

# The real value of consultation

Liverpool Personal Service Society (PSS) developed a 'creative café' consultation to find out what people with learning disabilities really want in a personal assistant - the surprising answer changed their approach to recruitment, delivery and learning and development.

## Background

PSS is committed to providing high quality personalised support services for their clients. To ensure this they developed a programme that would allow the staff that they employed as support workers to make the transition to the role of personal assistants in line with the personalisation agenda. Key to this programme was close consultation with people who need care and support.

PSS set out to analyse the skills, including experience, training and qualifications of support workers and map these against the skills and qualities required for the role of personal assistant. At the heart of the programme was a process of consultation with people who need care and support to learn directly from them what skills and qualities they believed were most important in personal assistants.

People with learning disabilities were chosen primarily for the consultation because PSS believed that this group probably struggled most to take full advantage of the opportunities afforded by the personalisation agenda.

Once the skills analysis and assessment of needs for personal assistants was made, PSS was in a position to make recommendations for the development of training for support workers to make the transition to the role of personal assistants. The programme was also seen as a template for managing future change, particularly as concerned the close involvement of clients in the development of appropriate skills, qualities and attitudes.

## What we wanted to achieve

- The aim of the project was for PSS to work with people and staff to analyse the skills and knowledge of support workers and map these against those of the newly emerging role of personal assistants.
- As part of the programme PSS anticipated it would identify new skills and knowledge to be developed and provide a means of bringing about attitudinal change across the organisation. In tandem with this, the project team hoped to develop within the workforce an ethos of peer support so that personal assistants would coach and support others less experienced than themselves. Finally, the aim was to prepare training and development which would result in highly skilled and motivated personal assistants.

## What we did

- The first task was the training mapping exercise for which ten support workers were chosen as a control group. They all provided community-based services for individuals with learning difficulties, mental health problems and acquired brain injuries. Following this exercise, PSS learned that between them these staff had attended 48 different courses with an average of 11 externally accredited courses per support worker. The courses included basic and mandatory training, client-central skills and knowledge development. It became clear that the group already had a high degree of personalised training in terms of undertaking courses specific to the needs of the individuals they supported.
- PSS used the creative café method of consultation as a way of engaging people who need care and support, managers and support workers. These consultations involve facilitated table discussions in which a blank piece of paper is placed in front of participants who then write their thoughts down and move on to other tables so that an accumulation of responses is collected. Fourteen people who need care and support from across the organisation attended the consultations and were asked to provide their ideas of an idealised version of a support worker. An additional two sessions were held in which managers and support workers were asked to provide their ideas of the ideal support worker so that PSS could compare the responses of people who receive the service with those of staff who actually provide the service.
- The comparison was extremely instructive and revealed that people receiving the service were far more interested in personal attributes than in skills and knowledge or technical abilities. Qualities such as trust, honesty, patience, reliability, listening ability, helpfulness and kindness came to the fore in the description of the ideal support worker.
- Some filming took place during the creative cafés and this was edited into a DVD for use as a training resource.



- From the outset of the project PSS also established a small steering group involving managers, project workers and people who need care and support. Again, the involvement of people who receive the service was a core principle of the steering groups, and their feedback about taking part was extremely positive.
- A personalisation survey was the other main component of the programme. PSS set up an online survey in order to gather a baseline assessment of knowledge about personalisation across its services. All staff and managers were invited to complete the survey and there were 70 responses from support workers, managers and business support staff. This provided the project team with a wealth of information to inform future learning and development programmes. In particular, the survey responses identified many gaps in understanding that existed about the role of the personal assistant, particularly those that concerned the terminology surrounding the role.

## What we achieved

The central outcome of this project has been the establishment of an effective way of communicating with the people who need care and support. People whose wellbeing, health and quality of care lie at the heart of PSS's services. In particular, the creative cafés and steering group proved to be excellent means of involving people and gathering their ideas of what is required in the provision of good personalised care.

There are a number of related outcomes:

- the personalisation agenda proved to be a force for motivating action and for PSS to reflect upon the skills and knowledge of those who deliver frontline services.
- PSS has developed a model of consultation that is rich in information and stimulates change.
- this consultation is now placed at the heart of learning and development planning.
- PSS usefully identified the existing skills and knowledge of support workers in the organisation, by means of a control group, as

well as identifying specific personal attributes that are important to the role of personal assistant.

- the project has led to a new way of contracting and delivering services which depend on the ability to provide high quality personalised social care that will be recognised and appreciated by both existing and potential people who receive the care and support service.

## What we learnt

- The foremost learning from the project was the benefit of involving people who need care and support at the heart of the project. The results of the creative café consultations were truly a surprise to the project team, particularly the wide degree of difference between what managers and support workers considered important to the role of the ideal support worker and what people unanimously felt were the key qualities. Managers and support workers tended to emphasise functional skills and activities, while people who need care and support emphasised personal qualities and values. Feedback demonstrated to PSS that the creative café consultations were enjoyed and appreciated and that people who need care and support are keen to take part and be involved in learning and development programmes of this kind more often. This requirement is being embedded in PSS practice.
- The training mapping exercise indicated that the support workers were generally very well trained and had undertaken an impressive range of knowledge-based and client-centred courses. Nevertheless, the consultations indicated that there are other important qualities that PSS need to take into account as part of their recruitment and development programmes to ensure the highest quality of personalised care.
- The sustainability of the outcomes of this project lies in the reflective model that PSS has developed which places consultation with service users and staff at its heart.

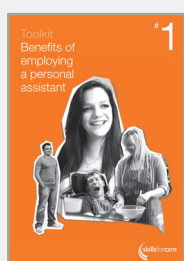
## For more information please contact

Sinead Martin  
Project Lead  
www.psspeople.com  
Tel. 0151 702 5555

## Skills for Care Recommends

Skills for Care continues to produce various resources that can help those involved in dementia care, from formal qualifications to related guidance and information. We have listed a few of these below.

### Employing Personal Assistants Toolkit



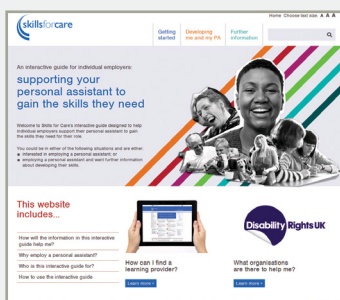
This helps guides you through the process of employing a personal assistant, what to do when they

are working for you as well as helping you to understand your responsibilities as an employer and your legal obligations.

[www.employingpersonalassistants.co.uk](http://www.employingpersonalassistants.co.uk)

### An interactive guide for Individual Employers

This resource has been designed to help individual employers support their personal assistant to gain the skills they need for their role.



[www.paskills.org.uk](http://www.paskills.org.uk)

### 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/iefunding](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/iefunding)

Skills for Care  
West Gate  
6 Grace Street  
Leeds  
LS1 2RP  
telephone 0113 245 1716  
email [info@skillsforcare.org.uk](mailto:info@skillsforcare.org.uk)  
web [www.skillsforcare.org.uk](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk)

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