

Housing and Social Work Services

Progress Report:
Approach to Assessment,
Planning & Reflective Practice
August 2009

North Lanarkshire Council Housing and Social Work Service

Approach to Assessment, Planning and Reflective Practice

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1. What are we trying to improve?

- 1.1 North Lanarkshire Council's Assessment, Planning & Reflective Practice Programme has been presented to approximately 1000 staff over the last two years. Although originally developed on a single agency basis (and continues to be delivered in this way), the programme has also more recently been re-shaped and adapted into "Person Centred Planning: Developing a common understanding" and delivered to primary care nursing staff working with older adults, with senior social work practitioners also participating.
- 1.2 Assessment, Planning & Reflective Practice aims to fundamentally shift the focus of professional engagement with people who use services away from service-led provision to an outcomes approach which places, at the forefront of any intervention, the question "how can we (service users, professional staff, partners and carers) work together to achieve the best possible impact on the individuals' life?".
- 1.3 The philosophy of this approach is one that emphasises the strengths, capacity and resilience of individuals and builds upon natural support systems. This personalised approach places the service user at the centre and provides a clear framework and guidance on assessment and planning.
- 1.4 The Assessment, Planning and Reflective Practice Programme responds to the vision set out in Shifting the Balance of Care (Scottish Government 2008) with relevance to health, housing and social work.
- 1.5 The programme also addresses three specific areas for improvement identified by the Scottish Government as being crucial to the delivery of higher quality social work services in Scotland
- 1.6 These are;
 - ✓ Increasing emphasis on measurable outcomes;
 - ✓ The delivery of person-centred, relationship based, social work services to all user and carer groups as envisioned by Changing Lives;
 - ✓ The creation of a more aspirational culture within which practitioners work alongside users and carers to improve the quality of their lives.

2. How have we gone about doing this?

- 2.1 Unique features of the programme are that it is designed to be of relevance to all grades of practitioners across all care groups. The programme is visibly championed by the local authority's senior managers. We believe it to be an example of how the new emphasis on leadership and development called for by Changing Lives, can radically improve practice within a statutory agency.
- 2.2 The main driver behind the shift in practice was a review of assessment and care management arrangements that was undertaken to improve services in North Lanarkshire. While the local review pre-dated the Changing Lives review, the expectations of our approach correspond with the recommendations of Changing Lives. As part of this work we examined service delivery processes, knowledge and skills and levels of user and carer satisfaction with the services offered by North Lanarkshire Council Social Work.
- 2.3 A literature review and a mapping exercise of the relationship between assessment and care management and person centred planning were completed.
- 2.4 Guidance was developed on our new assessment, planning and recording arrangements. This was designed to provide clear and simple direction to staff as to how they might most effectively realise the aims and values of the service.
- 2.5 The programme was driven by the desire to respond more creatively and effectively to the needs of users and carers to promote independence and inclusion. The effect that this programme is having on improving outcomes whilst enriching the lives of users and carers is best illustrated through practical examples.

3. Are we achieving our objectives?

- 3.1 In addition to ongoing evaluation of each course, the whole programme was evaluated by Dr Emma Miller, Researcher, with the Joint Improvement Team. The programme was evaluated through the use of focus groups and the results report was published in November 2008. Participants noted that the programme had a significant impact on their practice and reported that it provided an opportunity to reflect on professional values and was moving the organisation towards an outcomes based approach.
- 3.2 One of the main themes that arose within the focus groups was that an emphasis on outcomes had given rise to a 'culture shift'. Outcomes brought practitioners back to aspects of person-centred social work practice which they felt had been lost by the organisation's previous assessment and care planning processes which centred on weakness rather than strengths and capacity, as well as on available services rather than achievable outcomes in partnership with users and carers.

- 3.3 One of the most common themes to emerge from the discussions with staff and managers was that participation in the programme had allowed them to revisit core values and principles. There were also several references to the importance staff placed on the relationships they had with service users. Illustrations of this came from participants, one of whom said:

"I feel as though I'm back to my core values about use of self and thinking about relationships."

- and another who noted that:

"I think it is about job satisfaction knowing you have achieved what might be small things. I worked with a girl who couldn't read or write and lacked so much confidence. I got her involved with Leisure and Learning and what they did was get her into adult literacy classes. You know one morning I came in and there was an email from her. I just thought, I just felt that my job was so worthwhile, because I know it was only an email but I just thought it was great. It might seem like a small thing but it gave me so much satisfaction and I was so pleased for the service user."

- 3.4 Equally important is informal feedback from staff, which has been overwhelmingly positive. The content of the programme, its presentation and the leadership by senior managers all contribute to practitioners viewing the programme as being highly relevant to their role. In addition, the programme was considered to be an example of good practice by SWIA during their recent performance inspection. A number of other local authorities have sought our advice on the content of the programme

4. The approach and content of the programme

- 4.1 The programme provides clear guidance on how workers can engage effectively and collaboratively to develop plans that acknowledge risk and provide users and carers with a better quality of life.

- 4.2 The programme:

- √ is person centred and outcome focused
- √ ensures that staff are risk aware
- √ emphasises strengths and resilience
- √ provides direction and clear guidance

- 4.3 The programme is designed to provide time for personal reflection, cross-disciplinary networking and the sharing of ideas and innovation. The evaluation of our programme, and informal feedback, have identified that re-focusing on outcomes requires a significant shift in thinking. Therefore, a range of methods are used in the programme to take account of different learning styles. These are facilitated by managers who encourage debate in a safe and supportive environment. The programme is delivered in a way that is designed to be interactive and challenging

- 4.4 Participants are actively encouraged to share their views and experiences on best practice. The programme acknowledges that there are real barriers to achieving better outcomes. Workers are encouraged to value their contribution to the organisation and contribute to a model of service that promotes a culture of continuous improvement. In short, participants are encouraged to develop a heightened awareness of the importance of reflective practice.
- 4.5 The structure of the days broadly follows the following themes:
- Day 1 – Contexts / Values / Outcomes / Partnership
 - Day 2 – Assessment
 - Day 3 – Planning
 - Day 4 – Reflective and Recording Practice

5. Programme format

5.1 Day 1

5.2 The day is structured as follows:

- Welcome / Introduction / Purpose
- The facilitators introduce the course
- Values and Principles / Role of Social Work
- Key Note Address by a Head of Service
(This sets the context for why we do what we do and the importance of our values. It covers “Changing Lives” and “Shifting the Balance of Care” and poses questions about the role of staff in being key enablers. There is a strong focus on outcomes, with staff being encouraged to think about the impact of historical, institutionalised practice, which created dependency on services).
- How Good is Your Plumber
(This session focuses on customer services. It asks people to work in their groups to consider the best and worst of our experiences of services. In describing this, staff are encouraged to make the links to their own practice – the importance of returning calls, etc. The “Guide to Social Work Services” is used and key standards are highlighted. There is a second exercise that works at the skills, knowledge, experience, and toolkit of a plumber. Parallels are then drawn with a social worker and a large group quick think takes place. This generates good discussion about the tools and interventions used by social work staff in their practice. This also opens up debate about the use of self in practice, and enables discussion about Social Work intervention V plan/care management).
- Being Outcome Focussed?
(This is presented by a Senior Manager on outcomes – followed by a group exercise. Staff are asked to identify inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes from a range of words on cards e.g. assessment, support plan, etc. This stimulates significant debate about what we are doing and why. In particular staff are encouraged to think about the impacts or consequences of what they

do / provide. It raises good questions about dependence on “service land” as opposed to natural supports).

- Working with our Partners
(This session consists of a presentation and video by a Service Manager. It highlights that we can't do it alone! Improving outcomes relies on working with other partner agencies).

5.3 Day 2

5.4 The day is structured as follows:

- What has stuck?
(The day starts with a group task to encourage reflection. Staff are encouraged to share their thoughts about what made an impact on the day. This creates an opportunity to help staff think about outcomes in their practice).
- Organising our thinking
(This session is a presentation on the assessment /planning framework set out in the guidance. Over the course of the day staff are given time to read the material and are asked to work in pairs or in groups (depending on the group) a range of exercises are used to facilitate discussion on each of the key stages). This includes:
 - Referrals – scenarios are tabled and staff are asked to address key questions (This highlights issues of consistency of practice).
 - Assessment
(Staff are asked to develop a picture of best assessment practice through cafe style working using key themes. This results in everybody moving, talking, and getting a chance to participate). The themes are set around practice e.g. involvement, participation, risk, etc.
- The day ends with personal reflection about what they identified and how they actually practise (using a case example).

5.5 Day 3

5.6 The day is structured as follows:

- Banana Game
(This is an ice breaking activity. Participants are asked to develop a 'story' in whatever creative way they choose. The story should summarise their learning to date in the programme. They are provided with a range of objects which they must build into the story e.g. tassles, sunglasses, ball, etc. This exercise starts the morning off in a fun way and helps pull together the concepts explored in previous days).
- Assessment and Planning Process/Practice
(This exercise consists of a group exercise during which staff are asked to develop an outcome focussed plan in response to the assessment outlined during day 2. During the exercise, prompt cards are used to trigger thinking e.g. costs, outcomes specific, etc. The feedback helps to check out if staff have grasped the difference between outputs and outcomes. It also provides opportunities to explore options in developing plans e.g. reliance on services via intervention focussed on developing natural supports).

- **Review your Practice**
(This exercise consists of individuals or pairs reflecting on their own practice in planning. At the end of the session, the assessment and planning journey is summarised by using the flow chart in the guidance. The links between processes, practice and recording are made).
- **Evaluation**
Staff are asked to complete on an evaluation at the end of day 3 which they can add to at the end of Day 4. This ensures that they key learning messages are captured.

5.7 Day 4

5.8 The day is structured as follows:

- **Reflection Session**
(At the start of the day, staff are given the opportunity to share how the first 3 days have impacted on their practice).
- **Why is recording important?**
(This session starts with open questions and staff are encouraged to share their views and feelings about recording. This is followed by a presentation based on the guidance - what, why, etc).
- **Best Practice Scenarios**
(This session involves a group activity - using various example recordings. Staff are asked key questions and it leads to reflection on the quality and quantity of recording.)
- **Organisation, Content and Structure**
(A presentation on the “how” of recording with an opportunity to ask questions. Time is made available for staff to read the guidance).
- **Prioritisation Framework**
(This is an input about the departmental framework, providing an opportunity for questions/issues about implementation).
- **Review your Practice**
(Reflection time is made available followed by a group plenary).
- **Summary**
(The 4 days are pulled together summarising the key messages).
- **Evaluation**
(Staff are given an opportunity to comment on the development days - content, style. etc. They are also given an opportunity to add to their evaluations).

6. Future Developments

- 6.1 The programme is designed in such a way that it can support the development of both the personal and organisational capabilities of practitioners.
- 6.2 We have recently developed day 5 and 6 as locality events – “First steps – next steps”. These have been facilitated by Locality Managers and the key elements are:
- revisit the outcomes based approach
 - methods used – showcasing local examples of excellence (reflecting different stages of assessment and planning)
 - presentations / inputs from local staff
 - launch of the tool - personal outcomes plan.
- 6.3 In conclusion, the programme is having a powerful impact on staff and is helping to re-shape our services. The approach, however, needs to continue to develop and be flexible enough to continue to meet the learning and development needs of the organisation.

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