

Gloucestershire activity champions project

The Orchard Trust aimed to change the culture of activity provision in residential care homes by engaging managers in the training of their Activity Champions. They wanted to promote the idea of a 'whole home approach' to activity provision, encouraging all staff members, not just Activity Coordinators and care home managers, to make everyday tasks into a 'meaningful activity' for residents.

Background

The Orchard Trust is a Gloucestershire-based charity providing a range of support services to adults with learning disabilities. Their training team is responsible for the delivery of training and development to both internal staff, and to customers from a range of industries, within and outside of Gloucestershire.

Previous specialised training courses run by the Trust had highlighted that many Activity

Coordinators felt very isolated in their role, had no network of support, and often faced considerable pressure from managers and other staff as they were the only staff member responsible for activities. Talking to stakeholders also highlighted the need for a culture change in care homes – instead of providing structured, planned activities to residents, a wide range of every-day tasks can also be made into engaging and meaningful activities, with all staff being actively engaged in this approach.

What we wanted to achieve

The Trust wanted to develop a sustainable network of trained and qualified Activity Coordinators, who would act as ambassadors for the 'whole home approach' to activity provision within Gloucestershire. They would also ensure that meaningful, person-centred activity provision is an important part of making care home residents feel unique and valued, and that their wellbeing is at the heart of the support they are given. This included the 'upskilling' of those joining the project, as well as engaging care home managers in the training of their Activity Coordinators.

The project also aimed to link up with individuals working in activity provision more widely, not just the original project participants. This would ensure a collaborative approach to training, provide ongoing support for Activity Coordinators, and facilitate the spread of ideas and best practice.

What we did

Activities included:

- Developing and delivering a Level 2 QCF qualification on activity provision, specifically for Activity Coordinators. Each unit was delivered in a single day of training and there were five highly participative taught days in total over a period of three months. The 38 students were also expected to complete additional coursework in their own time between training sessions, which was marked and returned to them at the beginning of each new unit;
- Engaging managers right from the start (the first project meeting included Activity Champions and their managers, with managers signing a joint 'Certificate of Commitment'). Throughout the project, they were asked to observe their Activity Coordinators, write an observation report which formed part of the course assessment, and work together with Activity Coordinators to write 'Smart Action Plans'. They were also invited back halfway through the project to watch presentations from the Activity Coordinators, and they attended an awards ceremony for the students and their guests.
- An Activity Champions Network was set up by the course attendees and regular meetings were held with a wide range of stakeholders (Activity Champions and their managers; Personal Assistants; domiciliary care workers; the Care Home Support Team from the NHS and the County Council's own Quality Assurance Review Team) to discuss the sustainability of the network and possibilities for expanding it within Gloucestershire.

What we achieved

All 38 students successfully completed the qualification and the 'training has had a massive impact' in terms of:

- Significantly improving the Activity Champions' practical skills in implementing activities, including making life biographies;
- Encouraging Activity Coordinators to use their creativity to develop innovative ideas for activities and for presenting ideas to their managers;
- Facilitating the sharing of best practice (one participating organisation designed a handbook for staff, giving ideas about how they could get directly engaged in a 'whole home approach' to activity provision);
- Giving Activity Coordinators the confidence to speak to their managers and make changes in their organisation;
- Creating the Gloucestershire Activity Champions Network - a hub of passionate individuals allowing isolated Activity Champions to interact and socialise with each other; and
- Raising the profile of Activity Coordinators within the community, as well as making managers more aware of the role Activity Coordinators play.

For individuals requiring help and support, one care home manager reported that residents now see the home as "a second lease of life", and another individual involved in the project told the story of an elderly resident suffering from severe

“ It was all about the culture change and getting the managers on board... there was such a cross-section of people on these courses...the training has had a massive impact ”

Project manager

dementia who, despite struggling to acknowledge or recognise anyone anymore, formed a close bond with her Activity Coordinator.

More generally, successfully bidding for this funding gave Orchard Trust the confidence to put in another Skills for Care bid (which they have recently won) and they have been asked to speak at several Skills for Care conferences which has improved their links with Skills for Care. The project has 'promoted the Orchard Trust in a very favourable light', including their being invited to speak at the Gloucestershire Care Providers' Association's annual conference.

What we learnt

The Network meetings have been successful in engaging a wide range of stakeholders and raising awareness of activity coordination. As a result of

their success, Gloucestershire County Council has now agreed to fund bi-monthly meetings, with 90 people attending the last one.

The Network Group has since been asked to produce an 'Activity Provision Checklist' – an audit tool for care providers that can be used to assess activity provision in their care setting. This tool is now used by Gloucestershire County Council's Quality Assurance Team when they are assessing care home provision through their internal inspections.

While the project had various successes, challenges highlighted by the project management team included: the difficulty marking the work of 38 students, especially as the project ran in tandem with their normal day-to-day work; employers complying with administration required to be involved in the project.



For more information please contact

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Skills for Care Recommends

From activity provision and learning disabilities qualifications to associated guidance, Skills for Care produces various resources to strengthen care worker skills and enable better care provision.

Recommendations for CQC Providers Guide

This guide helps registered managers to comply with CQC expectations around various areas of workforce development. Section 5 highlights how awareness of learning disabilities can be included in induction training.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/CQC

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