

## Community Navigator Services CIC

### Refocus - fresh perspectives on personalisation

**Personalisation is described by the Department of Health as meaning ‘every person who receives support, whether provided by statutory services or funded by themselves, will have choice and control over the shape of that support in all care settings’. In practice it is difficult for all the people involved to know how to make this happen. Personalisation begins with listening, and talking to each other with respect.**

**This user-led organisation developed a programme for care professionals, and people who need care and support, using their own experiences to learn how to put personalisation into practice in their daily work.**

Community Navigator Services CIC (CNS) is a user-led organisation set up in 2014 with two key aims: to support people to help themselves, and to help organisations become more accessible and approachable. We are passionate about social justice, co-production, and personalisation. We are experienced in advocacy, training, coaching, mentoring, and communication.

We are based in Solihull in the West Midlands, and our core team is six people including two personal assistants. The three directors are: Clenton Farquharson, awarded an MBE in 2014 for services to disabled people; Robert Punton, advocate and activist; and Jack Nicholas, corporate and creative communicator.

We were looking for, but could not find, something that would help us have a better understanding of personalisation and how to use it to best effect. We could also see that while personalisation was a hot topic in management circles, it was not working on the ground. Both organisations and front line staff were getting bogged down in tasks and not having the time or focus to think about relationships. We believed this was affecting the quality of lives for both workforce and people who need care and support, and that we had to do something to help people achieve better lives.

### What we wanted to achieve

Much of the social care industry still works in a task-oriented, time-based way, with training provided via toolkits. This means that care-workers often feel subordinate to processes, while people receiving support are denied the better lives they desire and have been promised. We thought there had to be a different approach: that we could start with our lived experiences in the real world, and introduce the change there.

Our specific goal was that there would be empowerment towards achieving a better life for both front line staff and people who need care and support, achieved through a greater understanding and practical use of personalisation and co-production. Our aim was to develop a programme for a mix of people: frontline care-workers, managers and people who need care and support.

We wanted to bring together people from private care providers, large and small, local authorities,

people who employ their own personal assistants (PAs), and the PAs themselves. We wanted a diverse mix of people to hear from each other about what personalisation meant to them, and the challenges they had in putting personalisation into practice. We wanted people to examine their own lives and practice, and figure out what they could do to personalise services in their workplaces. Our aim was to work together as equals, no name badges, nor job titles.

The impact on Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council workers attending the sessions has been huge, with much more self-aware and person centred practice taking place as a result.

Anonymous, Refocus workshop participant

## What we did

There were six phases to the project delivery.

### Phase 1: Co-design

We got together with people who could influence or be influenced by our programme. This included people who need care and support, carers, front line staff, managers, commissioners, and senior decision makers. We shared our ideas about what the workshops and supporting communications could achieve and how.

### Phase 2: Refocus Workshop 1

This was an introduction to what personalisation means both to front line staff and to people who need care and support. The workshop was deliberately designed differently to traditional training.

There was no PowerPoint, there was no all-knowing voice of a trainer. This was about building awareness, using stories and the sharing of experiences in an informal, safe environment.

At the end of the workshop delegates chose three actions for themselves, which they wrote

on postcards. These cards were reviewed by facilitators and then posted back to the delegates.

Working together with the Community Navigator Service (CNS) has allowed Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council to really focus on understanding and developing services that are person-centred and focus on positive outcomes through a co-production approach fostered on partnerships.

Sue Dale, Assistant Director,  
Adult Social Care

### Phase 3: Practice, active learning, reflection

Two to eight weeks back at work with the front line staff putting into practice the actions they had decided for themselves, and keeping a journal on their progress.

### Phase 4: Refocus Workshop 2

We regrouped and discussed what had worked and did not work for front line staff in phase three. We went on to share new ideas, reinforce the idea of relationships supporting tasks, introduced themes of small purposeful movements and the ability of every person to make a positive difference.

### Phase 5: Refocus. Ongoing communications to support continued practice, active learning, reflection

We knew we could not change the world in a single workshop, or even two, but we could start the journey that had then to be maintained. Facilitators and delegates continue to communicate, to keep the commitment going.

### Phase 6: Pre-focus. Facilitate the facilitators

We took a group of delegates and went through the entire process with them over three days of workshops so that they became confident both with the process and also with their own skills, and could disseminate in further workshops in other arenas.

## What we achieved

Front line staff benefitted from having a safe space to explore what personalisation meant in daily practice and the impact they could have. They enjoyed being able to voice some of the frustrations and concerns about the constraints of their daily work and share strategies for tackling these. Employers were surprised at the energy and enthusiasm that was generated – a double-edged sword, perhaps, as there was pressure on them to rethink whether or not their processes and systems were adding or impeding value.

An unexpected benefit was that many of the people who need care and support described the co-production experience as transformational. We had expected an impact but not at this level. And finally, we at CNS have learnt and developed as individuals and as an organisation – more than we could ever have imagined.

At the time of writing, Solihull Council is continuing to build on this work and further developing the course.

The Adult Social Care directorate have been able to begin to develop a new way of delivering social care that promotes a health and wellbeing approach, promoting and supporting community based care for all. We are really proud of the work that is being taken forward together.

Sue Dale, Assistant Director,  
Adult Social Care

## What we learnt

There is a real need for raising awareness and understanding of personalisation at all levels of staff who work in social care, as well as with the people who receive the care and support. Challenges to personalisation came from leaders, front-line care-workers, and people who use care and support services. Some people who need care and support had excessively low expectations, and others were unrealistic about

what was possible. Personalisation isn't a blank chequebook, and it isn't about making demands. It happens through conversations and negotiations; it isn't about having to accept whatever is offered. Front line care-workers were claiming they were restricted by management, and a risk-averse culture where permission had to be sought for activities.

Through this programme where a diverse mix of all the people involved in personalisation were encouraged to listen and talk to each other as equals, people's understanding increased dramatically, as well as their confidence in putting personalisation into practice.

The Refocus style of workshops really works – creating awareness through stories, videos, and an informal sharing of experiences and ideas without any of the traditional training apparatus. Co-production really works – both in planning how to use the programme in your organisation, and in the delivery. There should be more than one facilitator on the Refocus and Prefocus workshops, not only to share the workload but so that there is a mixture of experiences and perspectives, and staff are hearing the voices of people who use services. Facilitators should be a mix of care professionals and people who need care and support. Of course, a person can be both a professional and a person who needs care and support.

Keep the programme in-house. This both reduces costs and makes the programme more real. Communications do not have to be super-slick if they are genuine. Co-production takes time, as does the Refocus approach. A project management element is necessary and should be allowed for – this is not just a one-off workshop.

## For more information please visit:

[www.communitynavigatorservices.org](http://www.communitynavigatorservices.org)

**Project lead:** **Jack Nicholas,**  
**Director**

## Skills for Care recommends

In recent years we have developed a number of resources to help Individual Employers and their Personal Assistants. From guidance to funding, Skills for Care is here to help.

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### Information Hub for individual Employers and Personal Assistants

This free online resource provides access to a range of products, services and practical information for individuals employers and personal assistants.

[www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Employing-your-own-care-and-support/Information-hub.aspx](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Employing-your-own-care-and-support/Information-hub.aspx)

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### Employing Personal Assistants Toolkit

This helps guides you through the process of employing a personal assistant, what to do when they are working for you as well as helping you to understand your responsibilities as an employer and your legal obligations.

[www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Employing-your-own-care-and-support/Being-an-employer/Being-an-employer.aspx](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Employing-your-own-care-and-support/Being-an-employer/Being-an-employer.aspx)

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### Individual Employer Funding

Individual Employer can now apply for funding to support the training and development of themselves and their personal assistants.

[www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Learning-development/Funding/Individual-employer-funding/Individual-employer-funding.aspx](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Learning-development/Funding/Individual-employer-funding/Individual-employer-funding.aspx)

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