picture. The professional support worker has to hear what has been said and what may not have been said, they have to contact service users regularly based on their intuition without being controlling.

> "Our aim is to make a resident out of a homeless person. No conditions linked to housing. Here is the flat. The support worker only makes suggestions, does not control. In the spirit of "honest love" I have to be able to tell them what I see, how they damage themselves, how they hinder their own development. But at the same time I don't see my service users as victims, but rather as people capable of developing and taking responsibility. Consequently I never act instead of service users, I act together with them."
>
> (Professional Support Worker, Menhely Alapítvány)

In practice it can often prove to be difficult to find the balance between the roles of a "professional friend" (when helping with moving in or during renovation works) and a habitual support worker (checking whether tenants have paid their bills). There are cases of contradictory roles when, for example, a tenant doesn't take care of the property, or when the level of substance use becomes impossible to handle.

SUPPORT WORKERS SHOULD REFLECT ON EVERY NEED INCLUDING BASIC NEEDS

Professional support workers always have to reflect on the most basic needs of service users. This need can manifest itself in various ways, even in asking for help in personal matters such as difficulties in a relationship. In this case the professional support worker cannot give advice, but is there to listen with their full attention and without any judgment. The experience of being listened to also has a therapeutic effect - it can help one to articulate and verbalise feelings and emotions, and think through certain problems more consciously.

Many people experience social isolation when they are homeless. This can be a real challenge to someone's successful recovery. Helping people to connect with others and form positive social networks is key to supporting people to move away from homelessness. Service users usually express that they can only count on themselves and their spouse, if they have one. General experience of the examined housing projects shows that social connections of service users remain limited (only a few people make new and deep social connections; connections with old friends and family members are usually already broken) even after they are housed. The connection between the professional support worker and service user is therefore crucial.

"When a person lives on the streets, they break, sometimes almost completely, the majority of the social links they had. One of the most critical efforts they have to make when they leave the streets is to create a new social network and to confront loneliness. When someone lives in an apartment by themselves, this solitude is very present, and we have to think about how to deal with this so that they have options that go further than staying at home watching TV or coming to the Arrels day centre."

(Professional Support Worker, Arrels)

SUPPORTING PEOPLE TO GAIN SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND INDEPENDENCE

Our aim is to enhance the circumstances of individuals and families threatened by homelessness. With that in mind, accommodation should be seen as a means of achieving the improvement, rather than the ultimate goal. Support work is successful when the service user reaches the point where they are able to look at their situation objectively, set realistic goals, possess skills and abilities that can help them to get into a better position. Our task is to make our ideas transparent, transform experiences into easy-to-follow steps and systematically contribute to independent problem solving.

SUPPORTING PEOPLE TO MAINTAIN HOUSING

The aim of the professional is to work together with the supported person to help them to overcome things that may lead to losing their home.

"Experience tells us that the crucial aspect of successful rehousing is to furnish an apartment. Mostly, families do have their own plans on how to furnish the apartment and need very low support in doing so. However, in a number of cases this has been crucial because for different reasons, the families are not able to make the place their home and the very crucial period of new life could be missed. When the supportive worker realises that there might be an issue in making the place nice and comfortable we use several options of support."

(Professional Support Worker, Platforma)

SUPPORTING PEOPLE TO EXIT SERVICES

Many people who have experienced homelessness require services to support them with their recovery. However, it is important to support people where possible to exit services by developing their assets, strengths and resilience, so they can live sustainable, independent lives.

EVIDENCING WORK AND PROGRESS

It is important to record and evidence all interactions and progress accurately so improvements can be monitored. (see tools).

SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES REQUIRED

What makes for an effective professional?

ABILITY TO ESTABLISH CONNECTIONS WITH THE SUPPORTED PERSON

The main pillar of successful professional support work is trust between the service user and the professional support worker. Building trust over time can be a solid basis for solving difficulties in the future. The professional support worker can only help in issues that they are told about.

In order to build trust with service users, ideally the professional support worker should:

- have the ability to establish connections
- be open-minded, non-judgmental
- be empathic
- be optimistic
- be intuitive

WHAT DOES 'INTUITION' MEAN IN PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT WORK?

Professionals should have some kind of social intelligence; they have to understand the context and see correlations. They also have to be practical. In every situation they should have an idea for a positive solution. This will be based on their knowledge from previous studies and regulation, but more importantly on practical experience of support work with their current and past caseload. This intuition is built up by gaining practical experiences and getting to know the service users well. For example when a service user calls their support worker with a seemingly unimportant question, the professional should know/feel (based on their previous common history) whether this is really something unimportant or if it is related to something else. In which case, they should go and see the service user as soon as possible.

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

In some contexts and levels of threshold, specific qualifications are required for professional work. If it is not a specific requirement of the role, it may not be essential to have professionals based on these conditions alone. A diverse team of professionals with different levels of education, work experience, lived experience, age, gender, sexuality, culture etc. enriches a professional approach for the service users.

'Some of the best staff I have worked with have been baristas and bar staff or people who have worked on shop floors. They have really good people skills. Being able to relate to people, especially those from different backgrounds and those with massively different lifestyles and values is key. St Mungo's recruits staff based on their approaches to work (called core competencies) rather than simply due to experience or qualifications. We believe we can give people the skills to do the job rather if they work in line with our values and competencies.'

(Service Manager, St Mungo's)

An organisation may support professionals with further qualifications or study. This can be used to support a service approach such as the management of volunteers or specialist approaches to supporting people around issues such as substance use or mental health.

Professional

CHAPTER 4

Guide

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Training, learning and developing as a professional

This chapter summarises some practical ways in which a professional can learn and develop.

> 'Professionals should permanently train and learn, not only to advance knowledge but also to improve the quality of the action through the critical analysis of their experience'
>
> (Professional Support Worker, Arrels)

TRAINING

Training can often be found through various means external to the organisation. An example of an organisational learning and development programme can be found here

Areas for training may include:

- ➲ Principles and methodology of Housing First
- ➲ Substance Use
- ➲ Physical Health
- ➲ Mental Health
- ➲ Diversity & Inclusion
- ➲ Advanced/Complex housing training
- ➲ Benefits/welfare support
- ➲ Personal/professional soft skills
- ➲ Intensive family support
- ➲ Critical time intervention

MENTORING

Mentoring can be an effective way for staff and managers to develop transferable skills and experience to advance in their career. A mentoring scheme can aim to:

- ➲ Offer a one-to-one learning opportunity that enables both mentors and mentees to develop professionally
- ➲ Help mentees identify the steps they want to take and the skills they will need to achieve their professional development goals
- ➲ Provide mentees with role models from within the organisation and support them to develop the skills and/or confidence needed to progress in their career/role.

SHADOWING

Professionals can work alongside each other both within and outside an organisation to gain experience or understanding for their development. This can allow professionals to:

- ➲ Share best practice and learn from one another
- ➲ View things from alternative perspectives and see the bigger picture
- ➲ Deepen insight of other roles and functions by understanding how other roles and teams work

To see more about shadowing click here

FORUMS AND NETWORKS

Developing communities of practices and encouraging learning opportunities through networks and forums enhances learning in key areas.

RECOVERY COLLEGES

Recovery Colleges are based on the 'recovery' ethos and the learning experience is based on principles of co-production. Courses are designed, delivered and attended by service users, staff and volunteers. The environment creates learning between people regardless of their 'role' or 'identity' within the organisation or service. Everyone becomes a peer.

OTHER LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

- Experience of other programmes
- English language training in order to access literature and participate at international workshops and conferences
- Contracting landlords, legal issues
- How to support service users in (re-)learning housekeeping skills, financial literacy and awareness, household management
- Meeting with other professionals from other organisations/social services domestically or at international conferences, exchanges or workshops.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

The importance of ongoing reflective practice as a professional

WHY REFLECTIVE PRACTICE?

> "People carry large burden."
>
> (Service Manager, St Mungo's)

Reflective practice allows people to reflect on the collective work and appreciate how the self is impacting on, and affected by, the situations faced. All professionals should have access to reflective practice. This can be done in a variety of ways, each providing similar benefits to the individual and the team.

Ideally support workers are a part of a supported housing team or teams with a mix of those who do or do not work in the housing program. Even when it has only taken place briefly in team meetings, professional support workers express its importance. Cases of service users can be discussed and professional advice can be shared.

Such discussions and/or regular supervision sessions (either individual or in group) help support workers to develop their professional competencies in the following ways:

- Reflect on their work
- Develop self-awareness and find the right boundaries (especially when they may become emotionally involved in some cases)
- Be more efficient (get practical advice)
- Strengthen their motivation
- Avoid burnout

OPTIONS FOR REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Team based

- Monthly meetings with an external facilitator
- Weekly team meetings where all professionals meet and discuss cases
- Ad hoc or post incident - opportunity to analyse/reflect 'what happened?'
- Team away days

Individual

- Regular supervisions with line managers
- Regular supervisions with external people who are 'supervisors' if people find work overwhelming
- Access to coaching and mentoring

Case study – Worker profile based team reflection

At weekly team meetings, every supportive worker reflects on their relationship with families with the aim of ongoing collaboration. The team supports the worker in practical suggestions of procedures but also tries to reflect the stages of collaboration in the model of 'workers profiles' considering possible changes in the approach.

'CASE CALLOVER' MEETINGS

These allow for teams to ensure continuous improvement of the support provided to service users via:

- Discussion with staff about the techniques they are using to engage with and motivate people using our services
- Providing clear and detailed feedback to service user facing staff on how they are supporting their service users
- Supporting staff where/when service user work is challenging
- Providing advice and coaching on areas which staff may need guidance
- Pre-empting and managing any emerging performance issues.

> "Housing unit workers work in shifts so they have a daily short team meeting for exchanging information, and once a week there is a longer more thorough meeting where the team go through the situation of every resident. Workers who are participating in support for scattered housing are having regular meetings of cases but reflective practice is not as thorough as in housing units due to lack of time and resources. Most common reflective practice is case discussion with a colleague or 'head of low threshold services'. There is also external supervision available."
>
> (Professional Support Worker, Vva ry)

Successful reflective practice needs efficient information sharing with other organisations (international and domestic), and service users.

ENGAGING WITH SERVICE USERS

Developing relationships to support service user work

Service users and support workers should meet regularly to help establish expectations and rapport as early as possible. Matching service users with professionals should be a considered process and not arbitrary. Encouraging service users to choose a keyworker based on personalities, interests and other useful criteria can be beneficial. Services can also support service users to switch workers if it is thought this may result in more positive outcomes.

LANGUAGE

Language can play a vital role in developing a trusting relationship. It is especially important to be aware of terminology and avoid the use of labels and pejorative terms. For example, it can be more productive to say that 'someone experiences homelessness' rather than labelling people as homeless. It can be beneficial to say someone has 'unusual beliefs' or that they 'hear voices' rather than suggest they are merely 'delusional' or 'schizophrenic'. It is less judgemental to discuss somebody's use or dependency on drugs or alcohol rather than labelling people as alcoholics or drug addicts, etc.

WHEN PROFESSIONALS FIND ENGAGEMENT CHALLENGING

It is important to believe that very few service users are entirely disengaged from a service; any contact or conversation, no matter how brief, is a form of engagement. It is vital to avoid the labelling of service users as 'someone who is not engaging' as this can have a detrimental effect. Service users have a responsibility for engaging with the support offered but professionals are also responsible for ensuring that the support offered is motivational, engaging and useful.

Questions for a professional to ask themselves when trying to engage with service users:

- Are we fulfilling our values and principles of working?
- Are we taking into account any disabilities or support needs in how we offer support?
- Are service users working well with external agencies? If so, what is it about their approach that the service user prefers?
- Is there any duplication with external services? Are service users having to have the same conversations, or having to fill in similar support plans/documents, with more than one service? If so, could plans be shared or completed together rather than repeated?
- Does the service user prefer group activities rather than one-to-one support, and if so, could this be offered?
- Is there a problem with the internal environment (e.g. too noisy or distracting), and if so, could some meetings take place outside of the service, for example in a local cafe?
- Does the service user seem to engage better with another professional?
- Is there a more suitable time for meetings (e.g. later on in the day)?
- Is the service suitable for the service user, or is support offered too high or low? Should an alternative service be considered?
- Does the service user prefer to work informally or formally? Do they prefer to fill in paperwork themselves? Do they prefer not to see any paperwork at all?
- Would the service user prefer to engage with peer workers or volunteers?

It is good to ask service users for feedback on why they may not wish to engage, and meet and change our approach as much as possible

INFORMAL WORKING

Formal working can create a counter-productive dynamic and disparity around power, goals, pressures etc. Working informally can provide a more collaborative and relaxed approach.

Examples could include going for walks, participating in practical tasks such as cooking or attending courses at Recovery Colleges. This method can prove useful when people are at a pre-contemplative stage or when formal meetings are hard to organise. Informal discussions can still be goal orientated and recorded as part of formal processes.

BEING THERE IN EVERYDAY SITUATIONS

The process of moving into new accommodation can be a vital stage of settling into a new life. Service users can assist with practical tasks to help the move-in, and take ownership of their recovery. Reports of both service users and professional support workers prove that joint work during renovation builds trust between them, and strengthens attachment to the apartment.

> "One of the ways we established the relationship was to help service users with moving in, repairing, cleaning etc. It is important to have in mind, however, that the professional thinks with the service user, not for the service user."
>
> (Professional Support Worker, Platforma)

FLEXIBILITY WHEN SUPPORTING PEOPLE INTO HOUSING

It is recommended to get in touch with service users when they are still on the street, support them in moving, official issues and developing household management skills.

Forms of contact: in Housing First generally support workers visit service users in their homes according to previously agreed appointments. This is in line with service user-driven direction and also provides space for free and deeper conversations leading to trust. This process can be started when the person still lives on the street. Support workers state that home visits are the best opportunities to assess the actual and further needs of the tenant, especially regarding housing.

> "A home visit could be 5 mins or 3 hours depending on what is coming on – adjust to the needs of the service user"
>
> (Professional Support Worker, BMSZKI)

Professional support work requires flexibility from the support worker. For instance, the timing of visits has to be adjusted to the needs of the service user, office hours and the availability of the landlord (for example in the evening hours). The frequency of meetings with landlords varies depending on the landlord. Some landlords never meet the tenant, only the support worker, while others live in the same premises as the service user. Depending on the needs of the service user, professional support workers can be present at these meetings.

Professional support workers should get in touch with every tenant or future tenant at least once a week. If there are no urgent issues, this can be a phone call as well.

> "We aim to be a conduit between service users and the system where the relationship between the two is or has been potentially fraught. We walk a fine line between the two to develop a relationship and to facilitate a connection."
>
> (Service Manager, St Mungo's)

ENGAGING WITH SERVICE USER GROUPS

It is important for people to be active members of their community, where they can get involved in various support groups and share their experiences with peers. This encourages the development of positive social networks, and increases staff capacity.

Some things to note when working with a group of people:

- People do not automatically benefit from being in a group if there is not enough common ground and/or shared experiences. In these instances, it can feel like a waste of time.
- People who are seemingly in a similar situation, may have very different life histories, so careful preparation must be done when groups are formed.
- Group work does not replace individual work.
- Some people do not benefit from group work because they are not comfortable in a group dynamic or the group purpose is not right. Thorough individual work can be beneficial before finding a group.
- Although group work can increase staff capacity, it needs dedicated support and resources.

Examples for Group activities

For full details click here

- Group work prior to getting into supported housing
- Group work during being housed
- Sharing and evaluating impacts of the new situation
- Establishment of and raising awareness on house rules
- Practical issues of co-residence
- Skills development groups
- Processing experiences of service users regarding employment or looking for a job
- Projective experience processing group
- Household management training

Case study - BMSZKI

Monthly group sessions worked as a first step of social integration for people who used to be homeless. It provided a safe environment where they could share things with each other.

Topics of group sessions reflected the needs of group members, including: rent contracts, official issues, finding a job and employment, household management, settling in to their home, connections with neighbours and colleagues, responsibility of maintaining a rental.
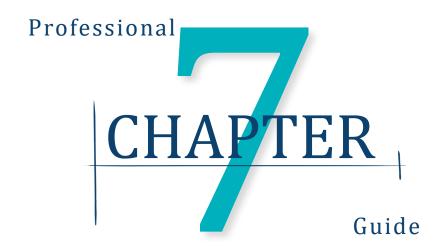
Main results of the group sessions:

- participants learnt how to reflect
- service users received feedback from others besides the support worker
- important emotional support after moving in – which can be a major positive change that has to be processed emotionally
- a good base for new connections and peer support: participants started to help each other outside group sessions
- opportunity to open up in a supporting environment, a meaningful way of spending time
- empowerment of participants

EVALUATING WORK

Feedback from service users on support work is highly valuable as they are the ones who can really tell how useful the support is for them and what further needs they have. Data on satisfaction of service users is best gathered by external, unbiased evaluators.

WORKING WITH OTHER TEAMS/AGENCIES

Providing support across a professional network

> 'The work should be interdisciplinary with constant coordination so that the action in support of people is coherent and constructive'
>
> (Professional Support Worker, Vva ry)

DEVELOPING WORKING RELATIONS

It is recommended to involve relevant support workers and organisations from the early stages of support, to share skills and increase service user motivation to remain engaged. Cooperation and involvement can be developed through one-day or multi-day team building training where common values and working cultures can be set.

Group sessions with other organisations (regular case discussion meetings, or supervision sessions) can be especially beneficial when various organisations are working with the same service users over a long period of time. These sessions can serve as a base for exchanging ideas and sharing information and good practices, discussing specific cases of service users.

MAINTAINING TENANCIES/LEASES

Close relationships with landlords or the local authorities (where relevant) can reduce evictions by preventing issues with neighbours and debts.

> "The vast majority of problems with neighbours appear months after a family moves in. The most important aspect in controlling the relationships in the neighbourhood is to have actual information from landlord, police and other relevant actors. The basic approach rests on the principle of immediate warning and rapid response. Any time a complaint is recorded, the response of the supportive team should be very quick and reasonable."
>
> (Professional Support Worker, Platforma)

Taking steps to deal with problems

(For the full article click here)

- Understand the context of the complaint and get in touch with all relevant parties.
- Discuss the situation with the tenant(s)
- Plan how to restore the normal situation based on the tenant(s)' decisions which are discussed and appropriated with the help of the supportive worker
- Discuss the plan with all relevant parties
- Reflect upon the plan every week presenting outcomes to other relevant partners, especially the landlord
- Develop an early warning mechanism which is intended to inform all relevant parties about any emergent debt
- Use any automated payment methods to avoid build up of debt

BALANCE OF POWER

Professionals must have the capability and 'professional self-esteem' to ensure that the language and communication is not 'colonised' by professional terminology and power relations so that the supported person has the possibility to have a say in their own matters.

8
CHAPTER

TOOLS FOR SUPPORTING PEOPLE

Useful things to have in place

> 'The most important and often most overlooked tool we have is time'
>
> (Professional Support Worker, Arrels)

Developing a professional toolkit enables flexibility and creativity in approaching challenges. Some elements are vital in providing effective support to service users.

CASE MANAGEMENT TOOLS

These can be used to frame service user's needs, aspirations and goals. Regular documentation (monthly or after each contact with the service user /services provided), such as written notes or memos, are a great help in monitoring, reflecting on and developing support work. When handing over a case or involving other professionals in the support process, such reports can save time and ensure that all necessary information gets to the professionals involved. They can also support deeper understanding and analysis, especially when services have not been effective.

Electronic/online database - It can be useful to have systems in place to record and monitor service user progress and outcomes which can be accessed and shared across teams of professionals.

This can make it easier to monitor a range of indicators, such as: services used; forms of accommodation used; welfare benefits; and rental debt.

Support Overview - this provides a summary of a service user's support needs and strengths. This will then inform case management, begin to evidence progress and inform which services the service user is referred to.

Safety & Wellbeing Plan - this is designed to facilitate discussion around any factors which could impact on the safety or wellbeing of a service user or others, and to put in place a plan to reduce the likelihood and consequences of those factors.

Action Plans - these are used to build on broader tools to support service users to:

- Reflect on their achievements, strengths and goals
- Consider areas that they would like support around
- Put together a plan to achieve goals by breaking them down into individual steps

"Outcomes Star" – based on the 'Stages of Change' model (see below) this enables service users to explain which areas they are strong in and require little (or no) support, and which areas require more focus, allowing support to be prioritised accordingly.

Warwick-Edinburgh scale – this tool focuses on wellbeing. It can be used at different stages or periodically to illustrate a service user's progress and to promote healthy discussions and reflections on issues that are affecting a service user's situation.

METHODS FOR WORKING WITH SERVICE USERS

Motivational interviewing - a service user centred approach aimed at stimulating change by helping service users to explore and resolve ambivalence.

Coaching - a service user centred approach aimed at supporting a service user to identify and achieve goals.

Active listening - listening carefully to what a speaker is saying and giving feedback through questions, encouragement and other signs, such as mirroring language and tone.

ITEP (International Treatment Effectiveness Programme) - ITEP Support Plans use a visual communication and care planning approach, providing a series of mapping exercises that can help service user identify needs and support in defined areas of their life. ITEP can help to inform the assessment of need and resulting actions.

CYCLE OF CHANGE

The Cycle of Change theory can be used to understand that behaviour change does not happen in one step, but rather that people tend to progress through different stages on their way to successful change:

- **Pre-contemplation** - Not yet acknowledging that there is a problem behaviour that needs to be changed (Denial)
- **Contemplation** - Acknowledging that there is a problem but not yet ready or sure of wanting to make a change
- **Preparation** - Getting ready to change and small experimental behavioural changes
- **Action** - Changing behaviour
- **Consolidation** - Actively consolidating the gains made during action
- **Lapse** - Temporary loss of motivation caused by personal distress or social pressures

Using the Cycle of Change

When using the cycle of change model, the professionals' aim becomes threefold. It is to:

1. Always be proactive, but also be patient and allow time. (Expecting behaviour change by simply telling someone, for example, who is still in the "pre-contemplation" stage that he or she must go to a certain number of meetings with their drugs worker in a certain time period is likely to be counterproductive if they are not ready to change).
2. Identify with the service user the stage they are in, in relation to a given issue. (Pre-contemplative service users may be unable to engage in this process)
3. Support and motivate the service user to enable them to move to the next stage. The support and motivation required will be different depending on which stage they are in.

TIME AND TIMING IN THE WORKPLACE

The timing of support is directly related to the overall quality of the support. In order to give the right kind of support at the right time, support workers must fully understand the person they're working with, and know them as people, not just a 'supported person'. As discussed elsewhere, it is essential to remember that the supported person should own the process, not the worker.

Having enough time is another major tool in support work. People are not just dependent on outside support; they also have capacity to solve their problems, recover and heal by themselves, given enough time and support to do so. People who are homeless often have problems and fixed patterns of everyday life, which have developed over a long period of time. Recovery and adjusting to the new conditions of life will not happen overnight.

If a move-on plan involving work or education is put into action soon after someone comes off the street, they may feel overwhelmed. Settling into accommodation after a period of homelessness can be challenging, and people need time to adjust to their new lives. Rushing people through this stage can cause them to withdraw from support. Six months or one year later, the same plan might be just what they want.

In addition to supporting people with your skills, time and patience, it is useful to have access to certain items to make their new life more comfortable.

Basic toolkit - useful for small maintenance issues or breakages which can easily be fixed. It is useful to help the service user distinguish what could be repaired by themselves and when they should call a professional..

'Sometimes help in practical matters that is considered being outside of the process of social work, done together with the service user, is an essential part of the work. It creates a sense of togetherness and trust. It helps to create a supportive relationship where there is genuine personal contact in the everyday life of the service user'

(Professional Support Worker, Vva ry)

Car/cart for transporting - occasionally it is needed to move a service user and/or their possessions. It can also make it easier to make visits, respond to crisis situations and go with service users to initial meetings with other local services.

Mobile phone - This helps the service user and support worker stay in contact easily. Internet access also helps resolve simple issues / queries promptly. There may be an opportunity to fundraise for phones for service user use.

Petty cash - to finance small purchases where relevant and appropriate

Breathalyzer - for use where relevant

MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Other issues to consider with professionals

INDUCTION

It is important for professionals to follow a thorough induction process to ensure they are fully aware of the expectations and responsibilities of the role.

(For a sample of role description click here)

MANAGING WORK AND PERFORMANCE

Having monthly supervisions that link to annual appraisals provide professionals with clear assessment, reflection and clarity of expectation on their role. Supervision should incorporate a Personal Development Plan, informed by the needs of the role and ambitions of the post holder.

> **Assessment can be carried out against:**
>
> - **Performance standards** - provide clear expectations for staff to meet in their role
> - **Core competencies** - a set of behaviours associated with organisational values, which inform how the work of the professional should be approached.

An assessment can be made up of personal reflections, the perspective of the line manager and the collation of feedback from immediate work colleagues, service users and volunteers, as well as stakeholders from outside of the team and the organisation.

FURTHER SUPPORT

Workplace allies - colleagues tasked with providing support to others who wish to discuss issues outside of their line management.

External Assistance - as well as professional support, there may be options to provide confidential support through third party sources. Organisations may provide this face to face, through telephone lines or online support.

Remaining focused - staff often prefer to be based in one single service, rather than across several ones. This approach is also more efficient for the business and can help to retain staff.

Flexibility - it is important to remain flexible during project implementation, respecting the range of skills and expertise staff will bring to the service.

"What were the strengths of the project that made it worth being part of it?

It was important that our job was well-paid. It was also very inspiring that we were free in how we worked. We created the frameworks, tools, working methods together - there was no pressure coming from above. We could fly, weren't restricted by the usual professional framework."

(Cornerhouse/Menhely Interview)

For the full interview click here

"Before starting the project did you have any idea about how much time it would consume and how it would respect work-life balance?

I expected the project to take a lot of time and that I wouldn't be doing a classic 9 to 5 job. In fact we had very little free time, we only allowed ourselves to have more free time towards the end of the project. With time, instead of 2-3 of us holding group sessions, it was only one of us. In the beginning we loved group sessions so much that we didn't mind that they took so much time."

(Cornerhouse/Menhely Interview)

Creative breaks/secondments - Providing creative breaks for professionals for writing studies, conducting research, making publications.

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